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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 78 (2013) 576 – 580

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

PSIWORLD 2012

A Transactional Analysis Group Psychotherapy Programme for Improving the Qualities and Abilities of Future Psychologists

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to study if a Transactional Analysis Group Psychotherapy Programme improves the psychology students' qualities and abilities specific for the profession of psychologist. A 12 sessions Programme was conducted for 23 Psychology College students. The pretest and posttest assessment tool was the California Psychological Inventory 260. Statistically significant results were found for Selfsatisfaction level and Psychological Mindedness, and also for other 2 psychological traits: Self Acceptance and Creativity. The implementation of the Programme contributes to increase the psychology students' qualities and abilities needed for the occupation of psychologist.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of PSIWORLD 2012

Keywords: Transactional Analysis, Group Psychotherapy, qualities, abilities, psychologists, Selfsatisfaction, Psychological Mindedness, Self Acceptance, Creativity.

1. Introduction

The positive way the role of the group is perceived in accomplishing the subjects' expectancies, meets the findings of other studies on the effectiveness of group therapy role in achieving the group participants goal (Yalom, 1985; Ettin, 1992; Maglo, 2002; Wolf et al., 1993; Meyers, 1996; Ballhausen-Scharf & Rudnitzki, 2000; Fuehrer & Keys, 1988) [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [7].

Many studies indicated that Transactional Analysis group psychotherapy improves the quality of group participants' life, enhances personal development level and develops the individual's autonomy.

In 1974, Thweatt integrated Transactional Analysis in a university programme and then requested feedback from students who were trained under that university programs. Most students have found Transactional Analysis to be important on a personal level; in addition, the Transactional Analysis study revealed an increased self-

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awareness level and improved personal relationships with others (Thweatt, 1974)[8]. Amundson and Sawatzky (1976) [9] have described the effects of Transactional Analysis theory-based educational program for children. The results showed that the educational program resulted in significant increase in the students self-esteem. In 1994, Lilian Wissink conducted a quasiexperiment by which he studied the effects of a six weeks Transactional Analysis based program, and the application of specific Transactional Analysis techniques (*selfparenting*) on students' self-esteem. The results showed significant differences on self-esteem in the experimental group subjects compared to the control group subjects, in favor of the former. (Wissink, 1994) [10].

Newton and Temple's research has shown positive effects of an Transactional Analysis educational module included in the Integrative Master Program of the Plymouth University, on different educational contexts' students. There were significant increases in the subjects' levels of self-knowledge and professional efficiency (Newton & Temple, 2003) [11].

The results of the studies conducted by Liikanen and Lerkkanen (apud Lerkkanen & Temple, 2004) showed that Transactional Analysis can be an effective tool for improving the pedagogy students' qualities, for personal development and self-knowledge [12].

2. Methodology

2.1. Objective and research hypothesis

The objective of this research is to study if a Transactional Analysis Group Psychotherapy Programme can improve the psychology students' qualities and abilities specific for the profession of psychologist: Tolerance, Psychological Mindedness, Emotional Self-control, Empathy, Sociability, Amicability, Satisfisfaction Level. The research hypothesis: A Transactional Analysis Group Psychotherapy Programme will improve the psychology students' qualities and abilities specific for the profession of psychologist.

2.2. Sample and respondents

The research sample consists of 23 students, voluntarily selected from the Psychology Faculty - "Tibiscus" University of Timisoara. The average age was 30.74 years (minimum 19 and maximum 52). The research is a quasiexperimental study.

2.3. Psychological instruments used in the research

California Psychological Inventory 260 – is a 260 items personality questionnaire, with dichotomous responses (true-false). The inventory measures 35 distinct personality dimensions and three additional vectorial scales. The 35 dimensions are grouped in five major areas: *Interpersonal Orientation, Self-Management, Motivations and Cognitive Style, Personal Characteristics, Work related measures*. The author of the questionnaire is Harrison G. Gough. The licence for CPI 260 is owned in Romania by D&D Consultants Grup SRL.[13]

The Transactional Analysis Group Psychotherapy Programme – consists in a series of twelve 3 hours weekly group therapy sessions. In these sessions self-knowledge and personal development elements and techniques specific to Transactional Analysis were used. Transactional analysis was born as a group of theories developed by Eric Berne and represents: (1) an expository personality theory, (2) a psychotherapeutical system dedicated to personal development and change and (3) a theory of communication based on the analysis of transactions (the International Transactional Analysis Association definition, [www. itaa-net.org](http://www.ita-net.org))[14].

2.4. Procedure

The 23 students were randomly distributed in two therapy groups. Before starting the *Transactional Analysis Group Psychotherapy Programme*, the psychology students' qualities and abilities specific for the profession of psychologist were pretest assessed using CPI 260. The same *Transactional Analysis Group Psychotherapy Programme* for both groups was conducted by the same psychotherapist, for three months. After the Programme ended, the psychology students' qualities and abilities specific for the profession of psychologist were posttest assessed using CPI 260.

3. Results and discussions

To accomplish the objective of the study, a quasiexperimental study was conducted. For the statistical processing of data, the SPSS 13.0 program was used.

Table 1. Statistical indicators for the psychology students' qualities and abilities specific for the profession of psychologist.

Variable	Mean	Std.dev.
Selfsatisfaction level	40.34	16.98
Sociability	48.39	10.07
Empathy	48.66	10.31
Emotional selfcontrol	48.09	9.23
Tolerance	49.38	11.46
Psychological mindedness	46.17	9.97
Amicability	47.23	9.97

Note: N=23

Following the statistical analysis of data, (using the two related samples Wilcoxon test), the results were statistically significant in the case of one psychological trait only: the *Selfsatisfaction Level* ($z=-2.276$, $p\leq.05$, ($p=.023$)). Statistical differences for *Psychological Mindedness* are close to the limit of the statistical significance, thus accepting the possibility of the existence of significant differences in the case of this variable, also ($z=-1.813$, $p>.05$, ($p=.07$)) (see table 2). Differences are recorded on two out of the seven psychology students' qualities and abilities specific for the profession of psychologist. Statistically significant differences were also found within other psychological traits of the other twentytwo psychological characteristics assessed by CPI 260, which were not initially included among the specific qualities and abilities of the profession of psychologist: *Self Acceptance* ($z=-2.062$, $p\leq.05$, ($p=.039$)) and *Creativity* ($z=-2.355$, $p\leq.05$, ($p=.019$)). The hypothesis was partially confirmed.

Table 2. Comparison of the psychology students' qualities and abilities specific for the profession of psychologist before and after implementing the Programme

Variable	Z	p
Selfsatisfaction level	-2.276	.023
Sociability	-1.393	.164
Empathy	-.504	.614
Emotional selfcontrol	-.262	.794
Tolerance	-.567	.571
Psychological mindedness	-1.813	.070
Amicability	-.926	.355

4. Conclusions

The objective of this research was to study if a Transactional Analysis Group Psychotherapy Programme improves the psychology students' qualities and abilities specific for the profession of psychologist: *Tolerance, Psychological Mindedness, Emotional Self-control, Empathy, Sociability, Amicability, Selfsatisfaction Level*. After implementing the Programme, improvements were found in only two out of the seven studied traits: *Selfsatisfaction Level* and *Psychological Mindedness*.

Gough (apud Pitariu et al. 2006) includes the self esteem concept in the concept of *Selfsatisfaction level*, which describes the psychological competency level, the integration of the ego, and the personal achievement level [15]. The increase of the psychology students' *Selfsatisfaction level* leads to harmonise their life aspects, to maximize their own talents and abilities and to improve prosocial attitudes. A student having an increased level of selfsatisfaction will be concerned by future personal development and evolution, and will also have a high self esteem and low anxiety. All these improvements will enhance the quality of the future psychologists as professionals and the quality of their social work, which will be in the major benefit of their clients/patients.

In Transactional Analysis concepts, the Programme's effect consists in the increase of autonomy, which represents the objective for change in Transactional Analysis therapy. According to Berne "Autonomy is the onset or recovery of three capacities: *awareness, spontaneity* and *intimacy*." [16]

The positive effects of the Programme and therapy group on the participants have also materialised in increasing their *Psychological Mindedness*. The *Psychological Mindedness*' level is a "consistent predictor of academic and professional performance in the field of psychology" (Pitariu et al., 2006) [17]. This quality will lead to significant positive changes on the future psychologist's ability to understand others, on sensitivity and interest in the clients' and patients' intimate needs, motives and experiences. Psychology students with a high level of *Psychological Mindedness* will easier mobilize and direct their intellectual effort onto the goal to become future competent psychologists, thus maximizing their cognitive and intellectual abilities, being more attracted to scientific research, having rational and balanced judgements, with no preconceived opinions, they will not jump into conclusions and will be bias free.

The Transactional Analysis Group Psychotherapy Programme had positive results on two other personality characteristics: *Self-acceptance* and *Creativity*. Although these two personality traits were not initially included in the category of specific qualities and abilities for the profession of psychologist, they are very useful in this helping profession. A psychology student with an increased level of *Self-acceptance* is a person who has given himself/herself permissions to accept himself/herself the way he/she is, creating the secure base for further healthy personal and professional growth and development. By raising his/her level of *Creativity*, a psychology student will be a future professional with a creative and out-of-the-box thinking, having a great intuition, being spontaneous and with many resources available. A creative future psychologist will have great resources of psychic energy: *physis* – "the growth force of nature" [18]. From a Transactional Analysis frame of reference, creativity originates in the Natural Child Ego State. The definition of an Ego State is: "a consistent pattern of feeling and experience directly related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behavior." [19] Individuals manifest three certain sets of thoughts, feelings and behaviors at different moments of time. Berne called these sets Ego States: Child, Adult and Parent. Later, Dusay observed that the Parent Ego State is comprised by Critical Parent and Nurturing Parent, the Child Ego State by Adapted Child and Natural Child [20]. Results in improving creativity through Transactional Analysis group therapy has obtained Klimis Navridis (Navridis, 2006) [21] and also Boholst [22].

Having a high level of Natural Child, the psychology student has a good knowledge of his/her psychological needs and has the ability to feed and nurture these needs, thus reducing the possibility of unconsciously entering the transference and countertransference phenomena which are occurring between the future professional and their clients/patients.

One of the limitations of this study is represented by the small number of participants.

The beneficiaries of the Programme presented in this research are the psychology faculties students. The utility of the implementation of the Programme consists in that it responds to the needs for personal development and self-knowledge of psychology undergraduates. The Programme contributes to increase the qualities needed in the profession of psychologist while still in the Bachelor's degree period, thus students are completing their academical training with the benefits of the Programme in the same period of time.

The psychology students are the recipients of the self-knowledge and personal development hours regardless of the psychological field of specialization they are opting for after graduation because the work of the psychologist is to optimize human behavior, thinking, personality and emotional life in all contexts the individual operates.

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