

Psychological Counseling of Clients in Crisis Situations

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Abstract: *The article expands scientific ideas about methods and techniques of dealing with crisis situations in different approaches to psychological counseling of clients who are experiencing current crisis realities in a complex social space. Different psychological approaches to the problem of the impact of psychological counseling on the crisis states of clients at the integrative and systemic levels are analyzed. Significant features of the approaches most often used in the practice of crisis psychological counseling –gestalt-therapeutic, cognitive-behavioral, and existential– are highlighted. Based on the generalization of the theoretical and methodological foundations of crisis counseling, the important role of subject-activity, professionally competent, personality-oriented approaches is highlighted. The importance of maintaining a person’s mental health in a crisis and providing him/her with psychological assistance in counseling and therapeutic practice is emphasized. A theoretical and methodological approach to the requirements for the criteria of consulting practice effectiveness is indicated. The structurization, conditions for organization and providing crisis counseling at different stages (areas) of work is described. The use of a neuropsychocorrective approach in the practice of crisis counseling is recommended. The significance of the integrative psychological approach to counseling mentioned by foreign and domestic researchers on the basis of a holistic vision of the relationship between the client’s psychological resources and the requirements of the crisis situation is noted. It is emphasized that the management of crisis education should be handled by the personnel services of organizations of extreme profile.*

Keywords: *Crisis situations; the neuropsychocorrective approach; traumatic bereavement; gestalt therapy; cognitive-behavioral approach; existential approach; psychological resources.*

How to cite: Demchenko, I., Simko, R., Hudyma, O., Levchuk, N., Shportun, O., & Samara, O. (2022). Psychological Counseling of Clients in Crisis Situations. *BR.AIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 13(3), 104-118. <https://doi.org/10.18662/brain/13.3/356>

Introduction

In the life of a contemporary individual crisis is a regular event: either unexpected or psychotraumatic, or unscathed. In today's world, social crises are a test of an individual for stress, a vector of change in human destiny, a vital test of the ability to withstand strong physical, intellectual and emotional stress. Up to now, domestic specialists of counseling centers for psychological assistance to the population provide support to victims of civil strife and migrants from the Crimea and eastern regions of Ukraine; carry out rehabilitation work with post-traumatic stress disorders of servicemen; carry out counseling-psychological, psycho-correctional, psychotherapeutic work with those who have psychosomatic illnesses, experience a reaction of acute grief or panic attacks, are prone to suicide or have already tried to commit it, depressed or lost their jobs - due to pandemics. Such crisis situations destroy the usual ways for a person to overcome critical situations and cause crises in them.

The study of the impact of crisis psychological counseling on activation of internal psychological resources, individual capabilities to overcome crises by the client, is undoubtedly extremely relevant for applied psychology, the practice of crisis psychologists and psychotherapists and a significant demand of contemporary individual. The practical significance and novelty of the problem studied in the article lies in the expansion of scientific understanding of methods and techniques of dealing with crisis situations in different approaches to psychological counseling of clients experiencing contemporary crisis realities in a complex social space. The purpose of the article is to analyze different psychological approaches to the problem of the impact of mental counseling on the crisis conditions of clients, modern scientific approaches to the methodological foundations of the organization and carrying out consultation process with clients experiencing crisis at the integrative and systemic levels.

Basic psychological approaches to crisis counseling

The literature on psychological counseling and psychotherapy presents various models of counseling for a client in crisis. Despite the existence of stable algorithms for structuring and providing counseling, the most important in counseling interaction is the client's consideration of his/her problem and analysis of his/her emotional response to the crisis, so the counselor determines the goals and hypotheses of counseling and selects methods of activating internal resources in the client. It is important to find

out from the client not only the experience of resolving crisis situations, but also to discuss the result of the desired solution to the problem. If in the counseling process the client's information about himself/herself is the most important, then in the work of the counselor –is the choice of the most successful counseling technologies in the correct psychological approaches (their methods and techniques) according to the information received from the client. Given that each client is unique, and the crisis situation in the contemporary social space can be in many respects truly unique, despite the variety of counseling psychological approaches, there should be an integrative work to include in the counseling technologies individually selected for the client.

Counseling technologies of helping a contemporary individual in overcoming unpredictable crises situations that occur frequently in today's social space of pandemics, wars and catastrophes, offer psychological approaches to normalize the mental state, expand the arsenal of constructive strategies for psychological well-being and experience of adaptation to crisis conditions. Cognitive-behavioral counseling is the leading direction in providing psychological assistance to a person who finds himself/herself in a life (social) crisis and is excessively worried about his/her inquietude, experiencing fear and insecurity.

Counseling within gestalt psychology orients the client to comprehend gestalts and develop in oneself the correct gestalts, i.e., the correct perception of oneself, surrounding people, situations, human relationships, etc. Their formation and completion depends on the individual's ability to clearly define their needs, the ability to come into contact with the environment in order to meet these needs. The problem of a person with a broken contact boundary is that he/she appears in a situation of incomplete gestalts (unfinished, unresolved problems). The task of the counselor within gestalt therapy is to help the client take responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, behavior and stay in the present without being distracted by the future or past. At the same time, gestalt therapy underestimates the cognitive aspects of the client's personality, focusing only on current experiences.

The approach to counseling in existential psychology involves addressing the following basic problems of the client in relation to existential conflicts: between awareness of their own freedom and the need to be responsible for their lives, between the need to have meaning in life and realizing indifference of the outside world, between the awareness of global

loneliness and a desire to be a part of something greater in one's life, between the awareness of the inevitability of death and the desire to prolong life. Such conflicts can cause fears, anxieties or increased nervousness in everyone from time to time. However, a person needs psychological support when a crisis situation exacerbates existential conflicts and neurotizes the psychological development of an individual.

In any psychological approach to counseling, its basis is a counsellor's dialogue with the client, i.e., a communicative interaction. Kellogg (2018) in the psychotherapeutic model of dialogue considers an integrative approach that covers cognitive, behavioral, existential, psychodynamic aspects. External dialogues help the client to get through grief and loss, heal injuries. Internal dialogues, in turn, focus on resolving internal conflicts, combating the negative consequences of internal criticism, and the experience of self-suggestion. Kolmannskog (2018) assures that in gestalt therapy through dialogue, clients can test themselves more, learn about others and the world around.

Crisis situations in society lead to deterioration of human mental health, which requires crisis intervention with a focus on achieving realistic goals (Smith, 2006). As a result of any crisis situation, a person may develop a crisis state - a mental (psychological) state of a person who suddenly faced a subjectively significant trauma (due to unpredictable changes in life, intrapersonal picture of the world) or which is at risk of a traumatic situation - a state disorganization of the individual, which may be due to both internal factors and a particular situation. Significant characteristics of the crisis are its duration and intensity. Crisis states are characterized by the following experiences: despair, fear, anxiety, anger, resentment, frustration, depressed mood, etc.; ideas: narrowing of consciousness, search for culprits, escape from reality; loss of meaning in life. A personality becomes disorganized, anxiety, depression, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness increase; the emergence of negative or positive changes that lead to degradation or development of a personality who has faced a crisis situation (Kisarchuk et al., 2015).

Clients with borderline personality disorders are prone to experiencing acute crises and need highly specialized counseling. Therefore, Gonzalez-Torres (2018) offers psychoanalytic psychotherapeutic methods for clients with borderline personality disorders, under the influence of which clients improve their mental abilities, understanding of themselves and others, integrate identity, increase self-regulation.

Crisis counseling is a specific type of psychological counseling that provides psychological support and assistance to a healthy but emotionally, intellectually and physically exhausted person in difficult, challenging circumstances. Al-Sulaiman et al., (2018), in an empirical study of crisis situations in women with high anxiety and depression confirmed a positive impact of crisis counseling and psychoeducation on them.

There are three principal directions of psychological counseling: problem-oriented counseling, which focuses on the analysis of the essence of internal and external causes of the problem, finding ways to solve it (family counseling); personality-oriented counseling aimed at analyzing individual, personal causes of problematic and conflict situations, ways to prevent them in the future, as well as contributes to the personal maturation of the client; decision-oriented counseling aimed at identifying resources to solve a psychological problem (short-term positive therapy, neurolinguistic programming, new solution psychotherapy, etc.) (Cherezova, 2016; Demchenko et al., 2021; Kosholap et al., 2021; Prots et al., 2021; Sandu & Nistor, 2020). Crisis clients counseling should combine these three directions of psychological counseling as an integrative creative process given the resourcefulness of the client's personality, the complexity of the crisis situation and factors of formation (both external and internal) and psychological features of the course of client's crisis.

The stages of counseling clients who are in crisis: listening and clarifying the situation, the client's position, his/her life attitudes, relationships, desires, needs, fantasies, plans, etc. (the techniques of active listening and clarifying questions); identification of key experiences and the crisis problems (discussion of ways to solve crisis problems); creativity in creating and testing new ways to overcome the crisis. The main strategies of working with clients in a crisis situation are: the mood of the counsellor, rethinking the event by the client, de-reflexion (the client should not focus on oneself and find meaning outside "oneself"); paradoxical intention (to break the circular mechanisms of response patterns, depriving reinforcement for crisis situations). Strategies for psychological counseling aimed at reducing the level of self-destructive behavior: to enable the clients to verbalize their condition and factual outline in full detail; reassure him/her that the counselor may be helpful and interested in continuing conversation; if the client mentions any positive actions or hopes, this point should be strengthened; provide assistance in identifying actions that the client could do instead of self-destructive ones; verbally and nonverbally confirm the

understanding that self-destructive behavior demonstrates suffering of this person (Afanasieva, 2017a).

Crisis situations can be a trigger for depressed states. A depressed client needs special attention and activity from the counselor, so the frequency of meetings can be 2-3 times a week with a gradual decrease depending on the client's condition. In the process of counseling, it is necessary to overcome the client's dependence and encourage him / her to play a more active role with each subsequent meeting. The counselor should be aware of the biological and psychological predispositions of some people to depressive reactions in crisis situations. In such clients, the state of depression may recur under adverse circumstances. Depression, especially that caused by external causes, disappears if living conditions change (Tymbaliuk, 2005).

In contemporary practice of crisis counseling cognitive-behavioral approach is used quite often. Cognitive-behavioral counseling is aimed at changing a wide range of mental phenomena: deformed thinking, persistent negative mood, emotiogenic states and inconsistent client behavior. It is important for the counselor to have a clear idea of how to interact with the client, what techniques and methods to use, what cognitive changes need to be provoked for the results of these changes in the counseling process to be effective. The client needs to understand what to expect from counseling, what he/she should focus on, what responsibilities to perform with a psychologist, what changes to expect in the near and in the distant future. Analyzing the client's complaints, assessing his/her mental state, the counselor identifies the most important points that need to be included in the agenda, start discussing personal problems and make them the objectives of counseling. Thus, the main task of each session is to determine the model of conceptualization of client's problems and drawing up a plan of corrective interventions (Bulakh et al., 2014).

Subject-activity, resource, personality-oriented approaches to the study of life crises of an individual, strategies for overcoming them and the peculiarities of psychological support and counseling are carried out at the meta-analytical, creative level in the work of Maksymenko et al. (2017). Researchers cover theoretical, methodological and applied aspects of the study of the problem of effective functioning and development of personality in various spheres of living in crisis conditions and critical life situations. Particular attention in the presented scientific work is paid to the problems of maintaining mental health and providing psychological

assistance in counseling and therapeutic practice. The methodical manual prepared by scientists of the Kostyuk Institute of Psychology, edited by Kisarchuk et al., (2015), summarizes the authors' own experience in providing psychological assistance to victims of extreme events in Ukraine, which has the most significant contribution to the practical significance of our work. It covers some important theoretical aspects of experiencing crisis traumatic situations, considers the practice of providing psychological assistance to various categories of victims, describes the work of the "Hotline" service. We have fully used the works of Bulakh et al. (2014) and Malkina-Pyih (2005) to analyze psychological approaches to counseling clients in crisis situations using psychotherapeutic methods and techniques.

Ahmad (2018) in his work argues that counsellors should be creative and try to avoid a unified approach to crisis intervention. Crisis intervention is a method used by psychologists, counsellors, social workers and assistants to solve crisis problems. Crisis intervention aims to support a person with a mental health crisis and to stabilize or restore balance to normal functioning. Lack of knowledge and understanding of effective ways to handle a crisis can create another crisis for clients. Professionalism and ethical problem of counsellors involves taking into account the psychological culture, beliefs, values of clients. Lobb (2018) emphasizes that psychological approaches, in particular gestalt therapeutical and psychoanalytic, need to be constantly updated according to clients' requests to meet their needs and social requirements.

The development of a state of crisis or personal resistance to crises as a high level of stress resistance can be explained by functioning of psi-programs as personal resources in the energy concept of the psyche and the mental. Psi-programs of the human psyche - is a tool for the implementation of operational and functional transformations of both external and internal mental on the basis of the existing mental, its psycho-energy, its perception, processing, transformation and transmission. Psi-program is an internal mental, formed on the basis of unconscious or conscious fixed instruction with its psy-code, which activates another internal and/or external mental according to this code and directs it to implementation of the information contained in it (fixed instruction). Overcoming the crisis is the formation of new psi-programs of behavior, relationships, lifeactivities, etc., at the conscious and subconscious levels of the psyche. Completion of formation of new psi-programs indicates that the person has overcome the crisis. In the process of helping a person experiencing a crisis, the psychologist can

carry out formation of psi-programs, using the energy power (resource) of the unconscious, subconscious, conscious and superconscious. Therefore, the psychologist should focus his activities on the formation of a person experiencing a crisis, new psy-programs of actions, behavior, activities, achieving goals, implementing ideas, overcoming obstacles, etc. To do this, he/she should form appropriate fixed (program) guidelines in the human psyche and activate them (Varii, 2017).

Analysis of theoretical and methodological approaches to determining the effectiveness of psychological counseling allows us to conclude about the universal criteria of effectiveness, distinguished by experts regardless of their experience, belonging to the method and number of sessions: in the field of individual characteristics of the counsellor - empathy, level of personal processing of problems, interest in clients; in the field of individual characteristics of the client - motivation for change, reflexivity, openness, responsibility; in the field of features of interaction of the counsellor and the client - trust, contact, openness, a clear contract; in the field of sustainability, duration and significance of changes in the client - raising self-awareness, problems, ways to solve it, which maintains stability for life, and the optimal number of sessions/consultations (from 4 to 15). In an eclectic, humanistic approach, one of the important criteria for the effectiveness of the consultation process is tolerance of uncertainty, acceptance of personal responsibility, setting realistic goals; in psychodynamic - high communication skills, professional and life experience; in the subject-activity - development of self-regulation, acquisition of the ability to solve one's own problems, gaining potential to provide psychological assistance to other people. In addition, the format of the effective counselling work should combine narrative, problem-oriented, systematic and solution-oriented approaches (Afanasieva, 2017b).

It is known that the trigger for a crisis is a stress response. From a physiological point of view, emotional reactions to the unpredictability of events under the influence of life crises are characterized by the inclusion in the response of many physiological systems at the psychophysiological, electrophysiological, biochemical levels. The result of experiencing chronic crises is a pathogenic effect on the central mechanisms or individual somatic or visceral functions, the central nervous system, especially the cortex of the large hemispheres. Burgdorf and Panksepp (2006) explained in detail the relationship between psycho-emotional stress and its discharge and systemic brain mechanisms, including parts of the limbic system, cortex and

subcortical formations. McEwen (2007) describes in detail how the brain as a key organ of stress response determines physiological and behavioral responses, and maladaptive ones indicate low human stress resistance. In this regard, we see the most appropriate neuro-psycho-corrective approach in counseling activities to normalize the mental state of a client in crisis.

Therefore, in the theoretical and methodological basis of crisis counseling of clients in crisis, it is important for an effective consultation process to apply the subject-activity, professionally competent, personality-oriented approaches.

Methods and techniques of working with crisis situations in psychological counseling

The purpose of crisis psychological counseling is professionally competent provision of psychological assistance to the client in crisis, in the activation of his/her personal resources, including responsibility and subjective activity in resolving the crisis situation with emotional support and partnership, resulting in a change in the client's attitude to the crisis problems, there is creative potential appearing in its transformation, expands consciousness and increases the psychological culture of behavior in the crisis realities of the social environment.

Structurization, conditions of organizing and conducting crisis counseling in order to study the client's crisis and activate internal resources to overcome the crisis should be subject to the following stages (directions of work): collecting information about the psychological problem and individual potentiality of its solutions by the client, identification of a crisis event with a reflection of the emotional response to stressors, conducting a psychodiagnostic study of the peculiarities of the crisis state manifestation and personal problem, formulating the goals of counseling in accordance with the client's request; psychological analysis of the problem and possible ways to solve it with the client, consideration of its causes and consequences, reformulation of the problem according to the development of reflection of personal resources and division of the problem into small parts in case of insufficient information about the dominant problem; joint discussion of ways to solve the problem with development of recommendations and forecasts and hypotheses on the assumption of the causes of difficulties; actually a practical stage associated with the further search for opportunities to address the crisis and internal problems of the client, psycho-corrective impact on his/her maladaptive experiences and behavior,

restoring the pre-crisis level of mental activity of the client, removing symptoms of crisis influence, awareness and rethinking by the client of the impact of crisis situations on dysfunction and imbalance in mental states, individual development of health-preserving technologies and methods of development of stress resistance in similar crisis situations; the final stage with the assessment of constructive strategies for overcoming the crisis, identifying the degree of customer satisfaction with the cooperation with the psychologist in terms of expectations and feedback.

The forms and directions of crisis psycho-consultative work offered by us are generalized on the basis of domestic and foreign literature. At each of the counseling stages it is necessary to take into account the individual approach, the uniqueness of each counseling case, the specificity of the client's crisis due to various crisis situations, including job loss or the loved one, psychosomatic or post-traumatic stress disorders; suicidal risk factors - beliefs, external circumstances, as well as biographical and medical, emotional and cognitive indicators of suicide risk.

In counseling clients with complex mental states (undoubtedly, they include a crisis state), a psychologist often uses psychotherapeutic methods and elements of mini-trainings. The most successful for working with crisis clients with psychosomatic disorders are the methodological developments of domestic researchers Zlyvkov et al. (2016) - their methodological approaches to the organization of post-stress recovery trainings are devoted to the analysis of various aspects of post-traumatic growth training with the following key topics: rethinking the individual's own meaning of life and changing life priorities; trauma as a source of self-development; formation of a new image of the Self and acceptance of one's own physical body. Closely related to the rethinking of the meaning of life is one of the most popular concepts of mindfulness in domestic psychotherapy today - awareness of the present moment with its adoption. The following therapeutic programs are identified in the context of the mindfulness approach: Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectic Behavioral Therapy (DBT), Mode Deactivation Therapy (MDT), Morita Therapy, Kacomi Therapy, Adaptation Practices, Mandfulness Relaxation, Model of Intra-Familial Systems. Thus, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a combination of Mandfulness of Meditations, awareness of one's own body and yoga, which results in: a significant reduction in anxiety, depression and aggressiveness, an increase in the ability to relax, increased vital energy, the

growth of self-esteem, forming stress management skills; Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT).

In cognitive-behavioral counseling, not only strategies of cognitive counseling are used (Socratic dialogue, controlled research, the method of falling arrows, the technique of active imagination, role games, methods of rigid, soft and objective denial of irrational ideas, homework, etc.), but also techniques borrowed from other areas of counseling (behavioral, gestalt therapy, NLP, etc.). The choice of technique is determined by the specificity of a personal problem or every traumatic event of the client and the tasks set by a counsellor (Bulakh et al., 2014). Cognitive-behavioral counseling technologies are effective for correction of complex personal problems. Thus, foreign researchers Donyavi et al., (2015) consider the cognitive-behavioral model of neurotic and psychosomatic problems of individuals that may be associated with generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive and post-traumatic stress disorder. At the same time, in practice of crisis counseling, counsellors often integrate cognitive-behavioral technologies with methods for counseling existential approach and family psychotherapy. Thus, Khodayarifard and Fatemi (2013) describe the therapeutic intervention of spiritual practices with a combination of cognitive-behavioral and family therapy.

A counsellor is always responsible for the counseling process, but special attention needs those clients who have lost a close person. To work with the bereaved Malkina-Pyih (2005) offers to use gestalt-therapy methods, neurolinguistic programming, cognitive-behavioral therapy, family psychotherapy, and psychotherapy of emotional injuries with the help of eye movement –the technique of de-sensibilization and processing of traumatic experience with the help of eye movement. The eye movement technique is used successfully in the work with post-traumatic stress disorders informer combatants, victims of violence, disasters and natural phenomena, as well as in case of phobia, panic and dissociative disorders.

The crisis state may have a different degree of complexity in manifestations - intensity, duration, specificity of the dynamics of the development. The crisis as one of the conditions of the crisis state can expand personal resources without psychological support from outside, and may become one of the causes of mental disorders. We believe that specialists of extreme professions that are often in crisis situations and have a low level of motivation to visit a psychologist, it is desirable to periodically consult on the prevention of transition of crisis states of varying degrees in

chronic and personal, psychosomatic, depressive and neurotic disorders. Management of crisis information should be dealt with in personnel services of extreme profile organizations.

Conclusion

Taking into account the specificity and complexity of crisis situations and crisis states, it is necessary in the practice of crisis counseling to carry out an integrative approach that offers clients in crisis, processing techniques of different approaches, primarily cognitive-behavioral, gestalt-psychological and neuropsychic reduction approach, existential and family psychotherapy. The integrative psychological approach to counseling is focused on the creative work of the counsellor with orientation to a holistic vision of the relationship of the client's psychological resources and the requirements of the crisis situation, resulting in "reprogramming" of cognitive styles of thinking in persons with stressful reactions, changing emotional response to a crisis problem, appears an adaptation potential to transform a critical situation.

In theoretical and methodological foundations of crisis counseling of clients who are in a crisis state, important for an effective counselling process are the use of a subject-activity, professionally competent, person-oriented approaches. The choice of technologies of one or another approach to crisis psychic counseling is determined by the specificity of personal problems, psychological resources of the client, professional competence of the counsellor, counseling tasks and purposes. Contemporary scientific approaches to the methodological foundations of the organization and holding of a counseling process with customers who are experiencing current crisis realities in a complex social space should be implemented on the integrative and system levels.

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