

Counselling Research: problems and alternatives

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Overview

- What has counselling research found?
- What has counselling research not found or asked?
- What might we want to find out?
- Some problems of research methodology and outcomes
- Other modes of related enquiry and discourse
- Conclusions

What has counselling research found?

- Does it work? How does it work?
- Which approaches work best?
- For which psychological conditions are different therapies effective/most effective?
- What happens in the counselling process/interaction?
- What goes well/badly?
- What are client perspectives on counselling?

Some findings

- 80% success rate
- The importance/centrality of the therapeutic relationship

BUT

- Some approaches/techniques apparently more effective with certain conditions

The limits of current research

- No clear agenda, few remarkable results (counselling can be as or more effective than medication)
- *Neurological* research into Schizophrenia, PTSD, OCD etc. more significant than psychological research
- Ill-defined scope of counselling field; social sciences less successful than natural science
- Counselling a response to mental health problems, neglect of causation and categorisation

The limits of current research (contd.)

- Dysfunctional behaviour attributed to parenting problems, early life/stressful events, faulty thinking and emotions
- Counselling is based on practice and 'faith'
- BACP agenda is promotional, not wide-ranging
- Little research comparing counsellors as opposed to techniques

What else might we want to find out?

Brainstorm:

- Meaning of mental health/illness
- Why so much suffering?
- Suffering/mental ill-health in UK, Kenya, elsewhere
- Causes of different kinds of psychological suffering
- Best means of addressing these
- Human susceptibility to suffering/accidental individual tragedies/severe psychiatric problems
- Optimal counselling practice/need to refocus

Problems of Research Methodology

- Randomised Control Trials
- Problems of qualitative research
- Improvements on common sense or guess work
- Contradictory research findings
- Kline (1992): 19 problems, incl. definitions of recovery, counsellor variance, spontaneous remission, length of follow-up studies etc.

Problems of Research Methodology (contd.)

- Priorities
- What is doable
- Different stakeholders
- Research open to corruption and distortion
- Empirical research driven by competition
- Diminishing returns

Other modes of enquiry and discourse

- Critical thinking
- Creative hypothesising
- Socially and environmentally engaged thinking
- Socio-political action
- New tradition of critical prophecy
- Countercultural perspectives

Conclusions

- We can remain counselling-specific
- We can regard ourselves as ‘personal scientists’ (Kelly, 1991)
- Anthropathology – critical thinking on why human distress is so wide-spread and enduring
- Continue to research empirically and critically but broaden perspectives