A study of client goals and goal achievement within school-based counselling

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1) Research questions
• What goals do young people present with at counselling?
• To what extent does counselling help achieve these goals as compared to the wait list?
• Is counselling effective in helping achieve some goals more than others?

2) Why this topic?
• Not many studies conducted on therapeutic goals of young people (YP) whose goals are distinct to those of adults (Nurmi, 1987).
• Cooper’s (2009) review highlights that what YP come to counselling with is not necessarily what the sessions are focused on, and thus it might be important to set goals for therapy.
• Goal attainment is an important parameter of psychotherapy and has strong association with success in therapy (Berking, Holtforth, Jacobi, & Kröner-Herwig, 2005).
• Goal setting is beneficial for a pluralistic practice (Cooper and McLeod, 2011).

3) Methods
• 2 pilot RCT’s; 73 participants. 46 female and 27 male randomised to either humanistic counselling or waitlist condition for one school term.
• Each participant recorded 3 therapeutic goals on the Goal Based Outcome Record and rated each goal on a scale of zero (Goal not at all met) to 10 (Goal reached) at baseline, midpoint, and endpoint.
• Thematic analysis used to identify types of goals YP had (n=199). The Bern Inventory of Treatment Goals (BIT-T, Grosse Holthoff & Grawe, 2002) was used as a basis for qualitative analyses.
• ANCOVA conducted to compare efficacy of counselling vs. the waitlist and to analyse if counselling was more effective for some types of goals than others. Only those goals that had both baseline and endpoint scores were included in the quantitative analysis. This resulted in a total sample size of 114 eligible goals.

4) Results
• Counselling and goal types - goal categories resulting from thematic analysis.

4.2) Results
• Counselling vs. WL levels of goal attainment - ANCOVA indicates that given two participants with similar goal scores at baseline, those on the waitlist would on average have an endpoint goal rating of 1.710 less than those on the counselling condition. The p value was .000 indicating that this result is significant.
• Efficacy of counselling in attaining specific goal types - The 16 goal categories were further combined into four overarching goal types to conduct an ANCOVA to compute whether counselling was more effective in attaining some goal types than others. Similar goal categories were combined into more meaningful goal types that captured the essence of the goals of the YP.
• Counselling was most effective in helping YP achieve emotional goals, followed by personal growth goals. No significant differences were found between counselling and waitlist for interpersonal goals and goals targeting specific issues. Differences in endpoint means for overarching goal types are presented below in figure 1.

5) Discussion
• Improving self-confidence/esteem, controlling/reducing anger, and improving relationships with family are the most frequently reported goals.
• The current study has established the overall efficacy of counselling in helping YP achieve their goals as compared to the waitlist.
• However, the small sample size of this study is one of its biggest limitations and has impacted the statistical analyses. These results need to be replicated with larger samples to ascertain the generalizability of the findings.

6) Presenter details
• Pooja Rupani, D.Psych in Counselling Psychology (3rd year), poojarupani17@gmail.com

7) References