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Effects of Existential Group Counseling on Enhancing Psychological Well-Being of Elderly Residents in Songkhla Foundation

Natchana Bhutasang

Graduate Student, Department of Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Education, Thaksin University, Thailand

Abstract:

This research aimed to study the psychological well-being of the elderly, to compare the effects of psychological well-being of the elderly before and after the experiment, to compare the effects of enhancing the psychological well-being of the elderly in the experiment group and the control group and to compare the effects of the psychological well-being of the elderly in the post-experiment and the follow up period. The sample for the study included 20 elderlies aged 60 years and over with a psychological well-being score of 25th percentile and lower who resided at Jong Hua Foundation for the Elderly and Homeless in Hatyai District, Songkhla Province. The subjects were divided into two groups of 10 people serving as a control and an experiment group. The instruments used in the research consisted of Psychological Well-Being Scale for the elderly, existential counseling program and activities designed for the elderly. The data were analyzed using such statistics as arithmetic mean, standard deviation, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test and Mann - Whitney U Test. The results showed that the post-experiment psychological well-being of the elderly was higher than that of the pre-experiment at the .01 significance. The psychological well-being of the experiment group was higher than that of the control group at the .001 significance. The psychological well-being of the experiment group during the follow-up period differed significantly from that of the post-experiment period at the .05 level, whereas that of the control counterpart showed a .01 significant difference. During the follow-up period, the experiment group showed a .001 higher psychological well-being than the control group.

Keywords: *psychological well-being of the elderly, existential group counseling program*

1. Introduction

Since 2007, Thailand has entered an aging society and the elderly form a sizable group of the population in the country. Development and progress in technology, medicine and public health play a large part in an increasing number of the elderly population [1]. Thailand's National Elderly Plan No. 2 for 2002 to 2521 focuses on the "life cycle," recognizing the elderly as "people who are beneficial to society and people in general should give them proper respect as much as possible. In the case where the elderly has to depend on others, their families and communities are the front-line supporters for them to lead a reasonable quality of life with supplement support from the state to guarantee the elderly's social security"[2].

According to Bradburn [3], psychological well-being is the balance between positive and negative feelings. This is consistent with Friedman and King [4], who state that psychological well-being is the positive as well as negative feeling of people. In addition, Hillier and Barrow [5] state that psychological well-being consists of happiness, morale, assessment of the existence or the desire to achieve the intended goal and recognition of experience of individuals. Cummins [6] has defined psychological well-being as satisfaction in life as well as quality of life. Kaplan, Atkins and Timms [7] have conceived psychological well-being as a result of daily engagement of a person's personal and social activities. Society has to support activity's channels accessible for the elderly to participate in actions interested by people of the same age, thus leading to psychological well-being in the lives of elderly people.

Group counseling is the process of assisting the elderly to strengthen the psychological well-being in their final phase of life. The elderly who were residing at the foundation were those who had no relatives, the condition that usually affects the emotional state and feelings. These people experienced a state of mental imbalance, lack of confidence, seclusion with no hope in life and decreased self-esteem. The group counseling process is an important tool in the technical assistance of the elderly to have the opportunity to explore on their own, express feelings and ideas, have the courage to face reality and accept the ideas of others with trust and mutual understanding. These circumstances lead to an incentive to modify the elderly's behavior with increased mental well-being, cooperating and sharing similar issues and subsequent changing of attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others. The group serves as a link and reflects the thoughts, emotions and behaviors for all to learn together, leading to a variety of possible solutions through past experiences, thus making the elderly dare to face the change with purpose [8]. In this study, the researcher has applied the concept and theory of existentialism for use in group counseling for the elderly who shared similar experiences and faced problems in exchanging knowledge and expressing common feelings. The researcher took the lead in the implementation of group counseling and

allowed the elderly to find the solutions, with an emphasis on the premise that people should take responsibility for their actions, face the reality of the changing situation, provide help to others, make decisions on their own and consult with others when there is a problem. In other words, they have to be self-reliant, not to be influenced by the enigmatic power, avoid grief or suffering by taking someone else's experience as a role model [9]. The above concepts and theories can reflect the process of helping the elderly to be aware of the free choice of action in life and to understand their livelihood and psychological well-being.

Therefore, in this study the researcher is interested in studying the effects of existential group counseling on enhancing psychological well-being of elderly residents at Songkhla Foundation. The outcomes of the study may serve as guidelines for psychologists in providing counseling people with low level psychological well-being as well as for other parties involved in providing assistance and remedy to people with low psychological well-being.

2. Purposes of the Research

2.1. To study the psychological well-being of the elderly residing at Songkhla Foundation for the Elderly and Homeless, Hatyai District, Songkhla Province.

2.2. To compare the effects of psychological well-being of the elderly before and after the experiment.

2.3. To compare the effects of enhancing the psychological well-being of the elderly in the experiment group who have undergone the experiment based on the existential group counseling and the control group who have not treated with the group counseling process.

2.4. To compare the effects of enhancing the psychological well-being of the elderly after the group counseling experiment and follow-up period.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Population and Sample

The population used in this study consisted of 42 elderly people residing at Songkhla Foundation for the Elderly and the Homeless, Hat Yai District, Songkhla Province; they included both male and female, aged 60 years and over with no communication disabilities and with completeness to provide information and full self-awareness (as of 2016). The sample for the study included 20 elderly informants whose level of psychological well-being was at 25th percentile and lower and were willing to take part in the experiment. They were drawn according to the simple random sampling and divided into two groups.

3.1.1. The experiment group of 10 people who received group counseling based on the existentialism theory.

3.1.2. The control group of 10 people who have not undergone group counseling.

3.2. Research Instruments

In this study, the researcher constructed the research instruments which included 1) a measurement of psychological well-being of the elderly, which consisted of five aspects of mental well-being: Self-esteem, Autonomy, Positive Relationship with Others, Purpose in Life and Social Contribution. Informants were to respond to each question of 5-level rating scale, with the content validity of .50 to 1.00 and a reliability of .98. 2) 12 programs in the group counseling based on the existentialism theory, with the content validity of .50 to 1.00. 3) 12 activities for the elderly with the content validity of .50 to 1.00.

4. Results

The outcomes of the study of the effects of existential group counseling on enhancing psychological well-being of elderly residents in Songkhla Foundation revealed the following. The experiment group showed a 'very low' score of Self-Esteem, Autonomy, Positive Relationship with Others, Purpose in Life and Social Contribution during the pre-experiment, a 'high' score during the post-experiment and a 'very high' score during the follow-up. This is in exception with the aspect of Purpose in Life where they showed a 'moderate' score during the follow-up. The control group showed a 'very low' score in the 5 aspects of psychological well-being in the pre-experiment, a 'low' score in the post-experiment and a 'very low' score in the follow-up. This is in exception with aspect of Social Contribution where they earned a 'low' score in the follow-up. The psychological well-being of the elderly in the experiment group during the pre-experiment was significantly 'higher' than that of the control group in the same period. To compare the significant difference between the experiment group and the control group, there is a need to compare the differences of the psychological well-being scores of the elderly among the two groups by subtracting the post-experiment score with that of the pre-experiment [10]. The results showed that the score of the psychological well-being in the experiment group was significantly higher than that of the control group at the .001 level. The psychological well-being of the control group during the follow-up showed a .05 significant difference from that of the post-experiment period. Finally, the psychological well-being of the control group in the follow-up was significantly different from that of the post-experiment at the .01 level, whereas the psychological well-being of the experiment group in the post-experiment showed a .001 significant difference from that of the control group.

5. Discussion

The effects of existential group counseling on enhancing psychological well-being of elderly residents in Songkhla Foundation can be discussed in the following:

1. The psychological well-being of the elderly after undergoing the existential group counseling was higher than that in the pre-experiment at a .01 significance was due to the fact that group counseling is a process for people with similar problems joining

in consultation with each other facilitated by the knowledgeable, able and experienced counselors. By working in a group, members have the opportunity to express their opinions and feelings, to face with problems and to make self-improvement. They are able to apply the knowledge and experience gained from the application to benefit themselves and society [11]. This is consistent with the study of Sorawanee Ansako [12] stating that the experiment disability group members who have undergone the existential group counseling showed a .01 significantly higher in the post-experiment than in the pre-experiment. It can be stated that group counseling is a process which provides assistance to group members with an atmosphere of recognition and trust; it thus becomes the opportunity for an exchange of experiences and ideas on the issues discussed in the group in order to vent their feelings about the problems faced by concerned individuals. Group counseling provides an opportunity for members to find out a common approach for a solution under the guidance of a counselor. Existentialism-based counseling aims for counselees to seek meaning in life, encouragement, stimulus to lead a life and take responsibility for one's actions as well as a full commitment to self-development.

2. The psychological well-being of the elderly experiment group was higher than that of the control group at .001 significance. This is due to the fact that group counseling is a process which creates intra-group interactions so that members understand themselves and accept behavior of others under an atmosphere of mutual trust, thus leading to self-exploration and ability to change to desirable behaviors [13]. This is consistent with the study of Chalermwan Ketsawas [14] related to the effects of group reminiscence groups and existentialism-based group counseling on the well-being of the elderly. The study found that the elderly group who have undergone existential counseling showed a .05 significantly higher level of well-being than that of the control group. The programs used by the researcher in this study were modified into group counseling sessions with the concept of Existential Counseling. Such concept and theory are developed in an attempt to provide help to people who have problems in life and who are feeling isolated, alienated and meaningless. During the first stage, the existentialist focused on a deeper understanding of the experience of the people rather than trying to undergo the therapy [15]. The existential counseling foresees that people should take responsibility for their actions and face the reality of the changing situation, provide help to others, make decisions on their own, consult with others when there is a problem, do things by themselves and avoid suffering by taking the experience of others as a role model. This theory supports the concept of psychological well-being of the elderly, which is consistent with a study by Cummins [6] who states that psychological well-being is the satisfaction in life as well as quality of life and a study by Heydrich [16] focusing on the psychological well-being in terms of the positive and negative feelings in the well-being aspects in general, including depression, self-esteem, autonomy, positive relationship with others and purpose in life of individuals. This study is consistent with the research by SorawaneeAnsako[12] who found that the experiment disabled group who have undergone the existential group counseling showed a .01 significantly higher in the post-experiment than in the pre-experiment. However, the improved score of psychological well-being of the elderly in the control group in the post-experiment was also high. When comparing the development of psychological well-being of the elderly group, it was found that the elderly who received the existential counseling showed a higher score of psychological well-being than those who did not receive the existential counseling. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that in the existential counseling, counselees must learn how to deal with life, make a decision and accept what is valuable for them. A counselor is a person who tries to understand the experiences of the counselees and make them reflect on a life by themselves [15]. This leads to the development of psychological well-being in the five aspects which include self-esteem, autonomy, positive relationship with others, purpose in life and social contribution.

3. The psychological well-being of the elderly experiment group in the follow-up differed significantly from that in the post-experiment at the .05 level. Similarly, the psychological well-being of the elderly control group in the follow-up differed significantly from that in the post-experiment at the .01 level. This may be due to the fact that the mental development of the elderly shows symptoms of forgetfulness, memory loss but rationality still remains in good condition, stable discretion, lack of initiative and upholding their principles. Often the elderly have difficulty in memorizing [17]; thus, the development of the elderly aged 60 years and over will undergo physical, mental, emotional and social changes. There is a need to provide care for the elderly in the correct manner with proper understanding through holistic approach encompassing physical, mental, emotional and social behaviors that lead to positive physical and mental health to prevent the deteriorating behavior of the elderly. This concept is consistent with the study of Pimpisit Buakaew [18] involving the health care and health status of the elderly in Thailand. The study revealed that the well-being of the elderly showed the standardized regression coefficient (β) of 0.174. Therefore, there is a need to promote health care behavior of the elderly by focusing on the participation of the elderly. In this study, the elderly in the experiment group showed a higher score of the psychological well-being than that of the elderly in the control group at the .001 significant level. Gibson and Mitchell [19] state that group counseling seeks to make adjustment of attitudes and behaviors. Development of group counseling is subject to unity of the group and sharing of ideas as well as concerns of each member of the group, which can be used for the benefit of the group. This study is in line with the study of SorawaneeAnsako [12] who found that the experiment disabled group who have undergone existential group counseling showed a .01 significantly higher in the post-experiment than in the pre-experiment.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Recommendations for Application in Research

6.1.1. Interested parties may apply the existential group counseling in research procedures and techniques in further studies. Counseling provided to the elderly is a sensitive task and counselors must understand the development process of the elderly to understand the nature of the people of this age.

6.1.2. Training should be provided to those responsible healthcare providers working at Songkhla Foundation for the Elderly and Homeless or other organizations with similarly responsibility so that they learn how to properly care for the elderly, both physically and mentally using the existential group counseling and techniques applied to enhance the psychological well-being.

6.2. Recommendations for Future Research

6.2.1. The study should provide individual counseling to the elderly group as well; some elderly is not ready to open up their accounts in front of other group members.

6.2.2. Various theoretical concepts should be applied in the group counseling programs.

6.2.3. Studies should be carried out on the psychological well-being of individuals in other similar groups such as the disabled, orphans and homeless and so on.

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