A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF COUNSELLING STUDENTS'

EXPERIENCES WITH GROUP COUNSELLING SESSIONS

NG JIA WEI

A RESEARCH PROJECT

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE BACHELOR OF SOCIAL SCIENCE (HONS) GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

JAN 2023

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Counselling Sessions

Acknowledgement

This research would be fulfilled only due to the help, assistance, and endless support of the following very special people: I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude and appreciation to several individuals who have been encouraging and guiding me throughout the process of working on this study.

Firstly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Ms. Komathi a/p Lokithasan. I am really appreciating my supervisor for her consistent advice and guidance throughout the research process. Thank you for always reviewing my work with regular consultation, which helps me be aware of my mistakes in doing the research and boosts my confidence to strive for better work. I am truly grateful to have her in my process of completing this research because I would face a lot of difficulties without her knowledge and opinions.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my parents, who always give me support and encouragement in accomplishing this project. I am really thankful to the understanding they give me to have more time and space in concentrating in this research. At the same time, I also like to appreciate my friends, who frequent concern about my progress and motivate me in completing my work. Thank you for walking through this journey with me.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the participants who willing to contribute knowledge in this study. Thank you so much for your time an effort, which significantly help me in achieve the research objectives and complete this final year project on time.

NG JIA WEI

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Table of Contents

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

List of Tables

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

List of Figures

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Abstract

Problems such as counsellors doubting their own abilities and incompetency even lead to the situation where group counsellors are reluctant to conduct group counselling sessions. This study aims to explore the experience of group counselling sessions from the perspective of counselling students. The research question is to understand the phenomenon of counselling students in group counselling by asking sub-questions about their attitudes towards group counselling, the characteristics of counselling students in group counselling sessions, and the impact of group counselling among them. This research applied phenomenology design by conducting a semi-structured interview. It involves six counselling students who are currently studying the guidance and counselling programme at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) Kampar, using the purposive sampling method. With the application of qualitative methodology, this study is able to provide a more in-depth exploration of the experiences with group counselling when the participants had carried out at least one complete group counselling session independently with fundamental knowledge. There is a scarcity of literature related to the experience of group counselling students, especially in the Malaysian context. This study also explores the experiences with a new perspective, using the counselling theory of Gestalt therapy as the theoretical framework. Consequently, the findings are also beneficial for students who are involved in group counselling and for counsellor educators to get updated research about group counselling topics. It shows that the students who are currently still studying the counselling programme have awareness about the way they reflect themselves through group counselling but low awareness when it comes to their competency. This research fills the knowledge gap by studying from the perspectives of counselling students, who are still on the path to becoming a professional counsellor.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Group counselling is known as a "therapy group," which involves multiple people working with each other at a time throughout the group's experiences. Participants can show a positive stance by modelling healthy behaviour during the group counselling session as they can observe others and interpret their actions (Logren et al., 2017). When it comes to group work, the Board of Counsellors Code of Ethics in Malaysia emphasises screening and protecting the clients (Iera, 2015). The counsellors must select participants based on their needs and a common theme. At the same time, it is important to create a safe environment to prevent clients from suffering trauma physically, emotionally, or psychologically. With mutual goals in the group, the clients can make changes and fulfil their objectives throughout the group process (Corey, 2018).

In the United Kingdom, support services in both individual and group counselling involve the active engagement of parents and teachers (Broglial, Millings & Barkham, 2017). It considers an intervention to deal with students' mental health issues by promoting behaviour change and instilling coping skills (Dhami, 2020). Recent research studies about counselling services in universities mostly focus on improving mental health, which enhances students' psychological, emotional, and social needs (Nair & Otaki, 2021). The efficacy of group counselling is shown in the development of decision-making skills among counselling students in Jordon (Al-Daheri, 2021). Group counselling services also become a support system to improve mental health. The effectiveness of group counselling among mental health patients is used in Malaysia as a self-management intervention and shows enhancement in their well-being (Bakar et al., 2020). When viewed through the lens of a group approach, it demonstrates

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

the effectiveness of individuals in meeting almost any need by gaining insight through interactions with other members (Corey, 2018).

In the current era, the demand for counselling services is getting higher at universities and colleges (Adamec & Janderková, 2021). It is because the authority pays attention to students' development and prepares them to face future challenges (Daim, 2019). College students' life satisfaction increases after they participate in a group counselling programme and solve the problem of problematic internet usage (Odac & elik, 2017). Moreover, the students achieve a greater sense of connection and receive support from other members of the group. It does not only increase life satisfaction and optimistic emotion; group counselling also effectively deals with college students' psychological issues (Quanli, 2014). Accordingly, past studies about the introduction of group counselling indicate the efficacy of group counselling to deal with common issues among college students.

Group counselling necessitates both theoretical and practical applications in the curriculum. It has been one of the learning components for counselling students in Malaysia. The professional responsibility of a counsellor is stated in Section C of the 2011 Board of Counsellors Code of Ethics, where it states that he or she shall advocate for change by offering appropriate services to improve the quality of life for individuals and groups. Counselling students are required to study a course about conducting group counselling and have practical experience handling counselling sessions. It shows the necessity for group counsellors to learn the principles and techniques to facilitate group counselling sessions as group counselling fosters growth in individuals (Miller & Moores, 2019). In addition, the group dynamic involves the interaction between the group members and the counsellor, who plays the role of the group leader. The group effect will be powerful if the group leader is well-trained and has experience

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

(Shulman, 2011). The counselling students must facilitate the group with knowledge and skills to ensure the group's effectiveness and quality (Ahmad et al., 2019). Thus, it is significant to explore the experience of counselling students when they are having group counselling sessions.

Research Objective

The research objective is to explore the experience of counselling students with group counselling sessions.

Research Question

1. What is the experience of counselling students with group counselling sessions?

    a. What are the attitudes of counselling students towards group counselling?

    b. What are the characteristics of counselling students in group counselling sessions?

    c. What is the impact of group counselling among counselling students?

Problem Statement

Most research reports the effectiveness of group counselling sessions by integrating various theories. The qualitative study in the Malaysian context relating to the counsellors' experience is focused on multicultural counselling (Mohd Jaladin et al., 2020). Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of research on the experience of group facilitators, particularly among counselling students in group counselling sessions. Most of the studies in Malaysia concern the group counselling course and facilitators' skills rather than the experience in group counselling sessions. Previous studies examined the outcome of group counselling in quantitative research

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

by distributing surveys to gather data. The experience of counsellor trainees in group counselling is gained through peer and lecturer feedback, as well as self-reflection by the participants using journals (Ahmad et al., 2019). Subsequently, it cannot specify the learning progress of counselling students in detail. Another mixed-method study in Malaysia observes experiential group counselling and uses survey data collection (Sing-Kiat Ting et al., 2022). It only uses a self-assessment to examine the students' group leadership skills after several group counselling sessions. Although a few findings use quantitative research methods, studies about group counselling experiences are limited in their ability to collect detailed data and clarify the phenomenon.

In addition, research in Turkey determined the effectiveness of group counselling on counselling trainees and realised the trust level among group members increased (Gültekin et al., 2011). It expects that the participants have fundamental counselling knowledge and have better communication skills due to the sensitivity of group rules. A research study in Malaysia even examines the group counselling skills among counselling students by exploring their preferences on skills and feedback about the applications of group counselling techniques (Ahmad et al., 2017). It concludes that the trainee counsellors can learn counselling skills through experiential learning that involves role-playing the situation in group work. Another study in a Western context uses grounded theory analysis to understand the professional development of trainee counsellors and their experiences when working in groups (Knight & Newby, 2019). Nonetheless, there are no further updated findings from this study about the influence of group counselling on trainee counsellors. It indicates that the study's limitation is that it uses a phenomenon-based research design to investigate the impact of group counselling on trainee counsellors.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

There are quite a few studies that agree with the effectiveness of group counselling. However, research shows that individuals are more likely to benefit from individual counselling than group therapy (Fawcett et al., 2019). The feedback about the clients' negative experiences is measured using the assessment, known as the Unwanted Events and Adverse Treatment Reactions (UE-G) Questionnaire (Muschalla et al., 2020). In a study with 71 participants, it was found that 98.6% of them perceived group counselling as a burden (Michael et al., 2020). Almost all the participants complain about the negative experience in the group, which is highly likely to happen due to demoralization. The clients of the group counselling session reported fear of being emotionally damaged when they witnessed other members' distress and simultaneously worried their strong feelings would be destructive to others (O'Beney et al., 2019). After being triggered by the traumatic events of other group members, the participants' emotional states deteriorate as they feel helpless and think group therapy is burdensome. Although the deterioration of mood state does not affect treatment outcome, 60 to 65% of clients do not feel comfortable in the group, which leads to premature group termination (Schneibel et al., 2017).

Research in Singapore tried to fill the gap of the trainee counsellor's limitations by realizing the counselling students at practicum faced a lot of difficulties such as lack of confidence and self-consciousness (Soh, 2021). However, there is very limited research in Malaysian context studies about the challenges faced by the trainee counsellor in group counselling. The news from Counselling Today claims that self-doubt among the counsellors, in which they are afraid of being incompetent, leads to a higher risk of tension, mental health problems, transitions in career, and even ethical misconduct (Smith, 2017). Even expert therapists are found to be reluctant to conduct group counselling because they feel

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

unknowledgeable or unskilled (Dublin & Ulman, 2014). The counsellors expressed themselves as incompetent when they did not have the ability to process emotions or demonstrate empathy in groups (Holmes & Kozlowski, 2016). It becomes concerning to make sense of the phenomenon of the counselling students' incompetency in dealing with group counselling sessions.

Premature termination of group counselling sessions is destructive because the last session will greatly arouse the clients' emotions (Goode et al., 2017). If the group counsellor fails to terminate the session appropriately, the clients cannot cope with the challenges in their daily lives, which increases their negative attitudes toward future therapy (Norcross et al., 2017). It shows the significance of finding out about the experience during group counselling sessions, as the unsatisfied therapist's behaviour causes a problematic therapeutic relationship (Shafran et al., 2019). For example, the clients are passive in the discussion and express minimal appreciation, which does not seem genuine toward the group counsellor. It is unethical when the counsellor is unable to provide a safe environment for the clients and even causes them new psychological harm. At the same time, the counsellor's role as a group leader in group counselling plays an important role in promoting meaningful discussion (Wahlig, 2018). Consequently, it requires an extensive understanding of the role of the group leader in the group as well as their experience during group counselling.

Another common ethical issue in group counselling is privacy and confidentiality, which are influenced by the connection of group members, the skills of the facilitator, and the stigma of receiving counselling in a group as a treatment (Selby-Nelson et al., 2022). When staying in the group, some individuals find it painful to share their issues with others and perceive that the counsellor is not paying full attention to them (Shay, 2021). Their discussion

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

in a group context is more equivalent to danger for people with social anxiety and avoidance attachment styles. Although the counsellor intends to build a good therapeutic relationship with the client, it is significant to prevent the dual relationship from obscuring professional boundaries (Haddad et al., 2019). To assist others and even undermine a professional's reputation, the counsellor may be unaware of the transference. As a result, previous publications emphasise the positive effects of group counselling and overlook its adverse impact on the group (Lambert, 2021).

Furthermore, a study in Irish with the participation of 32 students has the common theme of vulnerability and the fear of having an open discussion in the group. It is challenging to build a good therapeutic relationship with the members in a group counselling session as it requires effort to build trust and let the client feel comfortable sharing his or her issue. For that reason, a counselling student must acquire qualified skills and experience so that the members of the group feel emotionally safe (Barrett-Ibarria, 2019). The working alliance is important in determining the group process because it increases members' willingness to disclose in a group (Woods & Ruzek, 2017). However, the therapists tend to feel nervous or fear being too emotionally engaged with the clients during the group process (Shamoon et al., 2016). Research finds that a significant factor in the rupture of group counselling outcomes is the attitude of therapists. It eventually prevents the counsellor from behaving non-judgmentally in the sessions if they have a distant alliance with the clients at the initial stage of group development (Tschuschke et al., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to assess trainees' readiness and perceptions of how to handle a group and to ensure the quality of counselling sessions.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Significance of the Study

The news reported that mental health issues increased due to the shortage of professionals in counselling fields (Iman, 2021). According to the Malaysian Mental Health Association, which released data in October 2020, the incidence of mental illness more than doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic, and stress is the most common reason for the public to seek counselling treatment (Yusry, 2022). It demonstrates that the topic of group counselling is worth researching in light of recent trends and rising demand in Malaysia. At the same time, this context specifically focuses on group counselling due to the discrepancy in experience in group counselling sessions. Although the effectiveness of group counselling is supported by much research, there are findings about the dissatisfaction of clients who stay in the group. In short, this finding applies the qualitative research method to a comprehensive investigation of the counselling students' opinions on the group counselling session.

Information related to group counselling in Malaysia is hard to access, whereas the findings of this research can contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon. Most of the studies conducted are in a Western context, while the research in Malaysia applies quantitative research by distributing surveys to gather data. It will be helpful to have an interview session for collecting detailed data and clarifying the phenomenon. Besides that, most researchers only focus on the experiences of members when staying in group counselling. A novice counsellor with less experience is more likely to be anxious about intervening, whereas some leaders are more prepared and competent in dealing with the uncertainties of group counselling (Marmarosh, 2021). The knowledge gap about the experience of the counsellor in observing the group or being one of the group members occurs because less attention is paid to it. Thus, the current results will provide an in-depth acknowledgement of

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

students' experiences with group counselling. It also works to fill up the knowledge about group counselling experiences among undergraduates who are studying the counselling programme.

Besides that, the findings will benefit counselling students as well as educators in the counselling and psychology fields. The research emphasises knowing how the counselling students stay with or facilitate the group, which enhances the current counselling teachings and ways to handle group counselling effectively. It enables people to understand the source of disparity in clients' group experiences, allowing for more effective interventions and potential solutions to be introduced to minimise the negative group effect. For instance, the counsellor knows ways to maintain a successful client-therapist relationship so that the client can independently tackle their life's complexities. Moreover, some studies use assessment to evaluate self-efficacy and satisfaction with the environment among Malaysian school counsellors (Ooi et al., 2021). It is because some counselling students or trainee counsellors face impediments to continuing to study the course. After considering the recommendations from previous literature, this study will explore the counselling experience with quantitative research to better figure out students' psychological and affective states.

This study can also increase the students' preparedness for group counselling. A result in India shows that trainee counsellors frequently worry about the challenges of group counselling and are indecisive in counter-transference management (Pereira & Rekha, 2017). By learning and knowing more about how group counselling works, students will feel more secure and capable of handling a group. The counselling students also can be aware of their weaknesses in terminating the group counselling session based on their experience. As a result, this research not only informs the public about the most recent findings in group counselling

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

but also assists counselling students in learning from others about how to overcome barriers in group counselling. This context will provide solutions and insights that are relevant to the current situation for counsellors and even students studying in the counselling field.

Definitions of Terms

The terms that are frequently discussed in this study are defined as follows:

1. *Group counselling*: There will be a counsellor who handles a few clients at the same time in group counselling, which aims to deal with their developmental and situational concerns by modifying their maladaptive behaviours (Ajufo, 2019).

2. *Counselling student/counselling trainees*: The students who are currently studying the program of Guidance and Counselling to become registered licensed counsellors.

3. *Confidentiality*: According to the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia in 2017, it claimed that confidentiality is a responsibility that depends on the client's trust. It means the intention to be kept secret and not share the content within the therapeutic session with others (Peterson, 2018).

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews several pieces of literature related to group counselling from different databases. The key terms involve "group counselling" and "group counselling sessions." "group therapy," "effectiveness of group," and "counselling students." It provides a more comprehensive understanding of the stages of group counselling, its effectiveness, and its challenges. The research also discusses some discrepancies when compared to the previous context as well as the characteristics of the students in group counselling therapy who will be included in the study.

Definition of Group Counselling

According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, group counselling is defined as psychological treatment in which the interaction among participants can achieve both emotional and cognitive levels. In group therapy, the counsellor usually focuses on a particular issue while all the group members have a common theme. For example, the group members are gathered to solve their academic-related issues. When sharing ideas and opinions, the members can receive impactful insight throughout the counselling session and do not have to face the issue alone in a group setting (Johnson, 2019). The contributions of each member of the group are highly valuable, as the clients can benefit from the shared experience, and they can make improvements with people who are having similar issues with them. They can learn from the behaviours of others to foster growth and change (Borek & Abraham, 2018). In short, group counselling is invaluable to promote self-learning and provide opportunities for clients to make positive changes.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Stage of Group

Corey (2016) introduced stages of group counselling, and it has been widely utilised until now. The stages of conducting group counselling involve the initial stage, the transition stage, the working stage, and the final stage. At the beginning of the group counselling session is the initial stage, which emphasises orientation and exploration. The group leaders must establish a strong therapeutic alliance by building rapport with the members so that they trust the counsellor and are willing to participate in the discussion (Pashak & Heron, 2022). However, the counsellor also needs to be aware of the professional ethics codes and prevent the breach of confidentiality through rule setting (Doshi et al., 2019). The second stage is the transition stage, during which the counsellor needs to deal with the client's reluctance and guardedness. The resistance of clients is defined as the unwillingness to cooperate or change, which eventually delays the group process (Ucar, 2017). For example, some clients remain silent, unwilling to share, or directly refuse to work in groups. The high level of attachment security from the client will lead to a strong therapeutic bond with the client (Levy & Johnson, 2019). It emphasises the importance of creating a safe environment for the clients and increasing their engagement.

The next group counselling stage is the working stage, which focuses on cohesion and productivity. Based on quantitative research, cohesiveness and engagement are not only significant in the initial stage but also affect the clients' commitment in the working phase (Robak et al., 2022). During this stage, the counsellor successfully builds trust so that the clients have a sense of commitment to work together and achieve the group goal (Ezhumalai et al., 2018). A meta-analysis shows that the group members will reach the consensus of group

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

dynamic to acknowledge the contributions of others in the group process due to the number of group sessions, increase of members' interaction and the effective use of therapist' intervention (Burlingame et al., 2018). The last stage is the final stage, and the key characteristics are consolidation and termination. Clients may require an adjustment period to adjust to dealing with their issues on their own (Kress & Marie, 2022). A proper closure can maintain the therapeutic relationship and get valuable feedback from the clients (Head, 2020). Therefore, the group leader must ensure the clients have the readiness to leave the group and learn something from it (Corey et al., 2010). By understanding the group counselling stage, this research can explore the counselling students' experiences in depth, focusing on their responses at different stages.

Therapeutic Factor

The therapeutic factor is the component that arises during group therapy that stimulates change and is useful in achieving goals (Repovecki et al., 2020). Irvin Yalom introduced 11 primary agents of change in his published work to rationalise the change in group work related to human interaction (Sousa et al., 2020). It explains how social interaction in a group leads to positive change because of the therapeutic factors of a group. The therapeutic factor to be reviewed is cohesion because it significantly predicts the improvement in group therapy based on the two meta-analyses with 40 supported findings (Burlingame et al., 2018). Research in the Indonesian context also revealed that cohesiveness is the most important component out of the other therapeutic factors in group counselling (Putra, 2017).

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Group cohesion

Group cohesion is defined as the unity of the group and is frequently studied in previous

literature to explain the relationship constructs in group work. Most of the research tries to find

out the correlation of cohesiveness with the group outcome (Chapman & Kivlighan, 2019). An

effect size of 0.56 from a meta-analysis indicated a statistically significant relationship between

group cohesion and the group counselling process (Burlingame et al., 2018). It highlights the

role of the relationship between the group leader and members in influencing the treatment

outcome. Besides that, cohesion in a group can help the group leader understand the

connectedness among members and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention (Dolgin et

al., 2020). It can be used as an indicator to assess the group counselling process and the goals'

achievement (Ristianti et al., 2019). However, past research has almost exclusively focused on

the influence of group cohesion on the outcome of group counselling sessions (Forsyth, 2021).

Client characteristics play an understandable major role in fostering emotional bonding, but

more comprehensive and fresh research should be carried out by exploring this topic from the

perspective of a group facilitator.

Effectiveness of Group Counselling

According to Nasongo (2019), group guidance is effective in hindering the development of

issues and challenges faced by students. Participation in a large group significantly helps in

personal development with better understanding and awareness (Kreeger, 2019). The

behaviour and attitude of an individual will be influenced either positively or negatively

through social interactions (Weis & Morrison 2019). As human creatures, it is undeniable that

everyone will surely make connections and be required to interact with others. Children in their

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

early and late teens are easily influenced by others with unstable social attitudes. For example, they are passive and isolated themselves from others by only playing with their phones. Group counselling proves that it successfully improves the students' attitudes while their affective attributes are measured using the psychological scale measurement (Sudiyono, 2020).

The scholars compare the effectiveness of group therapy among students with that of individual counselling. According to the findings of a randomised pilot study, both individual and group counselling significantly reduced students' depression and anxiety levels, but university students preferred individual therapy over group therapy (Fawcett et al., 2019). According to the stepped care model, group counselling has a lower intensity, which makes the participants feel that they are not stepping up to receive better care. It eventually strengthens their mindset that they can always go for individual counselling when group therapy fails for them. Besides that, the children who attended individual counselling displayed less peer problem behaviour and increased prosocial behaviour compared to group counselling during the post-treatment phase (Melero et al., 2021). Although individual and group counselling have proven effective in reducing maladaptive behaviours and improving well-being, it is hypothesised that there are still other factors that limit the outcome of group counselling to being equal to or better than individual therapy. Nonetheless, the latest literature across the past five years that compares both individual and group counselling is hard to access as it has received scant attention in the research literature.

The effectiveness of group counselling as a treatment for students dealing with their issues is still supported by journals. When a control group is compared with an experiment group, the students who receive group counselling as treatment show improvements in resilience (Ramadhoni et al., 2020). The dynamic interpersonal process of group work encourages

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

individuals to think and gain awareness about their behaviour (Wibowo, 2019). Activities conducted in groups are useful for social development when the clients have the chance to implement communication skills and practical exercises with other members (Papadopoulos, 2020). The result shows that secondary students enhance their ability to form friendships, and their performance persists after three weeks of follow-up (Banat et al., 2020). This is because the techniques and exercises learned in group counselling prepare students for daily applications. Overall, the studies highlight the needs of the experimental and control groups to demonstrate comparisons in determining the efficacy of group counselling interventions among adolescents.

Challenges of Group Counselling

Although more members can contribute various ideas, the larger group size can also be a challenge for the counsellor to deal with. The obvious difference between group and individual counselling is that in group counselling, there are multiple clients in the therapeutic environment with the counsellor, whereas, in individual counselling, the counsellor only has to deal with one client (Generes, 2022). The formation of a group before therapeutic sessions must consider the type and duration to determine an optimal group size (Biggs et al., 2020). For example, some individuals are scared and feel uncomfortable when they struggle to talk in front of many people (Cline, 2020). The members will also worry about the breach of confidentiality and be unwilling to share more when they are in a large group. Besides that, the group counsellor must prevent certain group members from monopolising the group. The members can't become the centre of attention in the group (Generes, 2022). However, the problem arises when some individuals are more active while others may be unmotivated. As a

result, the group leader must ensure group dynamics by giving each member ample opportunity for sharing and discussion.

Counsellor Development

An Integrated Development Model of Supervision (IDM) is used to assess the therapist's characteristics across four levels and supervised domains. It also evaluates the supervisee's awareness, motivation, and autonomy in carrying out the task (Stoltenberg & McNeil, 2010).

Level 1 trainee counsellors

Since the counsellors at level 1 have no counselling experience, they are very reliant on the supervisor. When a trainee counsellor encounters counselling-related challenges due to a lack of knowledge and training, they will seek out the present school counsellor for assistance (Singh-Pillay & Cartwright, 2018). They tend to experience anxiety with low levels of skill competence. Although counsellors at level 1 have low awareness of how to handle more than one participant in a group, they have high motivation to provide the best service to the clients. For example, they are excited to attend training and enhance their fundamental counselling skills.

Level 2 trainee counsellors

The second level of the counsellor is in a transition stage and is functioning more independently. At this stage, the counsellor is competent in expressing empathy toward the clients. The counsellor can consistently reflect on what the clients are sharing and apprehend their expressions with active listening (Neukrug, 2022). However, there is a risk that the counsellor will overidentify clients' needs and develop countertransference. The motivation of

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

counsellors gradually changes after encountering more novel counselling sessions. Some trainee counsellors are passionate about facing challenges, whereas others start to doubt their abilities. Because of the high demand for training, research indicates that counsellors experience burnout as a result of a lack of control over their work (Archer, 2020).

Level 3 trainee counsellors

The counsellor at the third level emphasises a personalised approach during the counselling session. With the integration of strength and style to conduct the therapy, the counsellor is more flexible to balance self and awareness. After several successful previous experiences, the counsellor can recover from the confusion and feel less anxious when confronted with the barrier. The counsellor may still exhibit some doubt, but the negative feelings are less likely to affect their progress (Salvador, 2016). Eventually, the counsellors' autonomy grows, and supervision is only used to improve their competence in the remaining areas.

Level 3 integrated counsellors

The counsellor at the third level emphasises a personalised approach during the counselling session. With the integration of strength and style to conduct the therapy, the counsellor shows his professionalism across domains, including the competency for intervention, the conceptualization of the case, and theoretical orientation (VanDerWege, 2011). He or she already has a personal style that emerges in the therapeutic sessions due to their high level of competency. The counsellor is mature in handling the therapy, such as when they consider the issues from different perspectives and assist the client in making decisions (Godward et al., 2020).

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

In conclusion, this study focuses on the early experiences of group counselling sessions among counselling students. The current context considers the approach to counselling skills and how the counselling students react during their counselling sessions. The levels proposed in IDM are the markers to assess the counsellor's development, so it is anticipated that the counsellor's development of the target participants is possibly at level 1 or level 2. As this model serves as a framework by specifying that individuals in different stages have certain skills and competencies, its limitation is that it does not vary the development for dissimilar trainees. Thus, the research helps in understanding the unique experiences of counselling students in group counselling sessions with a qualitative approach.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Theoretical Framework

Gestalt Therapy

Gestalt therapy, first introduced by Frederick Perls, emphasises individual uniqueness in achieving personal development and self-actualization. From the humanistic approach, it takes awareness of one's presence in the world and connection with the environment. One of the principles underlying Gestalt therapy is field theory, which investigates the pattern of interaction between a person and their environment. This theory was also used in a study to determine the change in therapeutic sessions in clinical practice (Francesetti & Roubal, 2020). It is believed that a thorough consideration of both the environment and the implications of insight in work can drive better results. As a discovery process, this theory helps to make sense of the functioning of the world by understanding how to respond in certain situations (Mann, 2021).

Gestalt therapy, as a straightforward approach, is best to describe phenomenology (Dreitzel, 2021). It is paying attention to the patterns and emerging themes throughout the process, but not only intending to know the result (Jones & Rainey, 2019). For instance, it involves the connections, challenges and finding out how the work is done. A Cycle of Experience (CoE) model is outlined to explain the process of how an individual contacts the environment (Perls, 1947). It is a cycle with seven phases to track the here-and-now moments. The first phase is the sensation which an individual must understand self and the environment by using the five senses before entering the second stage, awareness. After noticing the sensory data, only the individual can be aware of the emergence of patterns and themes in the situation. Then, they will mobilize the energy to act due to excitement. On contrary, the energy is incapacitated when an individual experiences anxious feelings. After transforming energy into action, an individual

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

needs to contact the changes, relating to the result of his or her behaviour. The sixth phase is

closure, and the seventh phase is withdrawal which highlights the learning and achievement of

the entire experience.

Figure 1 The Cycle of Experience (CoE)

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions
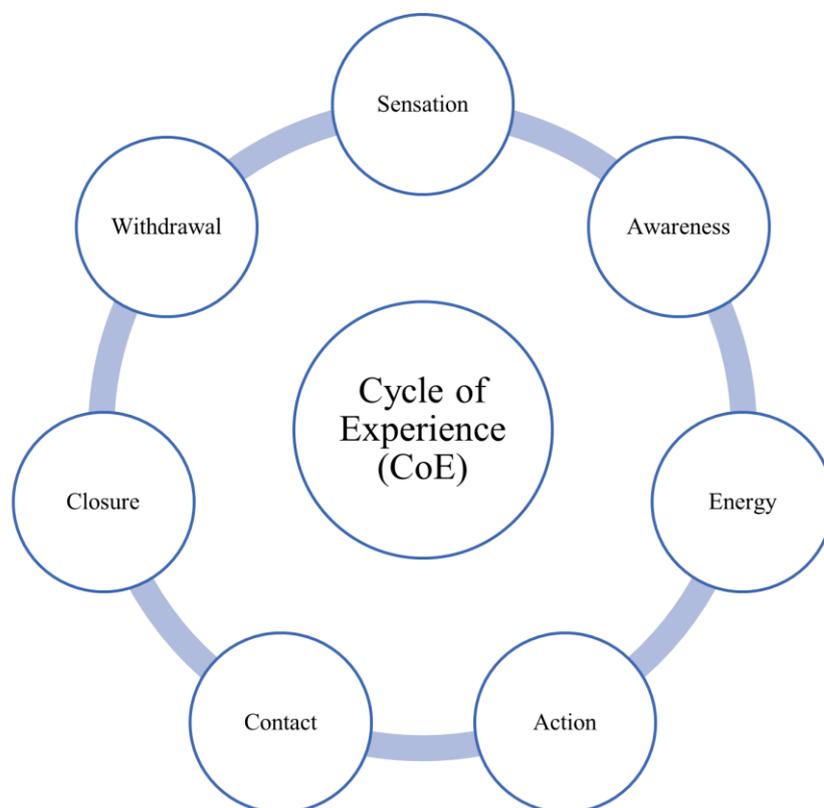
Application of Theory in the Study

The application of Gestalt therapy guides the study to focus on the present rather than explore the past. This research explores the individual uniqueness of the experience of counselling students in group counselling sessions. According to Gestalt therapy's field theory, one's actions and emotions may be relevant to their surroundings (Chew-Helbig, 2019). Interviewing the counselling students who have experience in conducting group counselling, involves their self-awareness of when to recall their performance during the session. For instance, the student's experience is interdependent with the group counselling environment, which influences their attitude or reaction to it. Consequently, the finding fulfils the research objective of this study and describes the phenomenon of student counselling in group sessions.

Furthermore, by gathering input from the target participants, this qualitative research is consistent with the theory's figure-formation process and leads to a more in-depth understanding. It is because Gestalt therapy promotes direct experience and focuses on "what" and "how" (Natasian et al., 2020). For example, the study reveals the situation faced by the counselling students and reveals more about how they handle challenges during therapeutic sessions. Counselling students are claiming responsibility for what is happening in the present by paying attention to their emotions, behaviour, and thinking (Schultz, 2022). It encourages intervention development in the present moment so that the students can enhance their growth and gain meaning from learning to counsel. Thus, the theory guides the study to focus on individuals' experiences and consider the human capacity for growth.

Moreover, the Cycle of Experience (CoE) from Gestalt therapy can be applied to exploring the counselling students' experiences with group counselling sessions. Its principle of figure-ground formation can conceptualise the internal processes that counselling students experience.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Disclosing the experience and recalling how the students handle group counselling sessions, allows the individuals to look at their behaviour from different lenses to develop beneficial growth. The counselling students will review their performance and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Eventually, this research not only finds out the positive experience of the counselling students but also the barriers or challenges that hinder their progress in conducting group counselling. It encourages a change process that will result in learning experiences and healthy functioning holistically for the participants of this research (Bowie, 2021).

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Chapter 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter covers the research design of a qualitative study and the data analysis method used to interpret the data. To understand the data analysis procedures, a model with seven steps is discussed to give a thorough idea of thematic analysis and the organization of information. Moreover, the proposed sample size specifies the target group to ease the process of recruiting participants who are eligible for research participation. As the researcher is the instrument in a qualitative study, a hermeneutic phenomenology approach will explain the procedure before and after conducting the interviews among counselling students. Lastly, this chapter also explains some ways to enhance the reliability and validity of the research to produce more quality work.

Research Design and Data Analysis Method

Qualitative Research

The qualitative method was used in the research to achieve the research objectives. This context applied **phenomenology design** by carrying out semi-structured interviews to understand the experiences of counselling students with group counselling sessions. The interview was conducted physically. With the use of a semi-structured interview, open-ended information could be received to understand the experiences of participants comprehensively (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Although qualitative research was more time-consuming, it delved deeper into the issue by exploring the participants' points of view than an online survey. Qualitative research also allowed follow-up details and in-depth exploration of thoughts, emotions, and beliefs from the participants during the interview session. Thus, a qualitative

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

research design was most suitable in this context to explain the phenomenon of students'

experiences with group counselling sessions.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis method was **thematic analysis**, and the findings were based on the

interview transcripts. The researcher recorded the conversation with the participants for

academic purposes after asking for their consent. The output would then be divided into

different themes and labelled with codes to summarise the key concepts. Research showed that

the thematic analysis method is widely used in counselling and psychotherapy research (Braun

& Clarke, 2020). It sought to identify a pattern in a specific phenomenon among counselling

students by involving research participants in the process with their interview data (Mortensen,

2022). The thematic analysis was also flexible in providing new insights derived from the data,

as the opinions and experiences of each participant will be unique. Therefore, the thematic

analysis was beneficial in categorising large amounts of data and the subjective experiences of

the participants.

Colaizzi's (1978) Strategy

The use of Colaizzi's strategy was a logical process for data analysis that is effective in

describing the fundamental structure of an experience before establishing the final thematic

construct (Wirihana et al., 2018). The descriptive phases allowed the researcher to explore the

phenomenon and apply it to a qualitative study (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021). This method

consisted of seven steps, emphasising that the data were validated by the participants (Morrow

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

et al., 2015). It was because the participants were eligible for the study and had personal experience with the relevant topic, which was the group counselling sessions.

Figure 2 A Summary of Colaizzi's Strategy

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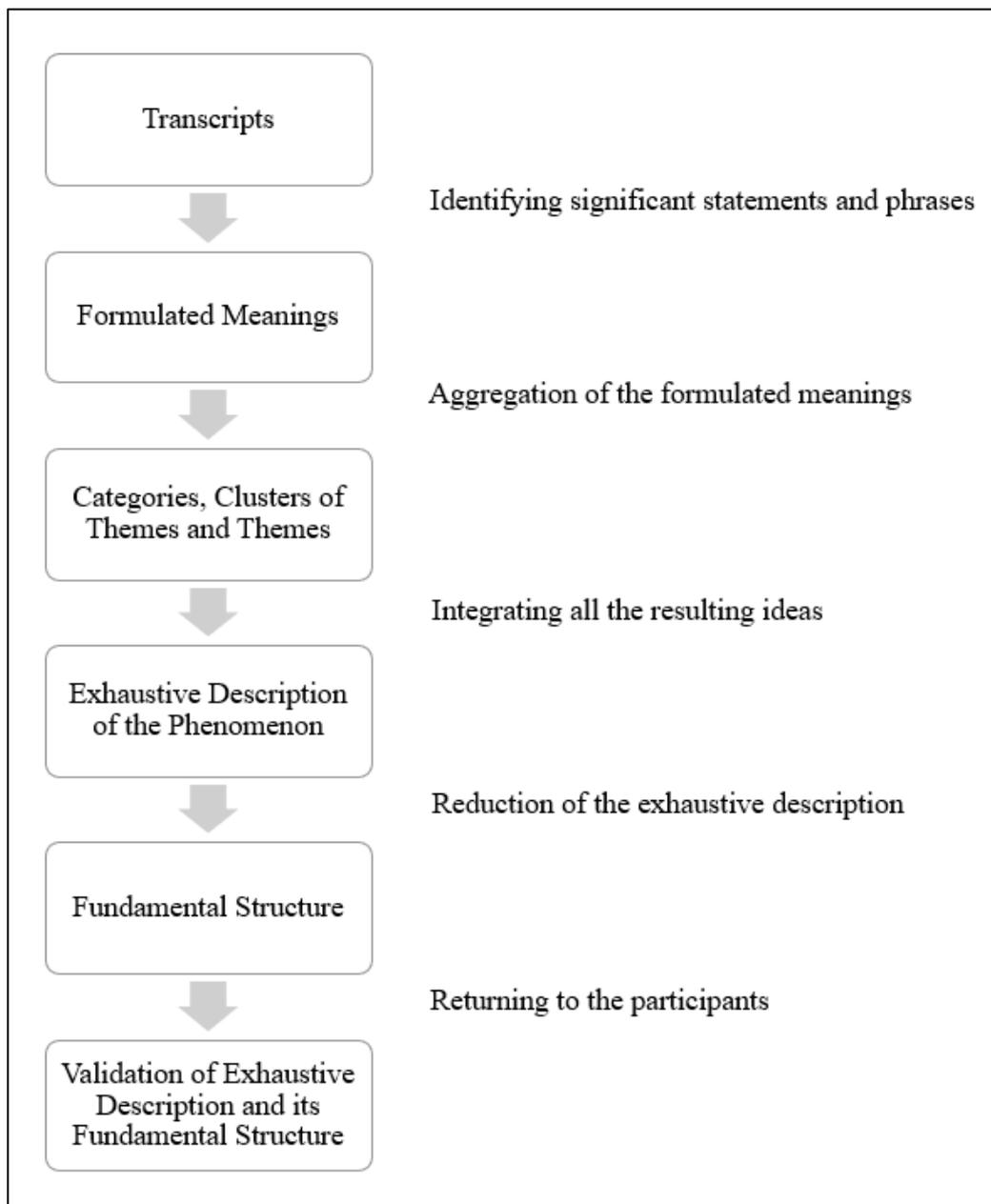
Counselling Sessions

Transcribe. The first step was to re-read the transcript to understand the whole context and explore the phenomena of the participants. The transcript was based on the input of participants about their experience with group counselling sessions. After reviewing the recording of the interview sessions a few times, the researcher could obtain a general sense of the study and become familiar with the information. It created a better understanding of the participants' experience. There was a total of six interview transcripts, representing information from six different participants, used for data analysis. The researcher also would refer to the field note to pay attention to minor information such as the record of participants' initial impressions and some thoughts of the researcher when conducting interviews.

Extract significant statements. Then, the researcher would identify and extract significant statements about the topic. The significant statements that were believed to contribute to the research findings after being extracted from the interview transcript. The statements were in the form of phrases and sentences that show relevance to the studied phenomenon. For example, the researcher could find out the positive and negative experiences during group counselling sessions for data analysis. The statements that had direct relevance to the phenomenon are under careful consideration and investigation. Only statements related to the participants' experiences with group counselling were selected and underwent further processing. In the interview transcript, the researcher would code or highlight certain sections that relate to the theme to disentangle its significance. The examples below are some extracted significant statements shared by the participant about their role as a counsellor in group counselling sessions.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Table 1 Examples of Extracted Significant Statements

Participants	Significant Statements
A	"What they trying to say, and I think is fun and amazing because I need to be a good listener. And I need to think, paraphrase, digest quickly what they had said at a time. And then I need to one by one let them take turn [participant pointed from one direction to another] telling, sometimes returning back to them."
B	I think I need to manage more stuff, emotions because it is different with individual counselling that they are a lot of people in group. And then we have to observe each of the client's emotions time by time while they sharing their experience. Yah, I think is a very important role to observe them.
C	I think one of the main responsibilities I would have in leading a group is to make sure that… I treat everyone equally like I need to give everyone a chance to speak. regardless they are willing to speak or not. At least… At the very least, I should give them an opportunity to do so. And not just let one, only one client to go on and on, keep on talking and talking.

Formulate meanings. After transcription, the third step was to formulate the meanings of the dialogue. The researcher would extract meanings from the context and organise them into various themes. Through data analysis, the researcher required interpretation and active curiosity to understand the meaning that the participants were trying to convey as they shared their experiences verbally. It was essential to review the context a few times and even asked for participants' clarification during the interview session to avoid misinterpretation.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Cluster themes. The following step was to organise the formulated meanings into emergent themes. The meaning of the data was categorized based on its similarities into common themes. The data was grouped into larger categories, which need to be combined or split. At the same time, the researcher would refine themes to ensure they accurately reflect the data. It was also important to ensure the themes proposed are coherent and meaningful to fulfil the research objectives. After understanding the meaning and interpretation of the participants' statements, the researcher would group each significant piece of information into clusters of themes.

Table 2 Examples of Formulation of Themes

Formulated Meanings	Cluster Themes	Emergent Themes
The group counsellor played the role of an active listener as well as a facilitator in understanding what the group members are trying to say and guiding them through the sessions.	Active listener, facilitator	Role as a Group Counsellor
The group counsellor should be an observer who starts alert to clients' emotions during the sharing session. It is important to observe the situation when there are too many things to handle among the clients.	Observer	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

As a group counsellor, the role is a facilitator who is in charge of leading the group so that all clients have the chance to talk and share their issues.	Facilitator	

Combine themes and formulated meanings. The fifth step was to combine the themes and formulated meanings to receive an overall understanding of the phenomenon. By integrating all the resulting ideas, the researcher could develop an exhaustive description by taking a holistic view of the experience of counselling students in group counselling sessions. There were a total of seven emergent themes to describe the phenomenon of group counselling and students' experiences with group counselling sessions. It involved the attitude of participants towards group counselling, their roles as a group counsellor, their skills as a group counsellor, their theoretical orientation, challenges, a lack of competency, and the impact of group counselling. A detailed description would be written for each theme, using quotes and examples to illustrate a coherent narrative of the research.

Describe fundamental structure of the phenomenon. Afterwards, the sixth step would be describing the fundamental structure of the phenomenon. Although the research findings were compiled and organised in the previous steps, the researcher would eliminate some of the information that is redundant or ambiguous. Overall findings would be able to capture the essence of the data through synthesis. The outcomes could best explain the research questions about the experiences of counselling students with group counselling experiences. It encouraged more detailed and dense explanations for the extracted themes to describe the studied phenomenon.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Validate findings. The final step was to seek verification of the fundamental structure by returning to the participants. When the researcher got the participants back for a follow-up interview, it was useful to validate the findings and ensure the accuracy of the data. The researcher contacted the participants through email and discuss the results of the study with them to understand their satisfaction. This step aimed to make sure the outcome of the study accurately reflected the experience of the participants with group counselling sessions. The participants of the research could help ensure the research findings accurately reflect their phenomena as well as increase the validity of the research. It also worked to guarantee accuracy and credibility during the research process. Based on the participants' feedback, the researcher would modify earlier steps in the data analysis to present reliable data.

Sampling Procedures

Sample Population

Purposive sampling was applied in the research, and the selected participants must fulfil certain criteria to provide valid and useful results. It was also known as "judgmental sampling," in which the researcher will recruit a suitable sample group to join the study (Saks & Allsop, 2019). The main advantage of using purposive sampling was that it allowed the researcher to focus on the topic in depth because it involved participants with characteristics that best fit the study. It helped the researcher to exclude participants who were not eligible for the criteria to gain the desired result. For example, the students must have fundamental knowledge about group therapy and experience handling at least one group counselling session. The students had first-hand knowledge about the topic and can contribute to providing real-time findings (Bhardwaj, 2019). In this study, the population of group counselling students had

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

the opportunity to conduct physical group counselling sessions compared to other students in different courses. At the same time, their programme structure involved a group counselling course that could guarantee the counselling students had adequate knowledge in group counselling.

Location of Study

The target population for the research was UTAR students from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FAS). The recruitment of participants would focus especially on students in Perak who are studying Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) Guidance and Counselling. This was due to the fact that the guidance and counselling programme was only available at UTAR Kampar, and students enrolled in the counselling course had a better chance of being exposed to group counselling. The researcher could get the personal details and contact information of students who had completed UAPC 3033 Group Counselling to yield appropriate findings. Students from various backgrounds and with varying lengths of study and experience handling group counselling sessions were not limited because it was believed that they would contribute different and important opinions.

Ethical Clearance Approval

Before collecting the data from the participants, the researcher got ethical clearance approval from the respective supervisor. It aimed to protect the rights of the research participants as well as maintain their privacy and confidentiality. At the same time, ethical approval also protected the researcher from bearing personal responsibility when the participants understood their contribution to the research and the accessibility of their data. The participants filled out the form while the researcher gained permission for data sampling collection and passed the documents to the supervisor for compilation. Afterwards, the

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

supervisor submitted the ethical clearance approval to the Head of the Department of Counselling and Psychology in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FAS). Hence, it was important to receive the approval of the faculty before conducting the data collection.

Rationale for Sample Size

The sample size consisted of six counselling students involved in the interview to complete this research. Literature suggests six participants can achieve rich data in the research up to 70% saturation (Guest et al., 2006). With six interviews, the sample could provide adequate information to present selected patterns related to the topic (Malterud et al., 2016). The majority of themes could be captured from the sample during the fifth or sixth interviews (Guest et al., 2020). According to the basis of theoretical saturation, the new information was no longer helpful in providing additional insights as the participants already presented saturated responses and there were no more fresh points to fulfil the research objective. Moreover, six participants were sufficient for the study, and the researcher could better spend the time exploring other pressing issues (Rosala, 2021). As a result, the number of participants reached six after data saturation.

Data Collection Procedures

Instrument

The data were collected via the qualitative method with one-on-one interviews, which the researcher considered the major qualitative instruments. This approach had the greatest potential to receive personalised information, which is best for exploring an individual's

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

experience. The interview was semi-structured, in which the researcher asked open-ended questions to encourage elaboration from the participants. Throughout the interview session, the researcher also observed the participants' non-verbal language, including their expressions and gestures, to gain a more thorough understanding of their perceptions. A physical interview with face-to-face conversation had priority, which helped with more accurate observation and data collection. However, it was prevalent to conduct online interviews so that the participants with geographical barriers had the chance to get involved in the research (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Lastly, the entire interview session lasted around 45 to 90 minutes. The researcher recorded the data and transcribed for analysis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria. The inclusion criteria for the sample group were that the participants must be over the age of 18 and actively enrolled in university in Malaysia. Only students who are currently studying in the Guidance and Counselling programme are accepted to join this research. Furthermore, counselling students must have prior experience in order to conduct or participate in at least one complete group counselling session. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria were the students who do not have experience with group counselling sessions and lack adequate knowledge about counselling.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Hermeneutic Interview Procedures

The hermeneutical phenomenology approach was oriented to describe the lived experience by making sense of and interpreting the data from the participants (Guillen, 2018). Van Manen, an educational theorist, combined the philosophical concept and hermeneutic phenomenology to reveal the phenomena within the lived experience (Robertson & Malt, 1999). The hermeneutic cycle showed cyclical processes to fully understand the phenomenology (McAuley, 2006). It encouraged the researcher to explore the topic in depth by knowing the perspectives of the participants and to interpret the findings after having acquired basic knowledge of the topic's background. Thus, the researcher used four phases of hermeneutic interviewing based on Van Manen's structure in the current study to guide the interview process.

Figure 3 The Hermeneutic Cycle

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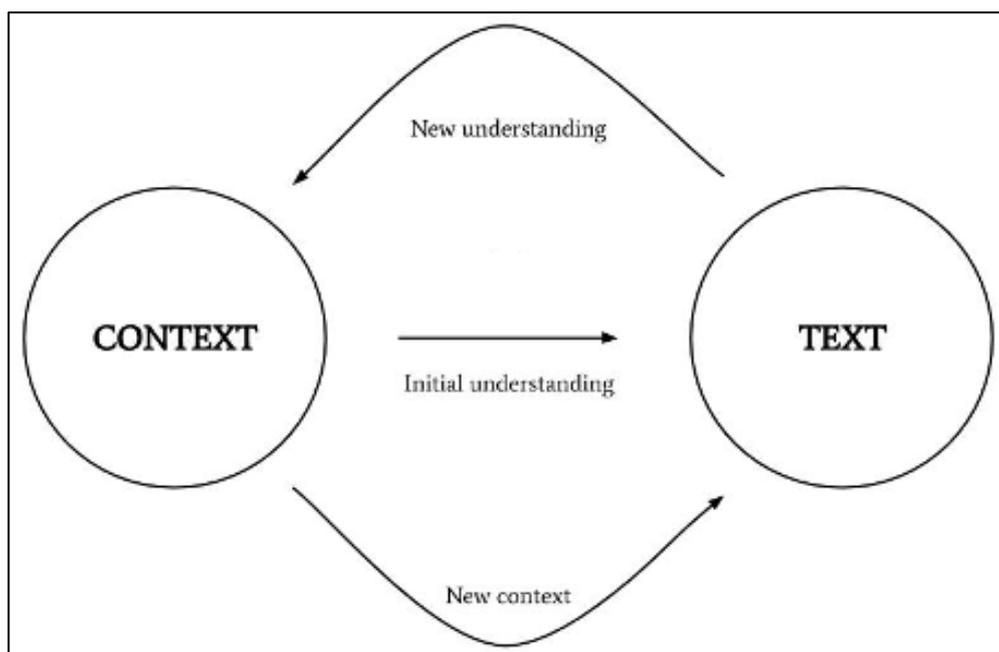
Counselling Sessions

The hermeneutic cycle described the experience mediated by interpretation. Based on past studies, the text from the literature provided an initial understanding of the phenomenon of group counselling. The researcher then developed new insights about the experience of counselling students by conducting the semi-structured interview. The research findings had the potential to influence the personal context in terms of beliefs or expectations. Eventually, the context led to new discoveries of the phenomenon, which achieved the research objectives.

First Phase: Nature of Lived Experience. To explore the phenomenon of the research topic, the researcher questioned the lived experiences of the group counselling students. Phenomenological inquiry only appeared when the researcher investigated how the participant felt and thought at a deeper level in order to discover the ultimate source of meaning in their lives (Qutoshi, 2018). Before conducting the interview, the researcher must have a thorough understanding of the phenomena related to the topic to avoid misinterpretation of the findings. It highlighted the importance of reviewing literature about group counselling for the researcher to make sense of the experiences among the sample group.

Second Phase: Investigating the Experience as It Is Lived. The physical interview was conducted with the participants to collect descriptive personal data that was unique due to individual differences. At the initial phase of the interview, the researcher encouraged the participants to share as much as possible about their experience with group counselling sessions. To learn more about the phenomenon, the researcher tried to learn about the participants' experiences as a group leader and members of the group. Instead of asking what the counselling students do in group work, the researcher used a "how" question so that the participants could elaborate more about the ways they handle group counselling or their coping strategies to deal

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

with the challenges. In short, the second stage of this data collection aimed to discover the topic in a complete and unbiased way.

Third Phase: Reflecting on the Experience and Essential Theme. Reflection was an important phase to reveal a comprehensive understanding of the experience. Because individuals could not separate themselves from the phenomenon, the research investigated its impact on perception (Pool, 2018). The researcher gained more concrete details about the counselling students by conducting group counselling. It was not about getting their thoughts on this group therapy, but about learning about their lived experiences. For example, the researcher asked the participants about their roles in the group and their relationships with the group members. Participants were asked to reflect on their experience during group counselling sessions, which considered a more direct contact with the lived experience. Then, the researcher extracted insightful themes during the discovery process when the participants disclosed themselves. It provided a pedagogical essence of the counselling students' experience with the therapy as a group leader or an observer.

Fourth Phase: Writing about Reflecting on the Experienced Lived. After completing the interview, the researcher integrated the descriptions and information from the participants. Throughout the interview session, the researcher looked for participants' assent to receiving accurate and credible information for interpretation. For instance, the researcher sought confirmation from them as to whether the researcher had the correct understanding of phenomena. It was because the dialogue, which carried essential meanings to explain the research objectives, was then transformed into a general structure by transcription from the recording. Finally, the researcher analysed the data by making sense of the participants' experiences. The figure below illustrates the phases of this study.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Figure 4 The Phase of the Research Study
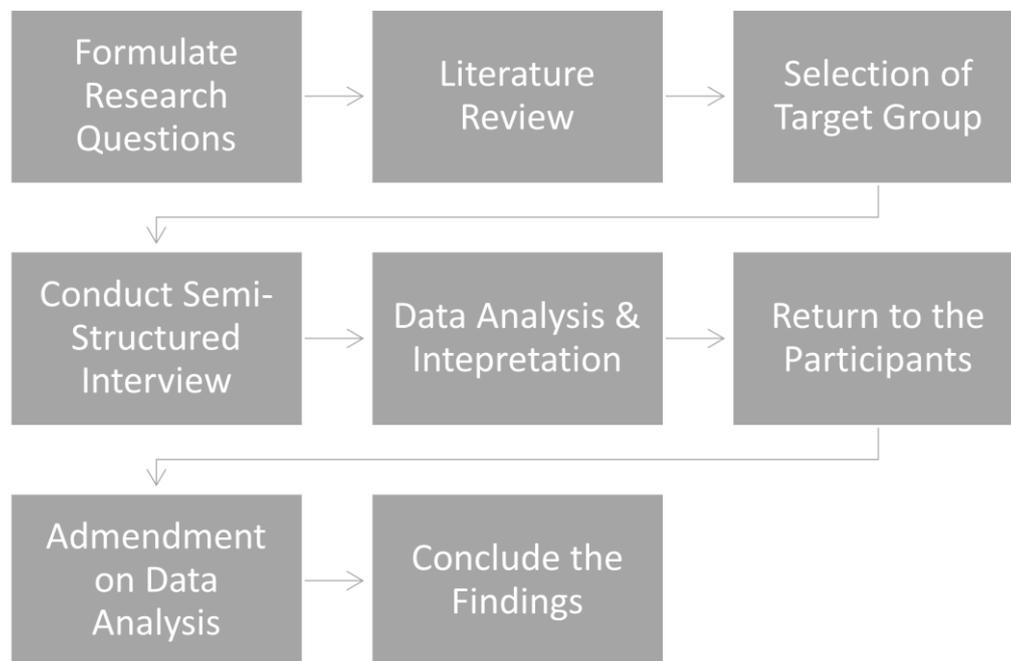
Reliability and Validity

Reliability in the Research

       Audit Trail and Member Check. Reliability was a measure of consistency, or whether the research produced the same result across time (Jhangiani et al., 2015). However, the reliability of the qualitative research was challenging to measure when it did not provide statistical analysis, such as when using the assessment to achieve the research objective. Although it was difficult to define the research's reliability, the transparency of the data sources or methods used to collect data was used as evidence to draw conclusions. In this study, the researcher explained the objective of the research and the findings to the participants. The process of creating an audit trail began at the beginning of the research to let the participants understand the rationale of the research and continued through the final stage of reporting the

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

results. When the participants were given the right to confirm the findings, they had a better evaluation of the research's reliability. For example, the researcher sent an email asking if there were any issues that were not addressed in the findings. Some inquiries or unclear statements about the participants were also included in the email to gain confirmation and achieve accuracy in the data. It could also ensure that the findings are interpreted based on the data provided by the participants (Forrester & Sullivan, 2019).

Replicability. Another criteria to determine the reliability of the research is replicability. It emphasises the accuracy of the researcher's report in conveying the actual situation as he or she observes it for generalisation (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). This study involved audio recordings as documentation and full transcriptions to establish procedural trustworthiness. The researcher increased the accuracy of reflecting the phenomena by repeatedly reviewing the recordings and coding the meaningful statements, which were able to contribute to the research outcome. Moreover, the researcher achieved reliable data when the definition or extraction of emerging themes was clearly defined. Thus, the researcher had clearly defined operational definitions about group counselling and the counselling students at the outset of the study.

Validity in the Research

Prolonged Engagement. Validity referred to the reliability of the study in measuring what it should (Jhangiani et al., 2015). It was significant for the researcher to build trust and a good rapport with the participants when the research applied an interpretative approach during the interview. Through the process of prolonged engagement, the researcher be present and

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

spend time exploring the phenomenon (Ho et al., 2019). The researcher had invested time by having active contact and follow-up sessions during the data collection period with the participant. Besides, the researcher created a comfortable environment to encourage the participants to disclose their experiences by informing them of privacy and confidentiality before the interview session.

Reflexivity. In qualitative research, methods such as reflexivity were required to reduce the researcher's bias in influencing the outcome. Reflexivity was related to the researcher's ability to make ethical decisions and avoid allowing personal experiences to influence research findings (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). For example, the prior knowledge or beliefs might influence the researcher's attitude towards the participants. Even though the research involved participant checks to ensure the information was recorded accurately, the researcher also kept a reflective journal in this study. Its goal was to document personal perceptions and thoughts throughout the data collection process so that the researcher had a better understanding of herself and could arrive at a non-judgmental outcome. For instance, the researcher's way of interviewing seemed not neutral when she directly asked if the participant felt good about the counselling experience after reviewing the audio recording with the first participant. The researcher immediately recorded such thoughts, preventing misleading questions in the following interview sessions by changing the style of asking about how the participants feel about their counselling experience.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Chapter 4 FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of this research. Initially, the demographics of respondents are shown in a table. Following is the thematic analysis result with seven themes, consisting of the attitude of participants towards group counselling, roles and skills as a group counsellor, theoretical orientation used in groups, challenges faced, a lack of competency to handle the group, and the impact of group counselling on the counselling students.

Table 3 Demographic of The Respondents

Demographic Factors	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E	Participant F
Age	22	25	22	22	22	23
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male
Ethnicity	Buddhist	Buddhist	Christian	Buddhist	Christian	Buddhist
Educational	University	University	University	University	University	University
Programme	Guidance and Counselling	Guidance and Counselling	Guidance and Counselling	Guidance and Counselling	Guidance and Counselling	Guidance and Counselling
Year of Study	Year 3	Year 3	Year 3	Year 3	Year 3	Year 3
Frequency of group session	2	1	More than 1	1	2	More than 1

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

In order to understand the experience of counselling students in group counselling sessions, the researcher used thematic analysis to find out relevant themes for this topic. The researcher had physically interviewed a total of six respondents using the interview protocol of 10 questions. All the participants are currently studying at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Kampar, and have at least conducted one complete group counselling. During the semi-structured interview, the researcher applied open-ended questions to explore more about the experience when the participant conducted the sessions. After the thematic analysis, there are seven themes to explain the phenomenon and answer the research questions.

Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Attitude Toward Group Counselling Session

Based on their experiences, 4 out of 6 participants had a favourable attitude towards group counselling. They described group counselling sessions with positive words. They involve easier rapport building, fulfil client's needs, and helping more people within a group. Such a positive experience helps the participants enjoy conducting group counselling sessions.

"Hmm… Although is hard but is interesting because it just like listening to a story, different kind of stories at a time, you know. And, yah. And then, the rapport building is easier, I think. Then… And then, is more challenging."

(Extract 1, Participant A)

Participant A enjoyed the uncertainty and challenges of dealing with several clients at once. The participant found it interesting to hear different stories from clients with diverse

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

backgrounds. Participant A also stated that having more people would ease the interaction and help build rapport among the members. Throughout the interview, participant A showed a positive attitude towards encountering challenges and looked forward to future group counselling sessions.

"I think is a very good thing that we will… We can have this group counselling session because as we know, there are two types of counselling, which is individual counselling and also group counselling, right? So, for certain people, they will prefer individual counselling and certain people they will prefer group counselling. I think it fulfil both different requirement for different kinds of people."

(Extract 2, Participant B)

Participant B felt that group counselling was good because it met the different needs of clients. As participant B mentioned, there are two types of counselling: individual and group counselling. Participant B also clarified that clients who preferred group counselling would not feel lonely when sharing in a group. The clients who faced a similar issue were able to interact with each other and experience a sense of belonging. Thus, participant B viewed group counselling positively and felt that it was necessary for certain groups of clients rather than only providing individual counselling.

"Although for individual counselling, I am more experienced with that compared to group. But from my experience with group counselling, I enjoy myself quite a bit, honestly. But, if I really have to choose, I think I would choose group counselling."

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

(Extract 3, Participant C)

Participant C compared his experience of conducting individual counselling with that of conducting group counselling. The participant had more experience dealing with single clients, but participant C still showed more preference for group counselling by stating that it was more enjoyable.

"Is from me and clients, I think. Actually, the both parties can receive the support from the group. Although there will be a lot of opinions, they (the member) actually can receive support from each other, involving the counsellor."

(Extract 4, Participant E)

Participant E used the word supportive to describe her experience with group counselling sessions. The participant felt that not only the group members could experience a sense of belonging, but they could also gain support from the group counsellor. Participant E clarified that the term "supportive" was thought from both the group counsellor's and clients' perspectives.

2 out of 6 participants showed a different attitude towards group counselling sessions due to their negative experience. They thought group counselling sessions were complicated and not easy to prepare. Eventually, they will be less favourably inclined towards group counselling and may not consider handling group sessions due to their experience.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

"And then, that is one thing about group counselling. I don't know how to make it very in-depth. Yah, because a lot of people, but then the time is very short. Yah, that's what I think about group counselling. First thing is very complicated because a lot of people. And then, another thing is not in-depth enough."

(Extract 5, Participant D)

Participant D described her group counselling experience as ineffective. Through the participant's experience handling the sessions, she was not satisfied with the theoretical approach she used. It made participant D have a negative attitude towards group counselling sessions, as the participant felt the therapeutic time was very brief and participant D was unable to help the clients at that time effectively. Besides that, the increased number of clients from the group counselling session limited participant D's ability to truly explore everyone's issues. Eventually, participant D felt the group process was too complicated for her to handle, and the process was not in-depth with information.

"The thing, ok… The one thing I want to elaborate more, like just now you said what is my attitude toward group counselling, and then I say negative. The reason I say negative is because I think group counselling sometimes as a counsellor, we will miss out something important from the clients, even though maybe they achieve the same common goal. So, I think compared to individual counselling, I think group counselling will have the… Will have the high possibility to miss out something, for me as a group counsellor and leader. It is like more than one person, so I need to focus on more than one person. So, I can't only focus on this client only. So for me, will have the negative attitude toward group counselling because

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

sometimes we need to like… Fully explore the clients, but group counselling will be limit the

counsellor to fully explore the clients."

(Extract 6, Participant F)

Participant F had a negative attitude towards group counselling, thinking the experience of being a group counsellor was not able to explore the clients' issues fully. The participant had a higher possibility of missing out on what the clients said and was responsible for focusing on more than one person. Eventually, participant B felt that group counselling limited the ability to provide better service. Participant D's perspectives were influenced by the number of participants in the group counselling, preventing a more thorough exploration process with the clients.

Theme 2: Roles as A Group Counsellor

4 out of 6 participants described the role of a group counsellor as a facilitator. They emphasized the importance of a group counsellor to lead the group and ensure every members have equal chance to speak. As a facilitator in the group, the counsellor will also needs to generate questions for the clients before they take the initiative to open up.

"I think one of the main responsibilities I would have in leading a group is to make sure

that… I treat everyone equally like I need to give everyone a chance to speak regardless they

are willing to speak or not. At least… At the very least, I should give them an opportunity to

do so. And not just let one, only one client to go on and on, keep on talking and talking. While

the others, they just sit there without being able to do anything. So, I feel like it is important

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

for everyone to get at least the opportunity to speak out during the group. That's what I

usually aim to do when I conduct a session."

(Extract 1, Participant C)

Participant C felt that the group counsellor was a facilitator in the group, leading the flow of

the session and letting every client speak on an equal basis. Regardless of whether the clients

were willing to share or not, at the very least, the group counsellor should give them a chance.

As the facilitator in the group, the counsellor also needed to control the clients, so they didn't

keep talking endlessly, leaving the others without the right to speak. Therefore, participant C

would always keep an eye out to see if clients in group counselling were engaged in disclosing

themselves.

"My role as a group counsellor is probably more like a facilitator, like I feel. A facilitator

and a person who ask, basically. Yah, I don't think I teach them or what. I just ask question

and ask them to generate ideas. And then, they discuss among themselves. And then, I tell

them oh, you can rank, you can do this do that. And then, they make their own decision, their

own ranking. And then, yah… Memang more like a facilitator I feel, because they make their

own decision, their stuff. Erm."

(Extract 2, Participant D)

Participant D perceived her role as a facilitator in the group who did most of the questioning

and let the flow go smoothly. Participant D clarified that she wouldn't do the teaching in the

group or ask the clients to follow the group counsellor. Instead, participant D would guide the

group at first and let the clients continue with their discussion. Participant D felt that all the

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

clients were given the right to make decisions, so the group counsellor's role as the facilitator was to only assist them and facilitate the group.

"The role as a counsellor. Basically, I am the leader in the group and need to carry out the whole session, the co-leader just assists me. During the classes, we have some practical and then we do some practices. We have some practice and I found out that there is very hard for me to carry out the whole session, the whole group as a leader. So, my role in the group is leader, sometimes I have to be the co-leader."

(Extract 3, Participant F)

Participant F described his role as a leader and facilitator to carry out the complete group counselling sessions. Participant F felt that it was not easy to handle the session independently when the clients had different personalities and communication styles. The group counsellor's role would be to control and guide the session. Participant F also stated that his participation in group counselling sessions led him to become the group's co-leader.

"What they trying to say, and I think is fun and amazing because I need to be a good listener. And I need to think, paraphrase, digest quickly what they had said at a time. And then I need to one by one let them take turn [participant pointed from one direction to another] telling, sometimes returning back to them."

(Extract 4, Participant A)

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Participant A claimed that a group counsellor plays the role of a facilitator to ensure the group counselling process is going smoothly. For instance, participant A would let the members of the group take turns in the rapport-building session and introduce themselves. As a group facilitator, it is important to understand and get the clients' points accurately and be the leader in facilitating the group. The group counsellor not only has to encourage the participants to actively disclose themselves but also needs to ensure everyone has the opportunity to share.

One participant has a different opinion on the role of a group counsellor, feeling that she is more of an observer based on her experience. She felt that it was important to observe every single activity in the group, especially knowing the clients' emotions.

"I think I need to manage more stuff, emotions because it is different with individual counselling that they are a lot of people in group. And then we have to observe each of the client's emotions time by time while they sharing their experience. Yah, I think is a very important role to observe them."

(Extract 5, Participant B)

Participant B thought that a group counsellor played the role of an observer. When every client was sharing in the session, the counsellor had to actively observe their emotions and non-verbal language. The emotions of clients varied with each other, so the counsellor had to focus on them and understand them. Based on participant B, she tried her best to observe all the members, but this participant had the experience of tending to neglect the others and just paying attention

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

to the one who was sharing. As a result, participant B believed a group counsellor was responsible for being a good observer and dividing her attention among everyone present.

Theme 3: Skills as A Group Counsellor

Everyone agreed that a group counsellor should have skills to be able to lead a group counselling session. Three participants talked about the importance of paraphrasing and summarising skills in the group. They also emphasized that empathically responding to clients will lead to effective therapeutic outcomes.

"The most important skill is basic counselling skill. Yah, I think the basic counselling skill is important because inside, one of it is paraphrasing and summarizing. The clients might be… Might be have blank mind suddenly (thinking) 'Oh, what I said ah just now'. Maybe they will think a lot a lot a lot… Then, I will summarize again to make sure they know what is happening, get them the follow-up in the right track."

(Extract 1, Participant A)

The skills participant A shared involve paraphrasing and summarising in a group counselling session. It is important to let clients pay attention to what they and the other members share in group so that they will not feel confused. As participant A, he used the term "blank minds" to describe group participants who cannot fully participate themselves when they forget what they shared earlier. The group counsellor can ensure that all clients are on the right track with a thorough understanding of the group process by using paraphrasing and summarising skills.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

"Yeah, paraphrasing and summarizing, basically, because same as my point just now. There

will be a lot of people in the group, a lot of people who will be sharing and it gonnas take a

lot of time. So, when it comes back to the counsellor to summarize to conclude everything, it

gonnas take quite a bit of skill to summarize three people or four people or eight people's

stories to do a conclusion."

(Extract 2, Participant C)

Participant C said that the essential skills that should be acquired by the group counsellor were paraphrasing and summarising skills. The number of clients in the group was an important element for the counsellor to reach out on the topic respectively to everyone. In order to ensure smooth progress within the time limit of a session, the counsellor had to summarise and conclude all the main highlights so that the clients gained a better understanding of what they learned or did in the session.

Another 3 participants said that a group counsellor must have good observation skill while 2 participants emphasized listening skill. Observation is required to know how the clients feel or react during the group process. Besides that, the listening skill also benefit the therapeutic outcome as the counsellor can track accurately using listening skill. The skills mentioned by the participants are overlapped. For instance, the counsellor applied both listening and summarizing skill in the group counselling sessions.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

"Any skill… I think the skill I usually apply will be listening, and then summarizing. And

then, paraphrasing and suggesting. Those common skills, but is more difficult to apply in the

group counselling for me. Because sometimes I don't know is this, can I summarizing for this

because there are more than one people, so I cannot waste too much time on one person only.

I need to like spare the, separate the time equally for every members in the group."

(Extract 3, Participant F)

Participant F also mentioned paraphrasing and summarizing skills. However, participant F found it difficult to apply these skills in group and had an uneven distribution of time with every client. Participant F stated that he should also make time for the members and could use summarizing skills to summarise all of the important information for them. Participant F also talked about some other skills like listening and suggesting in group counselling sessions.

"I think observation is very important. Because you have a lot of people in the group, able to

observe everyone, make sure everyone is doing ok."

(Extract 4, Participant C)

Participant C also stated that observation skills were necessary in group counselling sessions. It was to ensure all the clients were doing their parts and did not face difficulties throughout the group process. After all, observation in group counselling was different from just paying attention to one client.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

"Oh, a group counsellor must have very good observation skill I feel. Because you need to like… You need to be aware of your surroundings, you need to be aware of every single person. And then, you need to have good attending skills. Or I will say memorizing skill actually. You need to have good memory because during the session, you need to remember what every person have said. If not, you will messed up. That's what I feel."

(Extract 5, Participant D)

Participant D claimed that a group counsellor's skills involved an observation skill to stay alert with the surroundings and pay attention to all clients with an attending skill. Besides that, memorising skills were necessary for participant D, as the group counsellor would always try to remember what the clients said after a few rounds of sharing. The participant also brought up the fact to ask the clients for clarification if she forgot certain information. Participant D expressed her feelings of not doing her job well if she failed to put effort into remembering all the contents of the group.

"Skills? So, actually as a group counsellor, I think a good counsellor must have a good observing skill. Because maybe the group members will feel uncomfortable during the session when sharing some sensitive issues. So actually when counsellor observe the clients, then the clients will feel that they are accepted by the counsellor."

(Extract 6, Participant E)

Participant E emphasized the importance of observing skill in group counselling sessions so that the group members felt accepted and received attention from the counsellor. The group counsellor should be aware of the clients' emotions and reactions during the group process.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

For example, the feelings of clients when they shared sensitive issues may have shown negatively, and the group counsellor shouldn't neglect it.

"Other skills… I think we need to be very patient because apart from as a counsellor. Because it is different from individual counselling, we ourselves we have to listen a lot to everyone's stories. Because in a group counselling, it is only… Not only one client, (but) there has been a lot of members, that will have to listen to them. So, I think is a job for the counsellor. However, it will be a bit tiring during the progress because you have to listen to everyone. So while you listen to this person, then you have to remember what they say, then you have to listen to another."

(Extract 7, Participant B)

Participant B said that listening skills were important for a group counsellor when clients were sharing different stories. Having good listening skills would encourage the clients to disclose themselves. Thus, group counsellors have to respond appropriately, especially when facing a large group of members. Participant B also stated that the group's progress would be tiring if she stayed attentive to everyone's issue. However, the counsellor still has to remain professional by focusing on the clients' contents, remembering each of them, and letting everyone speak without interruption.

"And another thing is listening, because during group counselling session, listening to a lot of things. And… Because a lot of people are going to sharing, is not just one person's story, multiple people stories. So, you need to be able to listen well."

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

(Extract 8, Participant C)

Participant C also had the same thought that listening skills were important, especially because the group counsellor had to listen attentively to everyone's stories. When a few clients shared in the group, the counsellor would receive more than one piece of information related to their issue. Listening to a lot of things essentially relied on how the counsellor processed the input, leading to more personalized and helpful intervention.

Theme 4: Theoretical Orientation

Participants mentioned Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) as theoretical orientations. Two participants used CBT in their session, while another two participants used SFBT. The remaining 2 participants shared that they applied both CBT and SFBT during their experience to conduct group counselling sessions.

"The activity you said, we do worksheet. As I said, I used the technique of cognitive restructuring, so I do found the worksheet for that like 'What's your thought? What's your negative thought, what you going to do with that' like that. So, after we do the worksheet, I will invited my clients all to share during the session, so that it can make a different atmosphere in the group counselling."

(Extract 1, Participant B)

Based on participant B's experience, she applied cognitive restructuring from CBT with the group members. The participant gave it a rating of 7 out of 10 for the effectiveness of using

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

cognitive restructuring. This technique aimed to identify the clients' negative thoughts and change them to more positive ones. For example, participant B would assist the clients in identifying their thoughts and guide them accordingly. Some resources, such as the CBT worksheet for the clients, were retrieved from psychology tools. Participant B also believed the involvement of clients in making changes could create a different atmosphere during the session.

"Hmm… As an example, when I ask like what is your thought when you feel anxious during presentation. So, when client A sharing his anxiety level and I will ask like what about client B, "What is your thought". Then, I will continue the session like this. Is like one by one."

(Extract 2, Participant E)

Participant E frequently applied CBT in her group counselling session to explore more about the clients' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Participant E would ask in detail about how the clients felt in the situation that contributed to their issue. For the same question, participant E would let clients take turns sharing their responses so that everyone was involved in the discussion. Based on participant E's experience, the clients were able to learn something from the other members that was beneficial for the therapeutic treatment.

"Yah, because it was effective for my clients at that time. Because if I remember correctly, my clients they are dealing with stress issue. I found that this theory was simple enough for all of my clients to understand. And it also didn't took up much of my time, because my clients are

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

students and while we are conducting the sessions, they were also busy with a lot of their

things in the schedule. So, it was good to not take up their time."

(Extract 3, Participant C)

The theory that participant C uses frequently is SFBT. Participant C perceived this approach

as simple and easier for clients to understand. Besides that, the participant felt that this approach

used less time to get the solution, which was very suitable for the group members. Based on

participant C's experience, most of the target participants were students, so participant C found

out SFBT wouldn't take much time and would be able to fit the clients' schedules.

"And then, not sure is it because my theory, because I am using SFBT (solution focused brief

therapy) back then, my group counselling process is not very in-depth I feel. It is very

surface. For example, their issue, their story they tell me, the intervention and everything, the

goals, they are quite surface I feel."

(Extract 4, Participant D)

Participant D applied SFBT in her group counselling session, which she thought was too brief.

Based on participant D's experience, the issue facing her members of the group was

procrastination, and participant D felt honestly that it wasn't that effective to solve the issue

thoroughly within a few sessions. With the use of SFBT, most of the clients applied their

previous solutions to dealing with current difficulties. Although the group members showed

improvement, Participant D still felt her group counselling experience was not good and was

dissatisfied with the decision that time.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

"With SFBT, it is helping and guiding the client to find own ways to solve their issues. At the

starting I will explore about what is the issue they are facing and then I will summarise or

paraphrase about their issue to let them clearer about what they are facing. After that, I will

ask about how they did before to solve their issue because using SFBT. Know their previous

ways to solve their issue, and they will share with me a lot."

(Extract 5, Participant A)

Participant A thinks that SFBT is quite effective in his group counselling sessions by asking

about the members' previous solutions. The group counsellor will try to make the group

members aware of their problem and difficulties during the exploration stage. The aim of this

theory is to let clients make their own decisions about the intervention or solution that is best

for them.

"I also use the CBT technique. The easy one which is the breathing technique when the

clients feel stress. Or I used like momentum technique. (For example) the issue is

procrastination. When they want to do the assignment, they have no interest on doing it. So, I

told them to use the CBT momentum technique."

(Extract 6, Participant A)

Participant A will also be assigned homework in his group counselling sessions. He would

teach some techniques from CBT, such as breathing techniques. This activity is easy and

helpful for clients who feel stressed during the session. An example of applying the momentum

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

technique shared by participant A is that his client will play video games first before completing

the task. The technique from CBT helps the client experience a sense of fulfilment, which was

one of the interventions applied by participant A before.

"Example, because I think is depends on the issue of the group. If the issue of the group is

common and don't have any underlying issue, then I will the Focused therapy, the focus that

one. Because it is more simple to apply and is very fast, very efficient, very effective."

(Extract 7, Participant F)

Participant F would apply SFBT when the issue of clients' difficulties was common without

an underlying issue. With the use of SFBT, participant F felt that it was simpler to process and

more efficient for the clients to solve their problems. Participant F found it effective, especially

when the client came to seek a solution without involving many other underlying causes.

"If the… If the common issue is about the feelings and behaviour, then I will apply CBT.

Maybe I will apply some CBT to let them know about their behaviour, how their behaviour or

their cognitive, cognition will affects their behaviour, their feelings."

(Extract 8, Participant F)

Participant F would also use CBT to learn more about clients' feelings and behaviours when

they were experiencing difficulties. This participant assisted his group members in knowing

that cognition would influence how they behave and feel, playing a part in designing

interventions for the clients.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Theme 5: Challenges

The challenges shared by most of the participants make it hard to pay attention to all clients. The most common issue brought up by them is the number of participants, which made them feel like it was harder to handle the group counselling sessions. They have to put in more effort and focus when there is more than one client sharing their issues in the group.

"Yah, five. Because you know what, if example, imagine I have eight clients in the gorup counselling. It is quite difficult, maybe I will lost of the puzzle of one of it. Like what they say, maybe I will mix with what they told me the topic. I mean not the topic, like issue. Maybe client A, I will mix with client B,C. maybe will confusing, so I think I can make it to 5, is the maximum one."

(Extract 1, Participant A)

Participant A described the importance of concentrating on a client as playing a puzzle. If the counsellor fails to track complete information, it will be like losing one piece of the puzzle to get the whole picture. Moreover, participant A expressed the confusion of receiving too much input from the clients, leading to misremember who exactly shared the issue. Subsequently, this challenge restricts participant A from recruiting more than five clients for group counselling.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

"Yah, I think I… I think I neglected, like focus to much on one member while they sharing because like they will share one by one. However, while one member is sharing their feelings or experience, then I will tend to focus more. Of course, I will still look at the other member but I think I focus a lot on that one person, so I neglected how the others feel and huh… Like the time will take so long."

(Extract 2, Participant B)

Participant B shared that one of her experiences when conducting group counselling sessions was that the participant failed to pay attention to all the clients. Participant B realized she would focus on the member who was sharing and neglect the others. The participant also felt there was an imbalance in the time spent with the clients. For example, some of the clients in the group may spend more time than others. In short, participant B noticed she might neglect some emotions of the client when participant B made self-reflection after the group counselling session.

"Personally, I think group counselling is a very complicated process because it involves a lot of people, compared if you compare it to individual counselling, you need to pay attention to a lot more people, a lot more of the content. And then, you need to be careful about how you spend your attention. For example, you cannot only pay attention to one person. So, when you are listening to a person, you need to ensure that you observe other people as well. And then, when you make treatment plan, you also need to be considerate about all the three people. For example, you have three clients. That time, I got three clients, so it's very troublesome compared to individual counselling."

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

(Extract 3, Participant D)

Participant D described the group counselling process as complicated and troublesome when the group counsellor had to divide attention among a few clients at the same time. With more people in the group, there would be more important contributions to the issue. Thus, the group counsellor had to be considerate when designing an intervention and also observe the condition of every client. The attention was on the client throughout the group counselling process because the counsellor not only had to stay focused during the clients' conversations but also plan the activities to be conducted in group.

Two participants from the interview brought out the challenge of communication in affecting group members' responses. As a trainee counsellor, both participants were working on being non-judgmental and avoiding asking directive questions.

"Second, thing I think as a counsellor, no matter in group counselling or individual counselling, we cannot be judgemental. Yah, because in the group counselling, we are not facing one side, so when we talk, we cannot like... How to say, "berat sebelah". Yah, so have to consider all people, all perspectives."

(Extract 4, Participant B)

Participant B felt that the communication style during the group process was hard, as the group counsellor required much effort to be judgmental. For instance, the counsellor had to consider every member without leaving any of them behind. In participant B's opinion, she felt that a

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

group counsellor should treat everyone equally without being biased towards one party. The behaviour of non-judgement was shown through the communication process by being aware of verbal and non-verbal language.

Two participants shared that they faced resistant clients in their group counselling sessions which was one of the challenges for them. They found it hard to have resistant client as group member because the unwillingness to cooperate will affect other clients. It requires more skill and competency for the group counsellor. It is not only make the clients more comfortable but also ensure the group move into working stage.

"I think the hardest part when I face is during the transitions stage when the clients not feeling comfortable and feel anxious about sharing their opinions. Yah, when I ask the clients "Do you have any thoughts about it" Maybe my clients will share something like, "I'm not sure", "I have no idea now". So, this will stop the conversation in the group when the other two clients just discussing the opinion. Yah."

(Extract 5, Participant E)

Participant E found it challenging when she handled resistant clients in her group. Some responses of the clients that did not contribute to the group's progress involved the fact that the client had no idea what to share or kept avoiding disclosure. The remaining clients might be affected when someone from their group does not give full cooperation. Participant E explained that such situations usually happen in the transition stage, when the clients are feeling uncomfortable and anxious to share their opinions.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

"Yah, definitely will. Like for the resistant client, I think resistant clients… If the resistant

clients don't want to share, it will like (to) drag the progress of the group because the group

needs to like have the common goal, needs to reach it together. If the clients don't want to

share, don't want to have some improve, so it will definitely like… I need to spend a little

more time about that client. If cannot, then there will have any other ways to deal with the

client."

(Extract 6, Participant F)

Participant F said that the resistant clients in the group were one of the challenges, as they would definitely affect other members. As the group counsellor, participant F had to spend more time and effort on the resistant client, especially when they didn't intend to share or make improvements. It would be really hard because all the group members had the same goal to achieve. If the resistant client was unwilling to work with the counsellor, it would have a negative effect on the progress of the group.

There are three participants who faced different challenges due to their unique experiences with group counselling sessions. As the group counselling sessions are conducted in English, participant A expressed his difficulties with having a language barrier as one of his challenges. He felt that having problems communicating well due to language issues may lead to misunderstanding and inaccurate interpretation.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

"It really needs to be professional and motivate me myself the language because I am facing the language barrier too. If the client is not good in English and also (me) myself is not good at English, it will have a language barrier in confirming that what I said is (what) client knows or what the client says some kind of the grammar word…."

(Extract 7, Participant A)

Participant A expressed his worry about conveying his message accurately to his clients in the group counselling. It is because he feels that his English is not good, so the language barrier will become a challenge in group counselling sessions. For example, the client may need more effort to understand what the counsellor is saying, which also affects the counsellor's ability to have an accurate interpretation. Misunderstandings may occur when both the counsellor and client are unable to communicate effectively.

"One of the challenges was like something like what I mentioned just now, my nervousness while conducting the session. There are also times when everyone run out of time what to say and there will be like awkward silences. When this awkward silences happen and sometimes, I really don't know how to continue. Sometimes, I might get stuck."

(Extract 8, Participant C)

Participant C was struggling in the group counselling session because he felt nervous, especially when all the group members had no idea what to share. At that time, participant C would be helpless without knowing how to react or lead the session due to the sudden awkward moment he described. Participant C himself would get stuck on carrying on the conversation.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

As the group counsellor, he failed to manage the group, which eventually made him feel like a challenge.

The challenge faced by participant D is hard to select a right and suitable counselling approach for the clients. She felt lack of confidence and unsatisfied with the theory chosen before, causing her to have the feeling group counselling is not easy to handle with inappropriate theory.

"I think my challenge is the approach. Actually, I am not really satisfied with the approach that I am was using. Because I think SFBT is, maybe for certain issue it will be effective, it will be helpful. But for procrastination, I feel they are just telling me what they already try, what they already know, probably not that effective. Yah because they cannot solve the problem, that's why they come to the session. But if I asked them to use the solution they have used before, back then it could be effective but right now it's not effective anymore. That's why they have this issue. So, I think the challenge is I don't know how to select a good approach that suits everyone."

(Extract 9, Participant D)

Participant D expressed dissatisfaction with the group counselling outcome due to her selection of theory. The participant noticed she faced the challenge of selecting a good and suitable approach for herself. The approach chosen based on participant D's experience was SFBT, which she thought was not really useful for her clients. It was participant D's first time applying such theory in a group counselling session, so it was not a good experience. The participant expected her selection of theory to benefit the clients and suit their issue. However, participant

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

D reflected on her experience and thought that she would have made a better selection in theory to get a more effective group.

Theme 6: Lack of Competency

Four out of six participants brought up the necessity of having a co-leader in the group because they were not confident in their ability to handle the sessions alone. They believed the existence of another counsellor in the group could fill up their competency gaps, which helped a lot to take care of the group members.

"Yah, control the situation is one. And, maybe any kind of the needs, anything in the session I miss out, he or she, my co-leader has more effective solution and experience."

(Extract 1, Participant A)

Participant A evaluated his group counselling experience and shared that he faced difficulty paying attention to all the clients. For instance, he tended to mix the concerns of a few clients, which made the counsellor feel confused. Based on participant A's current capabilities, he brought out the necessity of having a co-leader in group counselling. The participant believes an extra leader in the group can help him come up with a more effective solution, especially when participant A missed some important information in the group. Participant A also mentioned some requirements to work with the co-leader, including that the person must be skilled, knowledgeable, and cooperative with him. Thus, it is fine to work with the counsellor whom participant A is familiar with because he believes it is not easy to build a bond and work along with another counsellor in a group.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

"Personally, I find group counselling to be very helpful because in my experience, leading a counselling group always involve co-leader. Meaning that I am not the only one to conduct the session. There will be another person there to conduct it together with me. And, because I am currently at a level where I am not hundred percent confident with myself and my skill, having another co-leader to guide the group and to fill out the blanks that I leave. I find it very helpful and provide a good learning experience for me also."

(Extract 2, Participant C)

Participant C mentioned that having a co-leader would benefit the group process. From participant C's experience, he said there was no obvious effect on the group members when having two leaders. However, having a co-leader would assist participant B in covering what he missed out on. Participant C also learned a lot from the co-leader and described it as a good learning experience. Participant C also brought out the issue that he was not confident in himself and his skills, especially when he handled the group counselling sessions independently.

"Probably I will wish to have co-leader because I think co-leader helps a lot when the leader cannot handle the situation. The co-leader can really help. For example, when a client feels very sensitive, he feels very emotional. Then, the co-leader can try to approach the client, and sees what the condition is. Then, the leader can continue the session. So it didn't interrupt others."

(Extract 3, Participant E)

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

In order to deal with the group counselling session better, participant E hoped to have a co-leader to assist her. When there were a few clients in the group, the group counsellor could not neglect other members but care about one of them. However, when something unexpected happens, such as one of the group members feeling sensitive and emotional, the co-leader could try to comfort the client first. At the same time, the group leader did not need to pause the session and interrupt others. It would benefit everyone in the group without delaying the group process and taking care of all the members' emotions.

"Hmm. This one, I think if can then I want a co-leader in my group, in my counselling sessions. Because co-leader can help me a lot. I think the co-leader can increase my level of confident, my level of self-esteem because there are two of them… We have two counsellors in a group, so if I incompetent and if sometimes I can't catch about what client says just now, maybe my co-leader can help me, something like that. And my co-leader can fulfil my shortage, so I can say. I am very bad at that time, maybe co-leader can help me to deal with the client."

(Extract 4, Participant F)

Participant F felt it was necessary to have co-leaders in his group. It was believed to increase his confidence and self-esteem level by helping him conduct more effective group counselling sessions. Participant F admitted that he was too incompetent to track what the clients said. At that time, the co-leader performed his functions to handle such a situation. The co-leader would not only assist participant F on time but also be able to cover participant F's weaknesses to lead to a better outcome.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Due to the low competency for the participant to conduct group counselling sessions at current stage, 3 participants expressed avoidant attitude to conduct group counselling in the future. They felt that they were not capable in group counselling compared to individual counselling, which affected them to try not or had less group counselling sessions next time.

"There are many kind of people in the world, so we don't know who will be facing. If I cannot handle well, it will affect other members. So… To avoid that situation happen, maybe I won't do group counselling as well, because I'm not really good in handling that."

(Extract 5, Participant B)

Due to a lack of competency, participant B lost interest in conducting group counselling. The participant even showed reluctance to handle group sessions in the future due to her fear of having a negative impact on group members. Participant B perceived herself as a more introverted person. Moreover, participant B, as a trainee counsellor, didn't have the confidence to handle more clients in a session at the current stage.

"So, personally I think group counselling is very supportive, somehow is also difficult, because when the counsellor is not very good in questioning or observing, she might feel the session is very difficult to conduct."

(Extract 6, Participant E)

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Although participant E had quite a good experience with group counselling sessions, she found it difficult with her current capabilities to work with a few clients at the same time. Participant E mentioned that the hard parts related to her skills such as questioning and observation. Participant E felt it was not easy to conduct the session, especially when the clients remained silent without knowing what to share. It made participant E sense the feeling of discomfort and think that it was the group counsellor's responsibility to come up with questions for the clients. As a result, it would have a negative impact on the clients when participant F's readiness was not high enough to conduct a good group counselling session.

"Hmm… I think it made me to feel… It made me realize how much I prefer individual counselling. [laugh] And then, another thing is probably. Eh, what I was saying… Oh yeah. It made me feel that group counselling is not easy, not that easy. And then, I will feel more nervous next time actually because I actually… I don't really think I do great last time. So, the next time I do group counselling again, I will probably feel very nervous. Yah."

(Extract 7, Participant D)

Due to the low readiness for conducting good and effective group counselling, participant D expressed her preference for individual counselling. Participant D lacked experience in handling a group and felt it was difficult. The participant also believed that she would feel more nervous next time after experiencing how she independently dealt with the group members. The nervousness was caused by participant D's unpleasant experience in previous group counselling sessions.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Theme 7: Impact of Group Counselling

Three participants agreed that group counselling had an impact on their personal development, which helped them enhance their counselling skills and be better group managers. When they played the role of group counsellor, they were able to learn from and gain new perspectives from the members of the group.

"I love challenging things. All right, beside that… Moreover… In addition… [laugh] Group counselling is actually good, you know why. I found which is the time management I can did well. I think is good because my time management is getting well. Quite well which is I can easily finish out what agenda in the session, what I need to do, and I can manage it in the time. And, also can solve the issue of the clients. Yah, and…"

(Extract 1, Participant A)

Participant A was very excited during the interview, expressing his preference for challenging things. Some of the impacts of group counselling are enhancing participant A's time management skills. The participant realized his time was well spent and getting better when he conducted a few clients within the same group. When participant A managed to carry out the complete session according to his agenda, he felt pleasant due to his good time management. The participant also experienced high self-esteem after successfully handling the group counselling sessions.

"I learn from their (the clients) experience, because they share their stories to us, we learn from other people's experience also, other people's stories. Yah, I kind of learn from therm.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Is one of my contribution on my personal development because I believe not everyone have

experienced what they experiencing. So, if we cannot experience that, we can learn from their

stories, their experience."

(Extract 2, Participant B)

Participant B felt there was a positive influence on her personal development after she conducted group counselling sessions. The participant felt that she learned from the group members due to their unique and personal experiences. When the clients sought help from her in group counselling, participant B realized that she would also benefit from learning from them. From her perspective, participant B might not have gone through what the clients experienced, but she gained a lot from their sharing.

"Ok. So, in group counselling, I learned from the participants a lot because not only of the

output from the professional but actually I can learned various of ways and how their

emotional grow."

(Extract 3, Participant E)

Participant E perceived the impact of group counselling as a learning process from the other group members. Participant E did not merely receive their output; she also learned their methods for achieving improvements. Furthermore, participant E could notice the emotional growth by observing the different ways clients changed into a better state. The participant said that the learning was not limited to getting professional advice but also from the clients of different backgrounds.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

"One of the things I learned early on during my group counselling is to… [cough] Sorry, is

to watch my words. To put it simply, to make sure that my word choice is appropriate

because you are dealing with multiple people, they may have different reactions toward

certain words, certain phrases you might say. So, you need to make sure that your word

choice, sentence choice is generally acceptable, I have to say."

(Extract 4, Participant C)

After handling the group counselling session, participant C was more aware of himself in terms of communicating. Participant C would ensure using the right word when interacting with different clients because he believed every client had their own style of reacting towards the same things. As a result, participant C learned to use more appropriate and gentle words so that her word choice was acceptable without offending anyone.

"After practice and involve in group counselling as a leader and a counsellor, I think ok. In

the future, I will conduct some group counselling sessions because for me, from my

perspective, I use same duration. Maybe in the future, I use 45 minutes to help a client, one

client only. But I can use the same amount of time to help like more than one clients. For me I

think is good because you can use the same time to help more people. But is more difficult, so

I think after I learning this group counselling course, I think is very good for me to know how

to conduct a group counselling, how to handle it, what is the possible situations will happen

in the future. So, it makes me more likely to conduct a group counselling in the future after

learning this."

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

(Extract 5, Participant F)

Participant F held a negative attitude towards his experience conducting group counselling sessions. However, he shared that the impact of group counselling changed his view of individual counselling. Participant F shared that he would try to handle more group counselling sessions in the future because he realized some advantages of having group counselling. As he mentioned, participant F was able to deal with more clients within the same timeframe as individual counselling. He believed that helping more people at the same time was beneficial. However, he still acknowledged the difficulty of doing group counselling sessions.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a discussion of findings related to the counselling students' experiences with group counselling sessions, with further elaborations and supporting ideas for a literature review. It also includes the implications from both theoretical and practical perspectives, limitations, and recommendations.

Discussion

Attitude Toward Group Counselling

In order to fulfil the research question of knowing the experience of counselling students with group counselling sessions, the first theme is answering the first sub-questions about the attitudes of counselling students towards group counselling sessions. The study finds that attitudes towards group counselling will be influenced by satisfaction with conducting group counselling sessions. The participants enjoyed the group process when they were able to help the clients achieve their needs or have a good treatment outcome. Although some of the participants reported being nervous and uncertain before conducting group counselling sessions, they found it helpful to serve more clients at the same time and felt that their experience in group counselling was pleasant. The findings are consistent with the study from 2010, in which the participants changed to a positive group experience after initially reporting negative feelings (Smith & Davis, 2010).

However, 2 out of 4 participants show a negative attitude towards group counselling when they feel unsatisfied with the theoretical approach chosen during the sessions and are also unable to handle the clients well, such as by struggling or becoming nervous. The

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

participant felt nervous to remain in a silent state with the clients, which research shows should

be handled by the counsellor candidates before they become professional counsellors (Yildirim,

2012). When the group members do not have the trust and respect to speak out openly,

psychological safety fails to occur in the group (Liang et al., 2012). Besides that, the participant

who was unsatisfied with the theory approach chosen by her at that time is SFBT. In fact, there

are a few classifications in modern counselling, and the use of SFBT results in a focused

approach (Chiboola, 2019). Subsequently, the counselling students gradually find out their

theoretical application and have experience with the suitability of certain groups through

involvement in the group counselling process.

The following themes involve the role and skill of a group counsellor, theoretical orientation,

challenges, and a lack of competency to handle group counselling sessions. These themes

explain the second main research question about the characteristics of counselling students in

group counselling sessions.

Roles as A Group Counsellor

4 out of 6 participants described the role of a group counsellor as the facilitator who

encourages the group members to disclose themselves freely. Based on the book with the title

Existential Group Counselling and Psychotherapy, it also supports the role of the group

counsellor to invite the members to share their thoughts and emotions because the members

view the facilitator as someone with specialised knowledge for them to seek assistance

(Weixel-Dixon, 2020). The role of facilitator, which is also called "group leader," involves

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

taking an active role to guide the sessions (Whittingham & Martin, 2020). Another role of the group counsellor mentioned by the participant is that of the observer. Hence, the responsibilities are congruent with the model of group facilitations, in which the counsellor guides and reflects the expressions of feeling words from the clients, and the second facilitator serves to observe the group interactions (Deming & Johnson, 2019).

Skills as A Group Counsellor

Research found out that the skills of a group counsellor will have an impact on the therapeutic environment (Jacobs et al., 2022). The three most emphasised skills among the participants were paraphrasing, summarising, and observation skills. There were two participants who mentioned the importance of listening skills during the group counselling sessions because the group counsellor has to pay attention to more than one client at a time. Most of the participants emphasized therapeutic process for all the clients, which occurs due to the cultural influence of promoting collective goals. A research in exploring the influences of Malaysia culture in counselling sessions also support the importance of addressing cultural variations will lead to social support(Talib, 2010). Moreover, the previous research findings showed that the participants found it difficult to cut off the clients (Ahmad et al., 2017). The difference in this context is that the group counsellors prefer to listen and let the clients share freely. The common cultural value found out in a research is politeness (sopan-santun), according to which Malaysians tend to avoid conflict by minimising self-expression that may be misunderstood as rude or selfish (Zawawi, 2008). Although the skills applied are different, the use of fundamental counselling skills is similar to another research study in Malaysia, where

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

the trainee counsellors will not interrupt the clients' talking due to cultural considerations (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Theoretical Orientation

All the participants showed the similarities of using a directive approach in the group counselling sessions. The two theories shared by the counselling students are Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT). The participants highlighted the use of CBT in determining the clients' emotions, behaviours, and thoughts. Interventions such as cognitive restructuring will be useful to allow clients to swiftly reach a more positive outcome. CBT shows significant improvement and proves to be effective in group counselling sessions (Yusop et al., 2020). Based on the data from the participants, all of them were satisfied with the application of CBT in their sessions.

However, there are opposing opinions on the application of SFBT. Three participants reported that SFBT is suitable for use when the group members do not present any underlying issues. According to past literature, the participants have the same opinion that SFBT is time-effective and allows the clients to get their solution within a short period of time (Neipp & Beyebach, 2022). On the contrary, participant D felt that SFBT was too brief and ineffective to really work for the clients. The participant had provided justification that the theory might not suit the group members' issues, leading to an unsatisfied experience. In short, the counselling students do not simply select the theory based on their preference but try to choose the approach that is beneficial and appropriate for the clients' issues.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Challenges

The most frequent challenge faced by the participants is paying attention to every client in the group. 4 out of 6 participants found it difficult to focus on the clients and needed to be careful about spending time with each group member. A research study published in 2017 in Malaysia also brought out the difficulty that the trainee counsellors will lack focus in the group because they are struggling to give appropriate responses (Ahmad et al., 2017). It is also related to the experience of the participants in this research about their nervousness leading to getting stuck in the session as the group counsellor figured out how to continue the flow. According to the news, the counsellor will fear making choices or decisions due to a lack of knowledge as the source of doubting his own ability to manage the group (Smith, 2022). The result was also consistent with the group stage described by Corey (2016), in which the participants started from the initial stage of rapport building. 2 participants faced difficulties dealing with a resistant client in the transition stage and perceived it as a challenge in group.

There is a participant who feels unsatisfied with the experience or with conducting the group counselling sessions, finding it hard to select an appropriate theoretical approach. A research study in Malaysia also found that counselling students lack confidence in their ability to apply suitable theories and techniques (Mansor & Yusoff, 2013). With the emotions of apprehension and anxiety, the study concludes that trainee counsellors are able to reduce their self-doubts over time, while they require more time to overcome the issue they face with skills and theoretical knowledge applications. The participants from this study also have the perception that they need more time and more opportunities to conduct group counselling so that they can work on their challenges. Overall, the challenges faced by the counselling students in group counselling are consistent with the study about the experience of novice trainees, in

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

which the trainees describe their performance during the session with a range of self-criticisms (Hill et al., 2007). It can be concluded that counselling students who are still trainee counsellors frequently face issues with self-awareness because of which they fail to be fully present or pay attention to the clients.

Lack of Competency

Due to the lack of competency and low confidence, the participants expressed a negative experience and even avoided having group counselling sessions in the future. The responses are very much in line with a study about the experience of conducting individual counselling practicums in which the trainee counsellors avoided making mistakes at the stage when they started to provide service professionally (Saki & Sahin, 2021). It explains that the trainee counsellors prefer to take no risks and need other assistance, such as supervision, due to their inexperience. Based on this research, the most important thing highlighted by the participants is the need for a co-leader. The participants feel that having help from others will reduce the difficulty of working with the clients. Some of the participants tend to avoid the situation, while the majority express the importance of having extra. In short, all the participants are aware that their competency will influence the group outcome, and they try to minimise making mistakes. Literature reviews show that the anxious feelings and incompetence sensed by the counsellors will hinder their professional development (Fulton & Cashwell, 2015). Hence, this research takes the feelings of participants into account when exploring their experience with group counselling sessions.

Moreover, co-leadership is a popular mode preferred for use in group counselling based on past studies (Atieno Okech & Kline, 2005). Similar research related to the exploration of

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

the preference for having a co-leader in group counselling is very limited, and the information is not updated. Surprisingly, the findings reveal the concern trainee counsellors have about having co-leaders in the future when they conduct group counselling. It reveals the phenomenon and current needs of the counselling students. According to the Handbook of Counselling and Counsellor Education, having a co-leader in the group has its benefits and limitations (Adekson, 2020). In this research, the counselling students emphasised their expectations for future group counselling sessions with the awareness of enhancing the experience. At the same time, they show less awareness when considering the cons of having a co-leader in the group. As a result, this research can let the counselling students look from other perspectives in weighing the advantage and disadvantage of having a co-leader in the group counselling.

Impact Of Group Counselling

The third sub-research question is to explore the impact of group counselling among counselling students. In this research, 4 out of 6 participants claim that group counselling has an impact on themselves. It is also supported by another study about the trainee counsellor's perception during group trainings, in which the positive outcomes gained from the group related to growth factors (Anderson et al., 2014). The specific impact of group counselling from this research is on both professional growth and relational dynamics with group members. The participants express an improvement in their skills to conduct better sessions. Besides that, the participants describe the group counselling as a learning process with the other participants. It is due to the cohesiveness.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Figure 5 The Phase of Research Themes
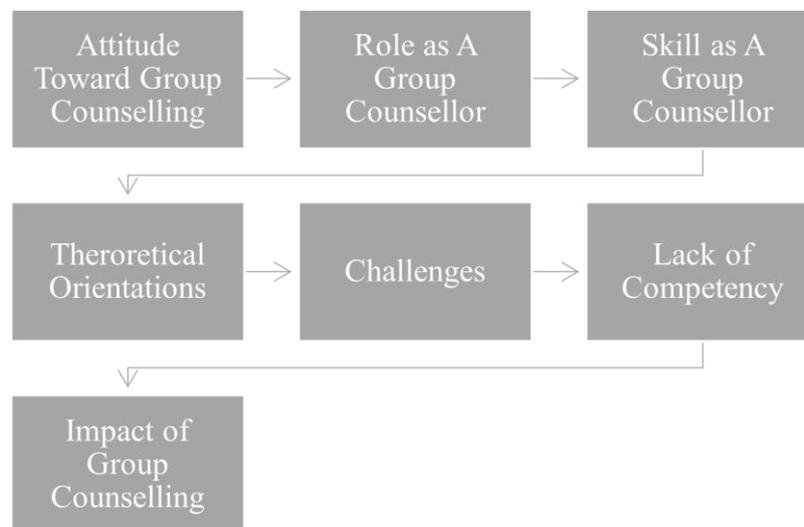
Theoretical Framework

Gestalt therapy is able to support the findings and experiences shared by the participants

through the cycle of experience. This cycle of experience uses the concept of figure and ground

to explain the situation of the participants during group counselling sessions. During the first

phase of sensation, it refers to how the participant feels and senses. For instance, the

participants reported feeling nervous or stuck when they were unable to control the group and

make the conversation go smoothly. The second phase of awareness occurs when the

participants become aware of their sensations. Most of the participants reported being aware of

their anxiety or struggles after conducting the sessions when they were doing self-reflection.

The reflection of trainee counsellors is influential to the development for the counsellor,

showing necessity among the counselling students (Schmidt & Adkins, 2012). At the same

time, the participants also expressed the need to do something so that the therapeutic process

would become more effective. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

(2018) and the British Psychological Society (2019) also point out the core requisite of counselling training is having self-awareness.

At the third stage of mobilisation, it refers to the commitment and preparation to take action (Zinker, 1977, 90–91). In this research, the participants have realistic expectations and a clear awareness of their strengths. They also propose the importance of having a co-leader in the group to help them make better progress when handling the group counselling sessions. The fourth phase is taking action to fulfil the needs and overcome the challenges. Based on this research, 2 out of 6 participants are still at the third stage, which they hope to enhance. They avoid dealing with more clients in a group due to a lack of opportunities to conduct group counselling sessions and a lack of practical experience. At the next stage of final contact, the participants meet their needs when the counselling students have a positive experience and are able to conduct and complete group counselling sessions effectively by themselves. This finding in the research shows that the participants can break the cycle in achieving satisfaction and a positive attitude towards their experience.

The sixth stage is satisfaction, when the participants experience growth and improvements in their skills through conducting the sessions. At the final phase of the cycle of experience, we withdraw to let go and allow new sensations to arise. It refers to the future experiences of the counselling students with group counselling sessions. As a result, the framework of using Gestalt therapy allows the participants in this study to attend to their experiences during group counselling sessions, which establishes a presence in their system and increases awareness. It helps facilitate a meaningful understanding of the phenomenon of counselling students who engage in group counselling.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The findings of the research are inclined towards the primary focus of Gestalt therapy. It discusses awareness of the present moment and making sense of the environment (Fogarty et al., 2016). Gestalt therapy supports personal development by helping individuals know themselves better when they are aware of their current situation. After interviewing the participants about their experiences with group counselling sessions, the counselling students show high awareness of what they are encountering, including the challenges and ways of handling the group. They have expectations about their future group counselling sessions as they make enhancements and gain more experience. At the same time, this research finds out an interesting aspect: the trainee counsellors have low awareness of their ability to cope with the group counselling sessions independently, as evidenced by their low competency, especially in skills. In short, the result of this study utilises the theory of Gestalt therapy because it finds it influential to apply in a Malaysian context.

Furthermore, Gestalt therapy emphasizes the individual's adaptation to the changing environment or the creation of new responses to encounter situations that allow growth and development (Raffagnino, 2019). The research also involves the opinions and judgements of the counselling students to help them conduct more effective group counselling sessions. Studies about group counselling in the Malaysian context explore the experiences of counsellor educators and trainee counsellors in the aspect of group work preparation (Yusoff, 2018). This study is contributing to the current literature regarding group counselling by emphasising the counselling students' experiences in conducting the sessions, something that has not been explored or addressed in past literature.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Practical Implications

This present study can help increase the awareness of trainee counsellors. Based on the findings, the counsellor can have more effective group counselling sessions by considering the challenges faced when handling more clients in a group. It serves as a reference for the group counsellor to develop a more suitable treatment plan or intervention. Literature studies report the effectiveness of self-reflection in improving self-efficacy and promoting growth (Masten et al., 2008). The participants also highlighted the significance of making self-reflections after conducting the group counselling sessions to notice their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, the present study shows that the counselling students' skill and ability contribute to their experiences in group counselling as well as influence their attitude towards conducting group counselling sessions in the future.

Besides that, this study is meaningful for the educators because they can help and guidance to deal with the concerns of the trainee counsellors. The findings support the trainees' experiences with group counselling as a learning opportunity that can improve their personal development. However, it also emphasises the consideration of low competency among counselling students in handling group counselling sessions. Due to their understanding of counselling students' barriers and expectations, the school educators who are involved in the field of guidance and counselling can give the students more opportunities to conduct group counselling sessions for the enhancement of their skills and knowledge. Through eliciting a mixture of positive and aversive group counselling experiences, the educators should be mindful when preparing the students to get involved in group processes and prepare them for being a group counsellor with readiness. Eventually, the findings helped to incorporate group

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

counselling into counselling programmes after a deeper understanding of counselling students' experiences.

Implication for future research

This result suggests that future studies can consider exploring the facilitation of co-leaders in group counselling sessions. Other studies support the involvement of a co-leader to maximize the therapeutic process from which the group members can gain more advantages (Yalcin, 2021). However, the study also highlights the importance of maintaining a good relationship between the group leader and the co-leader. In this research, most of the participants expressed the idea of cooperating with a co-leader in the future, but none of them tried conducting group counselling sessions with another counsellor. The implications for future research are that this current context can be used as a reference to compare the phenomenon of counselling students with and without a co-leader in the group. It will generate new findings in understanding the phenomenon among counselling students.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group
Counselling Sessions

Limitation

There are several limitations that have to be addressed in this qualitative research. The sample size in this study is utilised and suitable to explore the experiences of counselling students in group counselling sessions. However, the data from the limited number of participants cannot be generalised to the whole population. It has to be noted that the group of counselling students in this research is studying in the same institutions and getting the same exposure to group counselling. The data collected does not reflect the perspectives and experiences of all Counselling students with group counselling sessions. From diverse perspectives, there are no ethnic differences among the participants. One of the limitations of this research is that the diversity may influence the overall experience of a trainee counsellor in handling group counselling sessions.

Besides that, the limitation of this research involves the accuracy of self-reports. It considers retrospective analysis when the participants experience last longer than 2 hours during the interview (Holtzblatt & Beyer, 2016). When the participants are asked to recall their experience, there is a potential risk that they will forget certain details. For instance, one of the participants remembered the application technique from the group sessions, but it took her some time to recall the name of it. Due to the semi-structured interview used in this qualitative research, the research questions are very subjective. Consequently, the result is not statistically representative.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Recommendation

According to the limitations, this research is unable to represent all the counselling students' experiences with group counselling. It is recommended to recruit participants from different institutions by exploring the experiences of counselling students at various higher education institutions in Malaysia. The researcher also has to consider the diversity in ethnicities as well as genders. It is believed to prevent bias by getting data from a specific sample size that is applicable to the Malaysian population. Due to another limitation, participants tend to report falsely because the data collection in this method is carried out through a semi-structured interview. The second recommendation is to involve more data collection methods, such as the usage of journals and other sources to retrieve information. Another information gap in this study about the supervision of the counselling students is not addressed. Further research may consider the effects of supervision on the competency of trainee counsellors in managing group counselling sessions. Consequently, a wider scope of information can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of students' experiences with group counselling sessions.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Conclusion

The study effectively examined the phenomenon faced by the counselling students, who felt a lack of competency in handling group counselling sessions. Through understanding the participants' attitudes and feelings, it becomes more difficult and challenging to deal with more clients at one time in the session. The findings show that counselling students who are on their way to becoming professional counsellors are aware of their performance and have realistic expectations. From this study, the participants are able to share the roles and skills of a group counsellor. However, they show low awareness of their capability in handling the group counselling sessions well independently by themselves with low confidence. Through exploring the challenges and barriers, the participants highlighted the need for assistance and help from the co-leader or their peer to ensure the group process went smoothly.

Besides that, the findings consist of both positive and negative experiences with group counselling among the trainee counsellors. It is noticed that their experiences with group counselling sessions are influenced by their skills and abilities in dealing with the clients. The participants expect more learning opportunities to conduct group counselling sessions and believe their competency will increase by gaining more experience as the group leader. The past studies also support the idea that the exposure to group counselling promotes growth and development for the trainee counsellor as she becomes more professional. The last theme in this research is the impact of group counselling, which all the participants expressed a negative perception of when they handled the group practically rather than studying knowledge about group counselling theoretically.

In conclusion, the competency of the counselling students deserves attention, as well as the introduction of more skill enhancement programmes to increase their readiness. The

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

participants agreed to participate in some workshops and consistently make self-reflections on themselves. At the same time, other stakeholders like the school educators can increase opportunities for the counselling students to participate in group counselling. When more resources and guidance are introduced, the counselling students can have a better experience without doubting themselves in group counselling sessions. After all, the counselling students' experiences with group counselling are associated with their readiness to apply skills and knowledge to getting a more effective group outcome.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

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A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Appendix

Turnitin Originality Report

4/17/23, 1:55 PM   Turnitin - Originality Report - FYP Ng Jia Wei

Document Viewer

Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 17-Apr-2023 13:54 +08
ID: 2066913180
Word Count: 16389
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FYP Ng Jia Wei By NG JIA WEI

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Leena Penttinen, Mikko Vesisenaho. "Career repertoires of IT students: A group counselling case study in higher education", International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 2013

Abstract Problems such as counsellors doubting their own abilities and incompetency even lead to the situation where group counsellors are reluctant to conduct group counselling sessions. This study aims to explore the experience of group counselling sessions from the perspective of counselling students. The research question is to understand the phenomenon of counselling students in group counselling by asking sub-questions about their attitudes towards group counselling, the characteristics of counselling students in group counselling sessions, and the impact of group counselling among them. The research involves six counselling students who are currently studying the Guidance and Counselling programme, using the purposive sampling method. With the

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A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Supervisor's Comments on Originality Report

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
Form Title : Supervisor's Comments on Originality Report Generated by Turnitin for Submission of Final Year Project Report (for Undergraduate Programmes)
Form Number: FM-IAD-005   Rev No.: 0   Effective Date: 01/10/2013   Page No.: 1of 1

UTAR   **FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE**

Full Name(s) of Candidate(s)	NG JIA WEI
ID Number(s)	19AAB03852
Programme / Course	Bachelor of (Hons) Guidance and Counselling
Title of Final Year Project	A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Session

Similarity	Supervisor's Comments (Compulsory if parameters of originality exceeds the limits approved by UTAR)
Overall similarity index: _____ % **Similarity by source** Internet Sources: _____ % Publications: _____ % Student Papers: _____ %	
Number of individual sources listed of more than 3% similarity: _____	

Parameters of originality required and limits approved by UTAR are as follows:
 (i)   Overall similarity index is 20% and below, and
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Note: Parameters (i) – (ii) shall exclude quotes, bibliography and text matches which are less than 8 words.

<u>Note</u> Supervisor/Candidate(s) is/are required to provide softcopy of full set of the originality report toFaculty/Institute

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Based on the above results, I hereby declare that I am satisfied with the originality of the FinalYear Project Report submitted by my student(s) as named above.

Signature of Supervisor	Signature of Co-Supervisor
Name:	Name:
Date:	Date:

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Ethical Approval for Research Project/Protocol

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN DU012(A)
Wholly owned by UTAR Education Foundation Co. No. 578227-M

Re: U/SERC/18/2023

10 January 2023

Dr Pung Pit Wan
Head, Department of Psychology and Counselling
Faculty of Arts and Social Science
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
Jalan Universiti, Bandar Baru Barat
31900 Kampar, Perak.

Dear Dr Pung,

Ethical Approval For Research Project/Protocol

We refer to the application for ethical approval for your students' research project from Bachelor of Social Science (Hons) Guidance and Counselling programme enrolled in course UAPC3083/UAPC3093. We are pleased to inform you that the application has been approved under Expedited Review.

The details of the research projects are as follows:

	Research Title	Student's Name	Supervisor's Name	Approval Validity
1.	Emotion Regulation Among Undergraduates in Malaysia: Distress Tolerance, Mindfulness, and Positive Reappraisal	Ching Kai Xuan	Mr Ho Khee Hoong	10 January 2023 – 9 January 2024
2.	A Study of Smartphone Addiction, Fear of Rejection, and Interpersonal Communication Skills as Predictors of Social Connectedness Among Malaysian Undergraduate Students	Dewayne Kuek Hui En		
3.	Help-seeking Behaviour Among Male University Students: Mental Health Literacy, Self-stigma and Conformity Towards Masculine Norms	Mah Jin Sheng		
4.	A study of depression, stress, and pornography consumption among undergraduate students in Malaysia	Chua Jing Yi	Mr Lee Wei Rong	
5.	The Relationship between Spiritual Intelligence, Cognitive Flexibility and Perceived Stress among Undergraduates in Malaysia	Tanita Sadiq		
6.	The Effects of Different Cooperative Communication Mechanics on the Problem-Solving Skills and Creativity Levels of University Students	Jeremy Lam Yew Kong	Ms Kavitha a/p Nalla Muthu	
7.	The Effectiveness of CBT on Big Five Personality Traits and Internet Aggression in Undergraduate Students: A Single Subject Study	Teoh Wen Qi		
8.	The Effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) on Social Appearance Anxiety and Self-Compassion Among Malaysian Undergraduate Students: A Single Case Study	Wong Yik Theng		
9.	Understanding the Psychological Well Being of Covid-19 Survivors	Legasree a/p Ravi Chandran	Ms Komathi a/p Lokithasan	
10.	A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions	Ng Jia Wei		

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A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

	Research Title	Student's Name	Supervisor's Name	Approval Validity
11.	A Study of the Relationship Between Perceived Social Support, Self-Efficacy, And Academic Stress Among Undergraduate Students in Malaysia	Amanda Lim Xin Yi	Pn Anisah Zainab Binti Musa	10 January 2023 – 9 January 2024
12.	Post Covid-19 Pandemic: Motivation, Autonomy, Relatedness, Self-competence Among Malaysian Undergraduate Students	Chai Jow Yee		

The conduct of this research is subject to the following:

(1) The participants' informed consent be obtained prior to the commencement of the research;

(2) Confidentiality of participants' personal data must be maintained; and

(3) Compliance with procedures set out in related policies of UTAR such as the UTAR Research Ethics and Code of Conduct, Code of Practice for Research Involving Humans and other related policies/guidelines.

(4) Written consent be obtained from the institution(s)/company(ies) in which the physical or/and online survey will be carried out, prior to the commencement of the research.

Should the students collect personal data of participants in their studies, please have the participants sign the attached Personal Data Protection Statement for records.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Ts Dr Faidz bin Abd Rahman
Chairman
UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee

c.c   Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Science
        Director, Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group

Counselling Sessions

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman			
Form Title : **Sample of Submission Sheet for FYP/Dissertation/Thesis**			
Form Number : **FM-IAD-004**	Rev No: **0**	Effective Date: **21 June 2011**	Page No: **1 of 1**

IAD Consent Form

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

Date: 21/4/2023

SUBMISSION OF FINAL YEAR PROJECT

It is hereby certified that NG JIA WEI (ID No.: 1903852) has completed this final year project titled "A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF COUNSELLING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH GROUP COUNSELLING SESSIONS" under the supervision of Ms. Komathi a/p Lokithasan (Supervisor) from the Department of Psychology and counselling, Faculty of Arts and Social Science.

I understand that University will upload softcopy of my final year project in pdf format into UTAR Institutional Repository, which may be made accessible to UTAR community and public.

Yours truly,

_____

Name: NG JIA WEI

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Action Plan of UAPC3093 Project Paper II

Supervisee NG JIA WEI

Supervisor Ms Komathi a/p Lokithasan

Task Description	Date	Supervisee's Signature	Supervisor's Signature	Supervisor's Remarks	Next Appointment Date/Time
Methodology Submit Chapter 3: Methodology Amend Chapter 3: Methodology	15/2/2023	*NC*			15/3/2023
Results & Findings Submit Chapter 4: Results Amend Chapter 4: Results	15/3/2023	*NC*			29/3/2023
Discussion & Conclusion Submit Chapter 5: Discussion Amend Chapter 5: Discussion	29/3/2023	*NC*			12/4/2023
Abstract	12/4/2023	*NC*			
Turnitin Submission	17/4/2023	*NC*		Generate similarity rate from Turnitin.com	
Amendment	17/4/2023	*NC*			
Submission of final draft	21/4/2023	*NC*		Submission of hardcopy and documents	
Oral Presentation		*NC*			

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Notes:
1. Deadline for submission cannot be changed, mark deduction is as per faculty standard.
2. Supervisees are to take the active role to make appointments with their supervisors.
3. Both supervisors and supervisees should keep a copy of this action plan.
4. This Action Plan should be attached as an appendix in Project Paper 2.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been conducting group counselling?

2. What do you think about group counselling sessions?

3. How would you describe your role in a group counselling session?

4. How do you feel about handling a group counselling in school

5. Have you come across any challenges in handling group counselling?

6. Tell me about the influences of group counselling on you.

7. What is your theoretical orientation and how is its application in group counselling?

8. What interventions do you find most useful and why?

9. What is your responsibility in group work?

10. What resources are available for handling group counselling?

Probes:

Tell me more about that…

Can you give me an example?

What makes you to think so?

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Sample of Informed Consent

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF COUNSELLING STUDENTS'

EXPERIENCES WITH GROUP COUNSELLING SESSIONS

Researcher: NG JIA WEI

018-5703421

jjiawei1108@1utar.my

Purpose of Study: To conduct and in-depth interview on understanding the experience of counselling students with group counselling sessions, to partially fulfil the requirements of UAPC3093 Project 2

Risks and Benefits: The benefits include increasing awareness and self-reflection of the group counselling. Participants can be reasonably expected to benefit from the activities, from the knowledge of results that will be shared with them once the study is completed and interpreted. There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation : Participation in the study, defined as completion of the demographic questionnaire, individual semi-structured interview, and follow-up interview, is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate in the study does not impact your grades or standing in the program in any way.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Confidentiality: All information including the personal experiences you have shared will be kept confidential by the interviewer and will not be made available to the public unless disclosure is required by law.

Disclosure: The information provided in this interview may be published or be reused for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. However, your identity will not be disclosed. The original records will be reviewed by the interviewer and the course lecturer, for the purpose of verifying research procedures and/or data.

Right to Withdraw: you are free to refuse to participate in the research and withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences to you.

By signing this consent form, you authorize the record review, publication and re-utilisation of data, and information as described above.

Consent

I _____, have read the description,

Including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risk, the

confidentiality as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher

has explained each of these to me, and I believe that I understood what is involved. My

signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this study and I have received a

copy of this agreement from the researcher.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Signature of Interviewee

_____   _____

Name of Interviewee   Date

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Sample of Transcript

Formulated Meanings

Researcher	Good morning, (participant)	
Participant	Hi. Good morning, Jiawei.	
Researcher	So… At first, I would like to thank you for participating in my qualitative research.	
Participant	Yah. [nod head]	
Researcher	So, I would like to repeat again. My title is 'A phenomenological exploration of Counselling students' experiences with group counselling session'.	
Participant	Ok, yah.	
Researcher	I also would like to let you know I will hmm… Turn on the audio recording.	
Participant	Ok.	
Researcher	This is for record purpose. [Participant showed understanding] So, thank you.	
Participant	Record purpose… Ok, sure.	
Researcher	Would you like to have a brief introduction about yourself?	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Participant	Yah. My name is (participant). I am from Penang, and currently I am a student, which is studying at UTAR Kampar. Now I am currently studying Year 3 Semester 3. GC courses… Guidance and Counselling course.	
Researcher	Okok. Hmm… Do you have any experiences n conducting group counselling session?	
Participant	Yes. I have been a group counsellor recently… I mean recent (time) last year. I have been the group counsellor about 3 months.	
Researcher	[nod head] Hmm, oh! Three months, ok.	
Participant	Because this is for my assignment purpose. So, I have the chance… I have the opportunity to have the experience about how to conduct a group counselling.	
Researcher	Oh! Do you independently conduct the complete session?	
Participant	Yah. I independently complete the session by myself with a few of the clients.	
Researcher	So how many clients in the group?	

Participant	Hmm. [thinking] At that time, three and above, so I remember is one, two… Yah. Three because the requirement of the counselling is three, right? I mean more than… Two and above.	
Researcher	Okok. Then, I would like to know about your perspective. What do you think about group counselling session?	
Participant	What do I think about hmm… Group counselling session. I think about the group counselling is quite good. It's quite hmm… Amazing and… I think is that. [lower voice] And fun…	The participant expressed a positive attitude about group counselling.
Researcher	What make you think like amazing and fun? [ask for confirmation]	
Participant	What? Yah, is a good question. Hmm, the thing is… Because last time we always… As a trainee counsellor, we always trained about conducting the individual counselling only. So at this time, I have to conduct a session, is a group. Yah. I need to (be) skilful and professional to conduct well the session (with) a few of the clients.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Researcher	How is your experience that makes you feel good? Is it the outcome or the process?	
Participant	Okok. So, the thing is I feel good about group counselling, right…	
Researcher	Yah. [nod head]	
Participant	Is about conduct a session in a time which the client, with a few of clients… Can solve their issue, not like the same like individual counselling. Like individual counselling, I need to solve the issue of the client. For example, three sessions, I need to settle the client three sessions. But now, group counselling, I have three clients, so I can solve the issue of the three clients in that few sessions. So is can… Shortly, I can save the time and I think that earn more money. Because in the way, an individual is one person charge, in a group is many person per charge.	
Researcher	So, a few (clients) at the same time?	
Participant	Yah.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Researcher	Okok. So, you think is amazing because it has a lot of benefits for you to conduct the session. Is it?	
Participant	Yah. For me, but from the client, what I can feel is… It might benefits that what I told you just now. But in the perspective of the client, I think is a good chance, space for them because they can have a good cohesion like…If I want to go to the individual counselling, I need to go well with the rapport building well first. But for group counselling, the clients come with the same common issue, and they will feel sense of comfort. They told me that they have… The group counselling is like having a new family like that. Yes. They have the feeling because they have a common issue and they feel 'Oh, not only me have this kind issue. Actually, have many people also having the issue too.' So, they can see the success like client A, what they did, actually the client also can did (follow). They can have the interaction. They will compare with each other.	The participants felt that group counselling not only benefited the group counsellor but also had advantages for the group members.

129

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

	Actually, they also can do it. It will build their self-esteem.	
Researcher	Does it mean they learn from each other?	
Participant	Yes. When they share the like… Share about how to solve their issue like, what is the way when they face their issue, what is the solution they used. Then, they will share about their solution, right. Then, the client ABC… If they have a different solution, they can share with each other. 'Oh, actually this also can work!' yeah. Or maybe they can create same goals, imitate each other who is successful before.	
Researcher	Oh, ok. Then, would you like to tell me more about… Explain the term just now you mentioned like the group counselling session is fun.	
Participant	Oh, you mean explain more about why…	
Researcher	Like how you think it is fun?	
Participant	I think is fun because like the common theme for that group counselling is like procrastination. They have the common issue which is the procrastinate. Yah on assignment. Then, I think is	The role of group counsellor is to become a facilitator who could guide the group

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

	fun because as I am the counsellor, I can hear from everyone… What they trying to say, and I think is fun and amazing because I need to be a good listener. And I need to think, paraphrase, digest quickly what they had said at a time. And then I need to one by one let them take turn [participant pointed from one direction to another] telling, sometimes returning back to them.	process, which the members can take turn and share their thoughts.
Researcher	So, for clarification, is this the role for you in group counselling session? Like be a good listener…	
Participant	Yah. Is important to be a good listener and get the important points. Because the clients will talk a lot, I need to catch what is the significant (meaning) of the words, what is important.	
Researcher	Then, do you observe like… What you did in the group session?	
Participant	Yah. Wait, I didn't finish saying. Actually is fun because we can see everyone is interacting, just like have a talk or a meeting, that kind of feeling.	

	Like 'Oh, yeah yeah like this' [acting the clients show agreement] Just like a…	
Researcher	A discussion?	
Participant	Discussion, yah.	
Researcher	Okok. Do you do anything to let them (the clients) interact with each other to have a smooth conversation. Or do they do it by themselves, like automatically they will start (the discussion).	
Participant	Actually, when after the starting of the first session… In the first session, when the starting, they (the clients) don't know each other, so I have done the rapport building with them, which is the I remembered the ice breaking they share… They share about what is their favourite things to do. Then, from there starts, they will… I told them the flow to take turn sharing and pass around to have interaction. I also told them that 'If you want to interact, you can discuss and share with each other'.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Researcher	Oh, okok. How do you feel when you conduct the rapport building session. Is it different like you deal with one client and many client?	
Participant	Yah. When I conduct with one client. Actually one client is like… I questioning or telling him or her, he just replies to me like general.	
Researcher	Then, how about in group? Do you observe any difference?	
Participant	In group is actually different. How different… [thinking]	
Researcher	So, what do you think? Is it easy to build rapport in group counselling session?	
Participant	In group counselling rapport? [researcher nods] Yes.	
Researcher	Easy?	
Participant	I think is easy.	
Researcher	Like how you manage to build the bond with them?	
Participant	Everyone takes turn to share everything. [laugh]	
Researcher	May I know what your preferred theoretical orientation during session is? Like theory…	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Participant	[laugh]	
Researcher	(Theory) that you usually use in counselling session?	
Participant	I think is quite useful in the group counselling session is SFBT (Solution Focused Based Theory) and CBT (cognitive Behavioural Theory).	
Researcher	Would you like to give me some examples like how you apply in the group counselling session?	
Participant	Yeah, sure. Hmm… With SFBT, it is helping and guiding the client to find own ways to solve their issues. At the starting I will explore about what is the issue they are facing and then I will summarise or paraphrase about their issue to let them clearer about what they are facing. After that, I will ask about how they did before to solve their issue because using SFBT. Know their previous ways to solve their issue, and they will share with me a lot. Then, I will ask them… [ask the researcher] Is that you want me to describe how is the counselling (session) going on?	A directive theoretical approach to SFBT is used by the group counsellor to make clients clear about the issues they face.

Researcher	Oh, no no no. Just give me some of the examples like you apply the theory.	
Participant	Yah, which is to set the SMART goal. The goal must be SMART. Do you know what it is?	
Researcher	Would you like to elaborate more?	
Participant	Yeah. Like me I am smart too. I mean smart boy. [Participant showed humour]	
Researcher	[laugh]	
Participant	Yeah. SMART goal, which is the goal needs to be measurable, in time (bound). The goal must be able to do it (achievable) and make sense. The clients can do it and it is logic. I would let the clients to write down their SMART goals and they will know what they need to do.	
Researcher	Do you find it useful? Like how the outcome is?	
Participant	Actually useful. The outcome is they can follow what they wrote and the homework they followed it. It seems like quite a huge progress. I also use the CBT technique. The easy one which is the breathing technique when the clients feel stress. Or I used like momentum technique. (For	Theoretical approach of CBT used in integration with intervention. The participant also provided examples for better understanding.

	example) the issue is procrastination. When they want to do the assignment, they have no interest on doing it. So, I told them to used the CBT momentum technique. One of the clients told me like he loves to play video games, so he goes to play video games first. Then, I told him quickly do the assignment after playing video games. He had the sense of fulfilment and do the work.	
Researcher	Is the way you suggest is suitable for all the clients?	
Participant	For all the clients in the session?	
Researcher	Is it effective for all the clients in the session? In that group?	
Participant	Yeah. Yeah.	
Researcher	So, are they doing the same activity?	
Participant	What kind of activity? Homework?	
Researcher	Ah. [nod head]	
Participant	Oh, no. the homework actually quite similar but is based on their own way. Because I am using SFBT, so the way is (what) they feel comfortable on it.	

Researcher	Based on their situation?	
Participant	Yah, based on their situation.	
Researcher	Then, how long do they show progress?	
Participant	How long they show the progress… When the starting, they have their own SMART goal, which they set their own targets like do their assignment three days one week. They need to complete which chapters like chapter 1, ABC… So, it is quite progress. When they done, they suggest their own ways which use the just to do technique. They know what they need to do, they mark what they did. Before that, they didn't have the guidance and will feel don't know how to follow, or maybe don't have the direction. They don't know what to do today because didn't have the goal, so they will still playing video games. So now, they have the goal, and they will follow it. It shows quite good progress.	
Researcher	Do they think having other members in the group help them?	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Participant	Yes. When they share how they solve their own issue like what the client said she used before which she… What she learned from other clients which is… She does the assignment first and then just go to do what she wants to do. I forgot what is the… [participant stuck]	
Researcher	The activity?	
Participant	Yah.	
Researcher	Okok. How do you think the application of the theory when apply in individual counselling and group counselling session?	
Participant	The theory is actually the same.	
Researcher	Then, how about the outcome? How do you feel when you use it in group counselling session? Is it as your expected or something hmm… do you face any challenges?	
Participant	Oh yah. I think have some challenges in individual (counselling) compared to the group counselling using the same technique and theory. So like the same issue, like experience…	
Researcher	Would you like to tell me more about it?	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Participant	Yes. Ok. So, the thing is the client will have a blank of mind, like what I said before. If the client didn't have his own way, she doesn't know how to do, to solve her issue, not like the group counselling. Group counselling members can imitate and learn from what they did, follow the successful solution. But now, the client is individual, so that's not showing him…	
Researcher	Someone like a role model?	
Participant	Yah, a role model.	
Researcher	Hmm, how do you think about the action of imitate others. Do you think is a good or a bad one?	
Participant	Uh, in a group? I think is good because is a good one… The way to help if he or she feels comfortable.	
Researcher	Oh, okok.	
Participant	The most (important) thing is the way he or she use is effective for them.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Researcher	Like they learn from others, importantly is how they apply in their situation, right? [ask for confirmation]	
Participant	Yah.	
Researcher	Oh, okok. [pause] Have you come across any challenges when you handle a group counselling session, like any difficulties that you face?	
Participant	Yes. Because the group counselling… I also tried first time. I feel that… I feel that… It really needs to be professional and motivate me myself the language because I am facing the language barrier too. If the client is not good in English and also (me) myself is not good at English, it will have a language barrier in confirming that what I said is (what) client knows or what the client says some kind of the grammar word… What kind of this word?	The challenge I faced was a language barrier, because the participant didn't feel confident in conveying accurate meaning in English, which may have affected the therapeutic experience.
Researcher	Do you feel worried to convey the accurate message to client?	
Participant	Yah. Accuracy, yah.	
Researcher	[nod head to show understanding] Okok.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Participant	Yah. Is some kind of worry about…	
Researcher	Uh-hum. So, does it affect your feeling when you first conduct the session? Like how you feel during the first session?	
Participant	Yes. The feeling like… Oh, I need to track well after what he said. Maybe the other clients want to take turn very quickly and then he got his own idea, opinion want to say out. So, yah.	The participant requires more effort and attention to other clients in the group when everyone is given a chance to share their opinions.
Researcher	Oh, so this the difficulty of having a few clients at the same time lah.	
Participant	Hmm.	
Researcher	How do you ensure that they have the equal time or distribution to share… Like one person shares a lot but another keeps quiet.	
Participant	If the client is… No lah because everyone clients will take turn to speak out.	
Researcher	So, you still manage to handle it well?	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Participant	Yah. It just whether they want to talk more, share more, or share less.	
Researcher	Oh, okok. Hmm, so you actually view this like you respect them to share as they wish?	
Participant	Yes.	
Researcher	Okok. Do you have any issue on maintaining the boundaries or professionalism with them?	
Participant	Hmm… Boundaries ah?	
Researcher	Like in and out the group because you…	
Participant	I know I know. Uhm, because I… The boundaries which is the client and client if both… They are friends.	
Researcher	Uhhm. Do you actually have experience like they (your clients) are friends and they attended same group?	
Participant	Yah.	
Researcher	Hmm, how do you handle that time?	
Participant	Errr, I told them what is the private and confidential (P&C). What did here will finish (maintain) here. And then if anything else, is their issue and not my issue anymore. But I have given	

	them the 警告 (Chinese vocabulary for warning)…	
Researcher	The warning or reminder?	
Participant	What? [increase volume, didn't hear clearly]	
Researcher	Warning or reminder?	
Participant	Yah. Warning and reminder also.	
Researcher	Oh, okok. Then… How is the result? Is it ok to have friends in the group or…	
Participant	Is that ok… I think actually is ok because they will have peer support.	
Researcher	Uh-hmm. Peer support.	
Participant	And, if they are friend, they will (be) more willing to say out.	
Researcher	Oh. So, they actually can share…	
Participant	Yah, they feel comfortable for the environment, and they feel more relax like got some peer support.	
Researcher	Oh, okok.	
Participant	More confident.	
Researcher	Hmm. So, how is your competency as a group counsellor?	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Participant	Competency?	
Researcher	[explain] Like are you ready to handle the session?	
Participant	Yah yah. Is important to ready. I do a lot of preparation.	
Researcher	Will you share with some of the skills you applied. Skills... In group counselling session.	
Participant	The most important skill is basic counselling skill. Yah, I think the basic counselling skill is important because inside, one of it is paraphrasing and summarizing. The clients might be… Might be have blank mind suddenly (thinking) 'Oh, what I said ah just now'. Maybe they will think a lot a lot a lot… Then, I will summarize again to make sure they know what is happening, get them the follow-up in the right track.	The skills involved paraphrasing and summarizing to ensure the group members were on the same track.
Researcher	Oh, okok. So, do you face any challenges like during the next session they forget about something in previous session?	
Participant	Ye-yeah…. No, because… You know why?	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Researcher	[shook head] I don't know.	
Participant	It's ok, I tell you. Ah. When the start of the next session, I will… I will repeat again what we all did in the last session…	
Researcher	Oh!	
Participant	Yah. If not… They will did not have… They will maybe forget.	
Researcher	Oh, okok. (The time) is very long. Do you have any like tips for yourself that you can improve as a group counsellor.	
Participant	Err. One tip… The first tip is to learn my English.	
Researcher	Try to improve your English?	
Participant	Not only English. Like communication skills, my language, professional. Then, second one is… Actually, empathy is more important. And then, giving the client feeling comfortable. I actually care of comfortable. Maybe the client expressed, he will cry out…	The participant's suggestions for improvement included dealing with the language barrier.
Researcher	Ok, so… Is there any resource that available for you in group counselling session?	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Participant	Resources? Err, the resources I take or learn is from my class… Can you ask me the question again?	
Researcher	Hmm… I would like to know like what resources are available when you handle the counselling session?	
Participant	Oh, yeah. My campus, university campus has our own Guidance and Counselling room. There also have a group counselling room. Yah. And then the group counselling room has the material all over there have chairs.	
Researcher	Is it spacious to have more people in the room?	
Participant	I think the room can be more than what it did before. I think enough.	
Researcher	Do you think the environment is comfortable with your client?	
Participant	Yes. The environment is comfortable because there has aircond. Is not that big big room because if the big room, the client or me myself also will feel like too big of space, didn't have the cohesion.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Researcher	Like too distance also didn't have the cohesion?	
Participant	Yah. [inaudible]	
Researcher	Okok. Is there any things you would like to improve about the environment for group counselling session? Like what you expect?	
Participant	Yah. Actually, what to expect is the chair. Because like campus, gorup counselling room's chairs use the wooden chairs. It is quite noisy.	
Researcher	[laugh] Ok. So, is better to change it?	
Participant	Yah. If not, will disturb everyone to focus. Yah.	
Researcher	Also. I would like to know your preparation in terminating the clients. Would you like to share with me?	
Participant	I will make sure my clients have progressed half the way and compare like… I am using the assessment.	
Researcher	Oh! You use assessment.	
Participant	Like pre-test and post-test.	
Researcher	Okok, that's great.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Participant	And then, they will know what is their result and the test will shine out how is the group counselling. And then, what is the question again.	
Researcher	Preparation for termination session.	
Participant	Oh yeah. And then, I prepare to confirm my clients' good well, so if they have any kind of issue like the individual one, I will do individual counselling if they want, if they willing. Then, I prepare the termination, make sure the issue already lessens.	
Researcher	So, you will ensure all of them really terminate.	
Participant	Yah.	
Researcher	Then, how you think about three clients, are you capable to handle for termination? What if more clients, the number of clients increase?	
Participant	That is the point of question I actually want to…	
Researcher	You are figuring out, thinking?	
Participant	Just now…	
Researcher	Do you think it is hard.	
Participant	Actually, hard and the time I need to use in counselling must be more than that. Maybe I can't	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

	explore more or give them time to express about it. Yah.	
Researcher	So, form your previous experience, how many number of clients you are able to pay attention on everyone of them? Do you have a number like maybe five clients?	
Participant	Yah, five. Because you know what, if example, imagine I have eight clients in the gorup counselling. It is quite difficult, maybe I will lost of the puzzle of one of it. Like what they say, maybe I will mix with what they told me the topic. I mean not the topic, like issue. Maybe client A, I will mix with client B,C. maybe will confusing, so I think I can make it to 5, is the maximum one.	
Researcher	Is actually based on your current capability?	
Participant	Yah, competency, capability.	
Researcher	Then, do you ever think of any ways to improve it or enhance it?	
Participant	Improve it or enhance it… Yes. Which is… Have co-leader.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Researcher	Oh, you have consider having a co-leader?	
Participant	Yah, because the co-leader will help me to… To fix…	The perspective of having a co-leader is believed to improve group counselling sessions.
Researcher	To control the situation?	
Participant	Maye what I have… Yah, control the situation is one. And, maybe any kind of the needs, anything in the session I miss out, he or she, my co-leader has more effective solution and experience.	The participant brought out the necessity of having a co-leader in the group.
Researcher	Oh… So, is there any requirement for you to get a co-leader? Like someone an experience person or, is there any requirement?	
Participant	Of course! The requirement is just he must be a counsellor.	
Researcher	Oh, any counsellor also can be your co-leader?	
Participant	The… Yes, yes. Co-leader must be… [pause]	
Researcher	Like what you expect them to be? To be skilful or…	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Participant	Skilful, then have the knowledge, how to apply. And must be very bekerjasama with me. Very what ah…	
Researcher	Very cooperative with you. So, will it be good to find someone you familiar, colleague or someone not really familiar?	
Participant	I think familiar is much better.	
Researcher	Okok.	
Participant	It is same like the cohesion with the clients, the kind of feeling. Like the newbies one, how we need to start with, have interaction first. Not that easy.	
Researcher	Okok. Do you have anything share about the co-leader or is that?	
Participant	Ok. [shake his head]	
Researcher	Then, I would like to ask another question about… Would you like to let me know the influences about group counselling on you. Like after you learn, conduct the session, is there any changes or influences on you?	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Participant	Any changes… Yes! Yes! Yes! [excited tone] Influence on me is I can… I can become an active listener, and I can… My focusing on the issue better.	
Researcher	How do you say so? Is it because you are trained to handle more clients now?	
Participant	Yah, is like have the steps on it, like actually I think my level is like this (low), actually I can do more well. Feel is quite easier than last time. I think individual counselling is easier.	
Researcher	Easier? Okok. So, will you think group counselling is very hard and you will not have much interest on it?	
Participant	Hmm… Although is hard but is interesting because it just like listening to a story, different kind of stories at a time, you know. And, yah. And then, the rapport building is easier, I think. Then… And then, is more challenging.	The participant still claimed the experience of group counselling positively, even though she faced some challenges during the process.

Sessions

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Researcher	More challenging. But how do you view? Do you view this positively or negatively about this challenges.	
Participant	No, I think is positive.	
Researcher	Ok.	
Participant	I love challenging things. All right, beside that… Moreover… In addition… [laugh] Group counselling is actually good, you know why. I found which is the time management I can did well. I think is good because my time management is getting well. Quite well which is I can easily finish out what agenda in the session, what I need to do, and I can manage it in the time. And, also can solve the issue of the clients. Yah, and…	The challenging process of group counselling also had an impact on the participants personal development, and the group counsellor had better time management in dealing with the group.
Researcher	So, you actually can solve all the clients' issue within the time?	
Participant	Yah. You see.	
Researcher	So, this is something you found, feel good when conducting group counselling session?	
Participant	Yeah.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Researcher	Then, how about your feeling when you successfully solve all the clients' issue? Is not one client but a few clients. How do you feel?	
Participant	Ok. My feeling is like I feel oh my god, my self-esteem is higher. Is like a gunung (like mountain so high)	The participant expressed positive feelings during group counselling process.
Researcher	So, you feel extremely happy?	
Participant	Not extremely happy, just happy. How can extremely happy.	
Researcher	So, you feel happy with what you done. Then, do you have any readiness or expectation toward future group counselling session? Like will you worry you will face something unexpectable?	
Participant	No. I think I love the unexpected words. I think the unexpectable, I can do it with my best friend, she is also a counsellor in group counselling.	
Researcher	Oh, you actually like looking forward to the uncertainty. Lastly, do you have any advice to other trainee counsellor like you because you say you enjoy listening to stories, have good time	

	management. But maybe some of them are having problems in it. So, do you have any advice for them.	
Participant	Advice the theory you need to use is important.	
Researcher	So, theory is important?	
Participant	Yah.	
Researcher	Is it also depend on the counsellor's skills?	
Participant	Yes. If the counselling…No lah, I think the knowledge is important.	
Researcher	Does it mean maybe the gorup counsellor needs to have preparation or study more knowledge about group counselling before conduct a session.	
Participant	Yah, what I say before which is preparation and never fear of giving up or fear of fail on any of the session.	
Researcher	If every clients in the gorup are progressing well but one is actually do not show any progress, then how is it?	
Participant	Ok. What I will do which is ask him or her permission which the person needs to have an individual counselling or what I can did is referral	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

	first. But what I most, I mean the choice I will do is individual counselling first, I can do it. Switch the client into individual counselling. Because I think is my responsibility.	
Researcher	Ok, then do you have any more to share?	
Participant	[shake head]	
Researcher	Thank you for participating in my research.	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

Marking Rubric

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING

UAPC3093 Project Paper II

<u>**Qualitative Research Project Evaluation Form**</u>

<u>**TURNITIN:**</u> *'In assessing this work you are agreeing that it has been submitted to the University-recognised originality checking service which is Turnitin. The report generated by Turnitin is used as evidence to show that the students' final report contains the similarity level below 20%.'*

Project Title:	
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF COUNSELLING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH GROUP COUNSELLING SESSIONS	
Supervisor: Ms Komathi a/p Lokithasan	
Student's Name: NG JIA WEI	Student's ID 19AAB03852

INSTRUCTIONS:
Please score each descriptor based on the scale provided below:

1. Please award 0 mark for no attempt.

2. For criteria **7**:
   Please retrieve the marks from "**Oral Presentation Evaluation Form**".

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

1. ABSTRACT (5%)	Max Score	Score
a. State the main research questions and research objectives.	5%	
b. Describe the methodology: • Research design • Type of participants • Sample size • Location of study • Interview protocol	5%	
c. Describe the characteristics of participants.	5%	
d. Highlight the significant findings of the study.	5%	
e. Conclusions, Implications • Practical implication of the knowledge generated form the study	5%	
Sum	25%	/25%
Subtotal (Sum/5)	5%	/5%
Remark:		

2. METHODOLOGY (25%)	Max Score	Score
a. Research design • Rationale for selected design	5%	
b. Sampling procedures: • Rationale sampling method and sample size • Describe the recruitment process • Procedures for ethical clearance and approval	5%	
c. Type of data collected • Describe the forms of data collected • Describe other data sources • Relevance of the collected data with the research objectives d. Validity of the data collection method (e.g., rigor) • How the validity of the data is established	5%	
e. Clear explanation of data collection procedures: • Inclusion and exclusion criteria • Procedures of obtaining consent • Description of data collection procedures • Describe questions asked in data collection, content and form of questions (e.g, open vs closed ended etc)	5%	

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

	Max Score	Score
f. Describe the management or use of the reflexivity in the data-collection process	5%	
Subtotal	25%	/25%
Remark:		

3. RESULTS (20%)	Max Score	Score
a. Appropriate data analysis for research objective • Describe in detail the process of analysis (e.g coding, thematic analysis)	10%	
b. Thematic Analysis • Describe research findings (themes, categories), the meaning and understanding derived from data analysis • Demonstrate the analytic process of reaching findings (e.g. Interview responses, observations, field notes, etc.) • Findings presented should include information to support the research objectives.	10%	
Subtotal	20%	/20%
Remark:		

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION (20%)	Max Score	Score
a. Constructive discussion of findings: • Discuss the research findings and understanding from the results	5%	
b. Implication of the study: • Theoretical implication for future research. • Practical implication for programs and policies. • Reflect on any alternative explanation of the findings	5%	
c. Relevant limitations of the study.	5%	
d. Recommendations for future research.	5%	

	Subtotal	20%	/20%
Remark:			

5. LANGUAGE AND ORGANIZATION (5%)		Max Score	Score
a. Language proficiency		3%	
b. Content organization		1%	
c. Complete documentation (e.g., action plan, originality report)		1%	
	Subtotal	5%	/5%
Remark:			

6. APA STYLE AND REFERENCING (5%)		Max Score	Score
a. 7th Edition APA Style		5%	/5%
Remark:			

*ORAL PRESENTATION (20%)	Score
Subtotal	/20%
Remark:	

PENALTY	Max Score	Score
Maximum of 10 marks for LATE SUBMISSION (within 24 hours), or POOR CONSULTATION ATTENDANCE with supervisor. *Late submission after 24 hours will not be graded	10%	
**FINAL MARK/TOTAL		/100%

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling

Sessions

***Overall Comments:

_____

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Signature: _____   **Date:** _____

<u>**Notes:**</u>
1. **Subtotal**:   The sum of scores for each assessment criterion
2. **FINAL MARK/TOTAL**:   The summation of all subtotal score
3. Plagiarism is **NOT ACCEPTABLE**. Parameters of originality required and limits approved by UTAR are as follows:
    (i)   **Overall similarity index is 20% or below**, and
    (ii) **Matching of individual sources listed must be less than 3%** each, and
    (iii) Matching texts in continuous block must **not exceed 8 words**
    Note: Parameters (i) – (ii) shall exclude quotes, references and text matches which are less than 8 words. Any works violate the above originality requirements will NOT be accepted. Students have to redo the report and meet the requirements in **SEVEN (7)** days.

*The marks of "Oral Presentation" are to be retrieved from **"Oral Presentation Evaluation Form".**
**It is compulsory for the supervisor/examiner to give the overall comments for the research projects with A- and above or F grading.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Oral Presentation Evaluation Form

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELING

INDIVIDUAL ORAL PRESENTATION EVALUATION FORM (FACE TO FACE/VIRTUAL PLATFORM)

UAPC3093 PROJECT PAPER II

Student's Name	ID	*Total (40%)	**Final score (20%)
NG JIA WEI	1903852		

**Final Score: (   ) / 40 marks ÷ 2 = (   ) / 20 marks
*to be converted into 20%

Date: _____   Time: _____

SCORE / TRAITS	SCORE	EXCELLENT 4	GOOD 3	AVERAGE 2	LACKING 1
POSTER PRESENTATION PREPARATION					
Organisation		Title/author of paper clearly displayed. Concise presentation of introduction, review of literature, methodology, findings and conclusions.	Shows title/author. Adequately presents introduction, review of literature, methodology, findings and conclusions.	Shows title/author. Presents main ideas of introduction, review of literature, methodology, findings and conclusions.	Title/author are missing. Insufficient coverage of main points of introduction, review of literature, methodology, findings and conclusions.
Competency		Student demonstrates competent knowledge of the subject by explaining the subject with details. Able to answer questions posted by the audience/examiners fluently with confidence.	Student is able to provide sufficient information to enable audience to understand main ideas. Able to answer questions posted by the audience/examiners with noticeable interval.	Student is able to provide basic information with vague and disjointed ideas. Student tried to answer the questions posted by the audience/examiner using common-sense rather than evidence-based answer.	Student is unable convey the information fluently to the audience/examiner. Student is not able to answer the questions posted by the audience/examiner.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

TRAITS / SCORE	SCORE	EXCELLENT 4	GOOD 3	AVERAGE 2	LACKING 1
Visual Presentation		Visually appealing poster with appropriate colours, organization, and font sizes enhance readability. Strategically positioned graphics and text.	Overall visually appealing. Organisation of content enhances readability. Appropriate font size enhances readability. Content arrangement easily understood. Graphics enhances text.	Visual appeal is adequate. Colours and layout somewhat cluttered. Font size affects readability. Confusing content arrangement. Graphics help to highlight some content.	Visuals lack appeal. Colours and layout cluttered. Hinders readability. Inconsistent font sizes and content arrangement Mismatch of graphics and text.
Mechanics		The slides are flawless with no misspelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors. Provide essential sources and citations using 7th edition APA style.	2 – 3 misspelling, punctuation and/ or grammatical errors in the slides. Provided excessive and cluttered sources and citations.	4 misspelling, punctuation and/ or grammatical errors detected in the slides. Inconsistent citation styles detected.	Slides are riddled with multiple spelling, punctuation and/ or grammatical errors. Does not cite sources.

TRAITS / SCORE	SCORE	EXCELLENT 4	GOOD 3	AVERAGE 2	LACKING 1
			VERBAL SKILLS		
Enthusiasm		Demonstrates a strong, positive feeling about topic during entire presentation.	Occasionally shows positive feelings about topic.	Shows little positive feelings toward topic presented.	Shows absolutely no interest in topic presented.
Delivery		Uses a clear voice and speaks at a good pace so audience can hear presentation. Does not read off slides.	Presenter's voice is clear. The pace is a little slow or fast at times. Audience can hear presentation.	Presenter's voice is low. The pace is much too rapid/slow. Audience has difficulty hearing presentation.	Presenter mumbles or talks very fast and speaks too softly for audience to hear and understand.
Language		Excellent and competent use of subject-related vocabulary and correct pronunciation.	Presentation shows competent use of subject-related vocabulary and correct pronunciation.	Some parts of lapse into colloquialism with inappropriate vocabulary and pronunciation.	Mostly inappropriate vocabulary and pronunciation.
			NON-VERBAL SKILLS		
Eye Contact		Student maintains eye contact with audience, seldom returning to notes.	Student maintains eye contact most of the time but frequently returns to notes.	Student occasionally uses eye contact, but still reads most of report.	Student reads all of report with no eye contact.
Body Language & Facial Expression		Movements seem fluid. Displays relaxed, self-confident nature about self, with no-mistakes. Appropriate facial expression without a zoned-out or confused expression.	Made movements or gestures that enhance articulation. Makes minor mistakes, displays little or no tension. Occasionally demonstrate either a zoned-out or confused expression during presentation.	Rigid movement or descriptive gestures. Displays mild tension; has trouble recovering from mistakes. Occasionally demonstrate both zoned-out or confused expressions during presentation.	No movement or descriptive gestures. Tension and nervousness are obvious; has trouble recovering from mistakes. Consistently zoned-out or displays confused expression during presentation.

A Phenomenological Exploration of Counselling Students' Experiences with Group Counselling Sessions

Timing		Within 10 to 15 minutes of allotted time.	Within 17 minutes of allotted time OR too short (<10 minutes).	Within 20 minutes of allotted time OR too short (<5 minutes).	Too long (>20 minutes) or too short (<3 minutes).
*TOTAL					

Comments:

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Evaluated by:

_____

(NAME OF EVALUATOR: _____)

Department of Psychology and Counseling
Faculty of Arts and Social Science
UTAR Perak Campus