

Loss and Grief Counselling for Flood Victims

Rahimi Che Aman, Syed Mohamad Syed Abdullah & Nor Shafrin Ahmad

Universiti Sains Malaysia
rahimi@usm.my

Abstract. Every disaster that happens, such as a flood, will definitely leave impacts on the individuals in terms of the feeling of loss and grief. This inspires counsellors to find the most appropriate counselling approach in dealing with these victims of flood disasters. This paper discusses the nature of loss and grief among flood victims, and the process of identifying suitable theories in developing counselling module for the affected victims. In addition, the integration of the principles of the Dual Process model, Solution Focused Brief Counselling and The Creative Arts in Counselling can be considered as significant inputs in constructing the loss and grief counselling module to manage the emotional issues faced the flood victims. The main emotional issues encountered by their clients are sadness, fear, and anxiety as a result of their experiences as flood victims. The multiple counselling techniques used are namely miracle question, scaling question, drawing, and modelling; they are known to be helpful in facilitating the counselling process. In conclusion, this systematic and structured loss and grief counselling module has effectively benefited counsellors in providing appropriate counselling services to the flood victims.

Keywords: Loss, grief, counselling, counselling techniques, flood victims,

INTRODUCTION

Every disaster that happens will have an impact on the victims due to the loss and grief suffered by them. One of the most significant disasters that happened in Malaysia, at the end of December 2014, was a massive flood that had a very devastating impact on the societies in the worst affected states: Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu, Perak and Johor. Based on press reports and Bernama, it was found that a large number of flood victims were located in the state of Kelantan with an estimated number of 142,582 victims (Bernama, 30 December 2014).

The inevitable consequences of the natural disaster were deeply felt by the community in the affected area. Not only were there physical loss but equally devastating was the psychological loss encountered by flood victims. All these aftermaths must be seriously taken care of by related organization such as the Welfare Department, Educational Department and non-government organization (NGO). Kristensen, Weisaeth & Heir, (2010) highlight the underrated risks to mental health resulted from disasters that involved loss and grief. The high prevalence of severe and long-lasting grief among the disaster bereaved makes it necessary for helpers involved in disaster care to be aware of the special needs of this disaster surviving victims group.

Flood victims need special services that often need to go far beyond the immediate crisis management stage. Once the flood victims encounter losses whether a physical loss or psychological loss, it will involve grief. Grief is considerably more than bereavement: it denotes a response to any significant loss, be it primary or secondary, tangible or intangible, and physical or relational (Gross, 2016). In order to plan and provide the appropriate service to the victims, a service provider such as a counsellor, and welfare staff need to understand the physical and psychological condition of the victims. The post-disaster investigation is important in understanding the coping strategies used by the victims. For example, based on a description by Otte (2007), the four months post-Hurricane Katrina era in New Orleans is considered as transitional times when many returnees felt compelled to share their thoughts and coping strategies after months of isolation and displacement. For the more fortunate ones, the Katrina drama unfolded in three distinct acts: a hasty evacuation, a shocking return to the ruined city, and an arduous path toward the restoration of former lives. These

experiences have some similarities with the flood victims in this study.

The significant effect on the flood victim involved loss and damage to infrastructure, material, life and also secondary loss such as lack of security, anxiety, and others. This motivates counsellors to find an appropriate counselling approach in dealing with the surviving victims of the flood disaster. Worden (1991) states that grief counselling involves helping people facilitate uncomplicated or normal grief to a healthy completion of the tasks of grieving within a reasonable period of time. In the counselling process, a counsellor needs to understand the nature of the victims who experienced the natural disaster such as flood, in terms of their loss and grief.

The overall goal of grief counselling is to help the survivor adapt to the loss of a loved one and be able to adjust to a new reality without him or her. However, grief counselling does not just focus on bereavement issues, because the non-bereavement losses accounted for the vast majority of the disaster-related possible complicated grief; despite the higher risk of responding to bereavement than to other losses (Shear, 2011). There are specific goals that correspond to the four tasks of mourning (Worden, 2009): (1) increasing the reality of the loss, (2) helping the client deal with both the emotional and behavioral pain, (3) helping the client overcome various impediments to readjustment after the loss, and (4) helping the client find a way to maintain a bond with the deceased while feeling comfortable reinvesting in life. In order to implement the counseling to the flood victim, the six steps model in the counselling process is used to develop a counselling module (Mizan & Halimatun, 2002). The six steps involved are the pre-session, building rapport, exploring and analysis problems, identify roots of the problem, action and termination.

The current model to understand this type of victims is based on the principle of the Dual Process model that which aims to cope with loss and grief circumstances. Although in the early development of this model, it focused on bereavement, but the authors suggest that their model may have application for death-related and perhaps for non-death-related circumstances. Based on the Dual Process model, loss adaptation involves a fluctuating process of both confronting and avoiding a range of stressors along two primary dimensions which is loss orientation and restoration orientation (Humphrey, 2009). Besides understanding the

model of the coping process which involved the flood victims, the specific techniques from the post-modern counselling approach are crucial in the counselling process. The techniques help to deal with loss adaptation to ensure sustainability among victims.

In this paper, specific techniques from the Solution Focused Brief Counselling were implemented in the counselling sessions such as miracle questions and scaling questions. Furthermore, the Creative Arts in Counselling also emphasized on developing a counselling module in helping flood victims. The Creative Arts in Counselling uses multiple platform or medium to facilitated victims in expressing their emotions, especially when the implementation of verbal counselling is limited. The art therapy is a non-verbal method that uses drawing, painting, or sculpting to facilitate emotional expression. This method often expresses the emotions that cannot be expressed verbally. It releases pent-up emotions and transfers them to such materials as paper, clay and so on (Schupp, 2007). Like writing, drawing pictures that reflect one's feelings as well as experiences of loss can also be helpful. This is a very good technique to use with bereaved children, but it works with adults as well. Drawings are less susceptible to defensive distortions than talking (Worden, 2009).

There is psychosocial program designed to help student cope with disaster related stressors based on available literature. Tara and Lori (2017) propose a post-disaster psychosocial school-based intervention program namely Journey of Hope (JoH) which helps students to articulate their feelings, regulate emotions such as anger and aggression, and gain knowledge. This shows the importance of designing and planning the appropriate counselling module, especially to assist surviving disaster victims to help them face and cope with the reality of losses and grief caused by natural disasters such as flood, hurricane, earthquake, and tsunami.

Objectives

The objectives of this paper are to presents:

1. The nature of loss and grief among the flood victims
2. The process of identifying suitable theories to develop an appropriate counselling module for the flood victims.

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative and qualitative research approaches were both employed in this study, which involved interview sessions with the flood victims and the completion of a questionnaire to the flood victims. The process of identifying suitable theories to develop a counselling module for the flood victims involved three stages of the research procedures.

The first stage was conducted in 19 to 20 April 2015 which involved 418 respondents aged 17 years old from the Kuala Krai district, Kelantan. The second stage was conducted in 16 to 17 August 2015 which involved 343 respondents age from 16 to 19 years old from the Kuala Krai and Gua Musang district, Kelantan. Once the first and second stages were completed, the group of researchers proceeded to seek a suitable theory and method to develop the counselling module to cater specifically to sense of loss and grief suffered by the flood victims. The third stages were conducted in March 2016 which involved 18 respondents age from 16 to 17 years old from the Kuala Krai and Gua Musang district, Kelantan. The steps employed in developing the loss and grief counselling module were based on the specific procedure to develop a module proposed by Sidek Mohd Noah and Jamaludin Ahmad (2005). This procedure included identifying the objective, background theory, rational, philosophy, target group and duration. Content analysis and

descriptive analysis were employed in this study. The module put through a validation process, and a pilot testing was conducted in the third stage of the study. 18 trainee counsellors and six school counsellors were also involved in providing feedback to the loss and grief counselling module used for the flood victims.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

1. The nature of loss and grief among the flood victims

Findings from the first and second stages of the study provided information regarding the nature of loss and grief among the flood victims and showed two main themes that emerged which were physical losses and psychological losses.

A) Physical losses

Physical losses refer to tangible losses which involved losses of home, possessions, school materials (books, stationery, certificate and personal identification information evident), foods and drinks, vehicles, clothes, and financial.

B) Psychological losses

Psychological losses refer to intangible losses which involved losses of hope for the future, loss of feeling safe and secure, loss of a routine life and sense of wellbeing. However, the main emotional issues encountered by their clients are sadness, fear, anger, trauma, shock and anxiety based on their experiences as flood victims.

The findings from the present study are in line with the events that incur loss such as Hurricane Katrina which is the most significant hurricane-related loss (Shear, 2011): Death of a loved one, work/financial losses, other tangible losses (e.g., home, possessions, memorabilia) intangible losses (e.g., quality of life, sense of well-being, control, security, way of life) and interpersonal losses (e.g., separations from family or friends, reduced quality of relationships with family and friends). It also includes inevitable consequences of flood disaster to the victims which involve loss of material/psychical, death of family members, becoming disabled, changes in daily life routine, feeling insecure and loss of hope for the future (Rahimi Che Aman, Syed Mohamad Syed Abdullah, Nor Shafrin Ahmad, Shahabudin Hashim, Abdul Rashid Mohamad & Ahmad Tajuddin Othman, 2016). The majority of the flood victims strongly agree with these criteria and agree to the help offered by the counselling services to counter the consequences of the disaster and find the appropriate coping skills. Based on those findings, it motivated the group of researchers to develop an evidence-based loss and grief counselling module on, specifically related to the flood victims.

2. The Integration of Principles in the Theories/ Models are Significant Inputs in Developing the Loss and Grief Counselling Module

The integration of principles in the Dual Process model, Solution Focused Brief Counselling and Creative Arts in Counselling are the significant inputs needed to develop the loss and grief counselling module dealing with emotional issues among the flood victims. The rationale underlying the integration of principles in the Dual Process model into the counselling module is because of criticisms of the traditional theorizing about the effective ways of coping with bereavement, most notably, with respect to the "grief work hypothesis". These criticisms include imprecise definition, failure to represent the dynamic processing that is characteristics of grieving, lack of empirical evidence and

validation across cultures and historical periods, and a limited focus on intrapersonal processes.

Therefore, a revised model of coping with bereavement, the Dual Process model, is proposed. This model identifies two types of stressors, loss-and restoration-oriented, and a dynamic, regulatory coping process of oscillation, whereby the grieving individual at times confronts, at other times avoids, the different tasks of grieving. This model proposes that adaptive coping is composed of confrontation avoidance of loss and restoration stressors. It also argues the need for the dosage of grieving, that is, the need to take a respite from dealing with either of these stressors, as an integral part of adaptive coping (Schut, 1999). With the understanding of the loss and grief principles proposed by the Dual Process model, it will help the counsellor in the implementation of a constructive way to provide counselling services to flood victims.

The principle and goal in counselling pertaining to the loss and grief issues are well discussed by Worden (2009). There are specific goals that correspond to the four tasks of mourning (Worden, 2009), which need to be focused on when counselling the flood victims. This is especially related to (1) increasing the reality of the loss, (2) helping the client deal with both emotions, (3) helping the client overcome various impediments to readjustment after the loss, and (4) helping the client find a way to maintain a bond with the losses, while feeling comfortable reinvesting in life. The mentioned goals were achieved with the appropriate counselling process, tools and techniques in counselling throughout the four individual counselling sessions.

The tools in Creative Arts in Counselling such as the use of artworks (draw a self-symbol or collage) were proposed to increase the reality of the loss in the first session of the counselling module. Apart from helping the flood victims (client) deal with both the emotional and behavioural pain, in the second session of the counselling module, the focus was placed on the exploration and identification of the presenting and real issues regarding loss and grief among flood victims. In this session, the tools used were sketching using crayons or writing a diary of the memories as they had as flood victims. Besides that, the clients were encouraged to list out the issues or problem that they encountered during the disaster. The counsellor also had a choice to use the list of the problems or just invite the client to tell the story regarding the event. Once the exploration and identification of the present and real issues was completed, the counsellor used the miracle question technique to persuade the flood victims to envision the future and describe life without the problems. This technique will encourage hope by focusing on future possibilities (Murphy, 2008). This perspective focus on what life would be like for the flood victims if the hopes were realized. A miracle question is a potent tool for accessing goals, and will help counsellor avoid getting mired in problems before the counsellor knows where the clients want to go (Littrell, 1998). In the counselling of clients who knew their destination, it was discovered that they were more eager to participate in the session than those who were still preoccupied with their problems. For example, the implementation of the miracle question such as *"if tonight while you are sleeping, something shifts and the problem that brings you here was solved"*;

How would you know?

What would you be noticing as different tomorrow?

What would your (parent, siblings, friends) notice about you that would give them the idea that things are better for you?

Once the goal of counselling session was established using the miracle question, an alternative plan was designed

based on the client's resources. A further step will discuss the alternative and action used to achieve the goal. An example of the activities was such as watching a clip video as the modelling technique in the session. This technique was designed for the session in order to expose the victims to new ideas regarding their new roles and identities in doing new things. It strengthened the existing resources and planned the actions that will help the clients reach their goals. Besides that, the elements of encouragement and positive reinforcement helped to inspire the clients to change and achieve their goals. The scaling question was proposed to help counsellor to assess the achievement of the client before the termination session. Finally, the counsellor must properly plan the termination session once the goals have been achieved by the clients. In this session, the related information regarding follow-up sessions were also discussed.

The use of a solution-focused brief counselling support by the previous research was effective to improve the internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems of children who had classroom-related behavior problems within a school setting. Five to seven sessions of solution-focused brief therapy services were provided to 67 children, identified by the school faculty and staff as those needing assistance to solve their behavioral problems (Franklin, Moore, & Hopson, 2008). This research was also supported by Birdsall and Miller (2002), who focused on resources, assets that the clients have and on the encouragement by the counsellor. It worked with a variety of clients.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this systematic and structured loss and grief counselling module has effectively benefited counsellors in providing counselling services to the flood victims. The integration of the principles in the Dual Process model, Solution Focused Brief Counselling and Creative Arts in Counselling are the significant inputs in developing the loss and grief counselling module, dealing with the emotional issues among the flood victims. In practical term, the multiple counselling techniques used are namely miracle question, scaling question, drawing, and modelling; which are known to be helpful in facilitating the four sessions of the counselling process. This result suggests that for the expansion of research on loss and grief issues need to exceed beyond bereavement; there is also a need to make educators, counsellors and clinicians aware of the need to address post-disaster grief associated with a wide range of losses. This owes to the uniqueness of individuals when they have to face the reality of losses with their extensive adaptability of using different coping skills. The efforts are needed to ensure that the surviving flood victims manage to remain in good wellbeing and continue to sustain it.

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