

Therapists accounts on the role of forgiveness with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse

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Contents of presentation

- Introduction
- Aim
- Purpose
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Results
- Conclusion



Introduction

- Skepticism and reluctance in applying forgiveness interventions in the therapeutic process particularly with childhood sexual abuse (**CSA**) survivors.
- Forgiveness interventions have been advised against treating sexual abuse, although this is not empirically supported (Enright, Eastin, Golden, Sarinopoulous, & Freedman, 1992).
- Research on Forgiveness has focused on the effectiveness and not on the process of forgiveness or how to facilitate forgiveness interventions (Malcolm, Warwar, and Greenberg 2005).
- Only one study exist on forgiveness with CSA survivors (Freedman and Enright 1996).

Introduction

- The effects on CSA survivors are variable and numerous but have been divided into three categories:
 - Psychological
 - Interpersonal
 - Behavioural
- (Miller et al., 2007).

Aim



- To discover an understanding of the process of forgiveness.
- To evaluate the reluctance of forgiveness with CSA survivors.
- Intention was to produce insights on possible guidelines on the process of forgiveness with CSA survivors, for therapists, educators, supervisors and researchers.

Purpose of study



- Attain insight and understanding of therapist's experiences and perceptions on the unknown process of forgiveness with CSA survivors as a therapeutic intervention.
- Gain clarity whether forgiveness interventions may cause more harm than healing with CSA survivors.

Literature



- It is suggested that trauma focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT) relieves chief symptoms in CSA (Cohen et al (2005).
- The models for the treatment of CSA that are applied by professionals do not have protocols nor have been tested on the effectiveness (Lev-Wiesel, 2008).
- There are no defined standards or adequate training in sexual abuse (Read, et al, 2007).

Literature



- Forgiveness interventions are described as “a key part of psychological healing” (Hope, 1987, p240)
- It is believed that forgiveness interventions can heal inner emotional wounds (DiBlasio & Proctor, 1993).
- Forgiveness interventions have proven to:
 - Be a useful tool in reducing anger enabling an individual to let go of guilt and express their anger in healthy ways (Fitzgibbons, 1986; Hope, 1987)
 - Reduce anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress (Reed & Enright, 2006).

Literature



- Generally, the reluctance to forgiveness interventions is thought to be due to:
 - Difficulties on defining forgiveness (Wade et al., 2008)
 - Unknown understanding and knowledge the process of forgiveness and on how to facilitate forgiveness (Malcolm, Warwar, and Greenberg 2005).
 - Reconciliation has caused intense reactions as some consider reconciliation as an inherent part of forgiveness (Freeman & Chang, 2010).

Literature



- To promote forgiveness interventions several theoretical model have been developed, dominating models are Enright's et al (2002) model and Worthington's (2001, 2006).
- Most studies have used a non-clinical sample, there is no reflection of what forgiveness is like with actual clients.
- No comparisons have been made between forgiveness models only with alternative therapy.

Methodology

- Qualitative approach
- Participants



Purposeful sampling: Six therapists who worked with CSA survivors.

Recruitment: Letters were sent to Organisations that offer therapy only for CSA survivors

Methodology

Procedures

- Data collection: semi structured interviews
- Setting: **Therapist's private practice**
- Location: **London**
- Interviews were **audio recorded**
- Data analysis: **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**



Results

Superordinate	Subordinate	Frequency
1. Impact of working with CSA	1.1 Doubt of competence	6
	1.2 Undesirable emotions experienced	5
2. Clients disclosure of CSA and the effects on therapists	2.1 Triggered own abuse	4
	2.2 Emotional effects	5
	2.3 Cognitions	4
3. Coping strategies when working with CSA	3.1 Supervision	4
	3.2 Personal Therapy	5
	3.3 Techniques	4
	3.4 Theoretical Knowledge	3
4. Conceptualisations of forgiveness with CSA survivors	4.1 Emotional release	5
	4.2 Acceptance of self & self-forgiveness	5
	4.3 Reservations to forgiveness	3
	4.4 Client's stance to forgiveness	5
	4.5 Stage of Therapy	5



Conclusion

- Working with CSA survivors is a challenging experience for novice therapists.
- Sexual abuse is a common issue in therapy, yet it fails to be prominent in training.
- Understandings have been provided on how to facilitate the forgiveness process with CSA survivors.
- Occurs as a therapeutic process rather than intervention.



Conclusion

- Unfolds naturally through the progression of therapy.
- A survivor builds, understands, empowers themselves, and self-acceptance & self-forgiveness occurs.
- Having Congruence with oneself
- Let go of anger, guilt shame and guilt then forgiveness of the perpetrator evolves
- Study revealed that forgiveness with CSA survivors is feasible, utilized and defined differently in the context of sexual abuse.

Questions

