

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTENTIAL THERAPY TO REDUCE THE
LEVEL OF DEPRESSION AMONG RESIDENTS IN MORAL REHABILITATION
SCHOOLS**

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Existential Therapy in reducing the level of depression among respondents. This study is quantitative. Researchers used a quasi-experimental approach. To perform a quasi-experimental study, researchers have distributed research instruments to 30 respondents to identify the level of depression of the respondents. Researchers used the Bahasa Malaysia version of the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) instrument to measure the difference in the level of depression of the pre- and post-application study respondents of Existential Therapy through counselling sessions. The reliability of the research instrument is $\alpha = 0.700$. The results of the study showed that there was a difference in the level of depression between pre and post application of Existential Therapy through counselling sessions that is $t = 5.40, p < 0.05$.

Key words: Existence Therapy, Depression, Adolescence, Juvenile, Counselling.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time full of challenges. According to Faizah, Rozmi and Norizan (2018), adolescence is defined as the occurrence of the passage of time in a person's biosocial. The issues that arise at this point are the result of the affective and psychomotor changes experienced by them and causing emotional stress and internal conflict towards them (Arnett, 2006, in Faizah, Rozmi and Norizan, 2018). According to Nasution (2007), in this age, adolescents are aware of social demands. In meeting those demands, they will face a learning process in becoming a teenager. As such, it will indirectly put a pressure on them in meeting those demands.

In Malaysia today, teenagers are exposed to various negative cultures that are difficult to curb. Various issues pertaining to adolescents are easily found on the front pages of the local newspapers, articles in the Internet, social media and the like. As a result of psychosocial factors these teenagers have indirectly been influenced to commit many types of crimes. If they are convicted of an offense, they will be convicted under the Children Act (2001). According to the Act, these groups will serve their sentences in moral rehabilitation centres that will be decided by the court. Usually they will be placed in the Moral Rehabilitation Center, Sekolah Tunas Bakti for a certain period of detention.

As a result, these adolescents will adjust to a new way of living as residents of the institution. For example, a teenager who was once free to commit any violation of rule or law is now required to lead a new way of living in a dormitory. A new episode in boarding life begins once the court makes the ruling. The adolescents who have never lived as a resident in a dormitory will begin to experience a strong emotional stress such as sadness, depression, isolation, remorse and the like. A majority of them face an internal conflict that they misunderstand. In hostel life, the residents will take some time in building new relationships with each other to gain trust. This is not an easy task for new occupants. The majority prefers to remain silent rather than expose themselves to others. As a result some of these adolescents will begin to experience isolation in their lives causing them to feel lonely and sad.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of Existential Therapy in reducing the level of depression as measured by Beck Depression Inventory-II (Bahasa Malaysia version) among the residential respondents by comparing the pre and post bdi test results after the counselling intervention.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study is as follow:

There are significant differences in the level of depression of the research subjects as measured by BDI II before and after they have gone through six sessions the Existential Therapy.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study conducted is a quantitative case study that uses quasi-experiments that aim to see the effectiveness of the application of Existential Therapy in counselling sessions in modifying the level of depression among the research subjects.

Respondent

The subjects of this study consisted of school students who live in the rehabilitation centre. They were selected by the rehabilitation officer on the basis of the level of depression. Thirty subjects with high score on depression were selected.

Research Instrument

Researchers used BDI-II, an instrument that measures the difference in the level of depression. The instrument was developed by Aaron Beck (1996). Researchers administered the instrument to the 30 selected students with high depression score before the commencement of the Existential Therapy session. The instrument will again be administered to the 30 students once they completed their six Existential Therapy sessions to enable the researchers to get the score and to compare the pre-post score to determine if there are differences in the score before and after the counselling sessions, and if the difference is significant ($P < 0.05$).

Research Procedures

The Existential Therapy was conducted in six separate sessions. Each subject underwent the six sessions. The focus on each session is as shown in Fig 1.

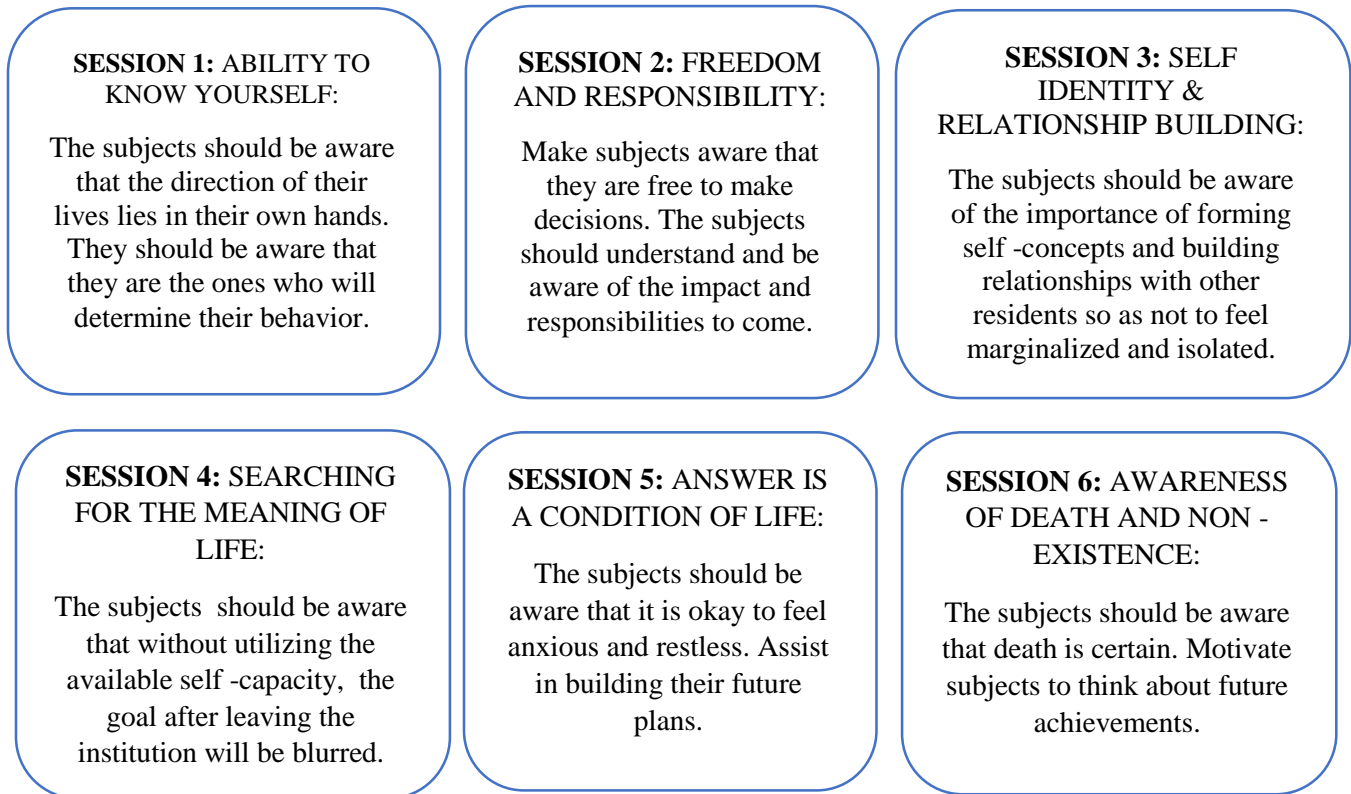


Figure 1: Discussion During Treatment

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis will use paired respondents t-test to make a comparison of the test scores of depression before and after the treatment was carried out. Descriptive analysis and inference using IBM SPSS version 21.0 computer programming were used to analyze the data. Because the study runs the inquiry form, it needs to be checked and ensure all information is filled out completely. In addition, the screening process is necessary to ensure that the data is structured and that data decisions are reviewed before making an analysis to test the study hypothesis.

Reliability

Reliability was used to identify the reliability of the research instrument in depression before and after training. The results of the analysis found that the study tool is suitable for use because the reliability exceeds 0.7. The reliability for depression before treatment was .74 and after treatment .76 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Results for the Difference in the Effectiveness of Existential Therapy in Measuring the Depression Levels Before and After Treatment

Dependent variables	Item	Before	After
Depression	21	.74	.76

Results

The Paired Respondents t-test was used to measure the level of depression before and after the counselling sessions of the 30 subjects and to test if the pre-post levels of depression are significantly different as a result of their being counselled using the Existential Therapy. The results of the analyses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of t-test for the difference in the Effectiveness of Existential Therapy in counselling 30 subjects of the study for depression.

Dependent variables	Independent variables	n	<i>min</i>	sp	t	sig
Depression	Before	30	6.57	2.13	5.40	P<0.05
	After	30	8.40	3.51		

T-tests were used to identify the differences in depression scores before and after the counselling sessions were conducted. The results of the analysis found that there was a difference in the score of the level of depression in that it is ($t(30) = 5.40, P < .05$). Based on the overall mean value, it was found that before treatment (Mean = 6.57, SP = 2.13) and after treatment (Mean = 8.40, SP = 3.51). The difference is significant.

DISCUSSIONS

A total of 30 subjects from among those who answered the research instrument, BDI-II, were selected. Those with high score in depression were selected. The 30 subjects underwent six sessions of counselling using the Existential Therapy, each session focussing on specific theme.

Decreased levels of depression among the study respondents after going through a counselling session were recorded. When the scores were analyzed for the significant difference between the pre and post scores, it was found the difference was significant.

Through Existential Therapy, the subjects were encouraged to identify their goal in life. This therapy emphasizes the intent of the goal. For example, the desire of the subjects to further

their studies after the expiry of the detention period. They were encouraged to put heart and soul together to achieve their goal. Existential Therapy has succeeded in encouraging the subjects to think deeply about their life goal and to plan and implement the strategy towards realizing it.

Frankl (2006) who wrote the book entitled “Man’s Search for Meaning” has succeeded to convince readers that every human being has a personal meaning in life. When this meaning is achieved in life, the person will be able to feel its significance. For example, the subjects of this study, who live in these rehabilitation schools tend to assume that they do not have a bright future. The same was true of the inmates of the Auschwitz Detention Camp in Austria run by the German Nazi Army. Frankl sees these inmates as people who are lost without meaning and direction in life. As a result, most of them suffer from extreme depression to the point of wanting to commit suicide. This also applies to himself as he is a Jew as well as an Austrian citizen., until he saw the significance of his existence as a medical doctor who could contribute meaningfully to the other inmates who suffered tremendously at the the Detention Camp, by attending to their medical needs.

In his notes to his book, Frankl (1946) states that the meaning of a life is to give a life meaning. This means, one should strive to achieve a goal by moving oneself in the chosen direction. In other words, if a person does not act in the direction he wants, then the desired goal is impossible to achieve. So it is not Existentialism (Van Deurzen, 1999).

In this regard, researchers gave a lot of encouragement to the subjects so that a driving force for themselves could evolve. Researchers like to use Cathartic Experience and Paradoxical Intention techniques. In applying the Cathartic Experience, the subjects will be educated and given an understanding of the symbolic experience. Then the researchers will bring the subjects to explore the experience to find its importance. In addition, the respondents will also be helped in understanding the meaning of the experience that eventually the subjects would be able to understand the past experience. By using these two important techniques in Existential Therapy, the researchers have succeeded in getting the subjects to appreciate the wisdom of the negative experience such as involvement in drug, rape and other cases.

According to Frankl (1946), Paradoxical Intention is a confrontational technique that is aggressively humorous. It is a technique of resistance to one's will. For example, the subjects may feel weak and not optimistic when thinking about the future. The researchers will insinuate the subjects that they do not need to think about their future. Just let it happen even if it is becoming something negative. The insinuation made the subjects react promptly by giving a response that they are determined to do something about their future with their hearts and souls.

Apart from that, investigators also practise Socratic Dialogue. According to Melati, Hartina, Norfaezah & Azmawaty (2015), this technique consists of a set of guiding questions. For example, investigators may ask the subjects: “After leaving this school, what do you want to do?” Through this Socratic Dialogue, researchers succeeded in making the subjects think seriously what they really want in life and how to go about achieving it. Frankl (2006) himself asked about his future. Will he still be alive after the end of the war, making him think in the future? Employing the Socratic Dialogue, the researchers have succeeded in making the subjects move forward in the future direction.

Existential Therapy does not limit the counsellors to use only the Existential Therapy. One may use other techniques as well as long as the objective of the study is achieved. As reviewed by the researchers in Chapter 2, the researchers also applied techniques from other Humanistic Psychology approaches such as the encouragement technique by Adler and the emotion appreciation technique by Gestalt.

CONCLUSION

Existential Therapy is a therapy that uses a philosophical approach. Existence Therapy places great emphasis on the awareness of self-existence. By identifying the potential and limitations of oneself, it would be easier to make decisions for oneself.

For example, subjects in this study lack the understanding and the wisdom behind their placement at this school. Researchers found that they did not know their personal interest until they joined the courses offered at this school. Realizing their interests, they have endeavored to learn the skills in the course. A plan has also been built to streamline the future planning of those who wish to pursue the course at the next level. Thus, this therapy has successfully strengthened their self-concept.

In addition, this study has expanded the literature on Existential Therapy in the country. Use of Existential Therapy is still relatively limited. The study has opened a new door for those, especially the teenagers, who suffer from depression. In addition, the study has broadened the scope of competency for the researchers who are now better informed about Existential Therapy and how it can be successfully used to help teenagers with depression problem.

As this study has employed individual counselling in helping the teenagers with depression, researchers would like to suggest that this therapy be used for group counselling sessions when treating clients with depression problem to complement the current study. It is further felt that a structured module related to existential therapy to provide treatment for depressed clients will be useful and helpful. In fact it is felt that it is needed immediately to meet the increasing incidence of depression among teenagers.

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