OPEN TO NOT KNOWING: Existential and Process-Oriented Approaches to Therapy with Elders with Dementia

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to highlight the relevant and effective components of Existential and Process-Oriented approaches to the clinical treatment of elders with dementia. The study draws upon a qualitative research design which allowed for the exploration of the therapist's inherent relational unfolding and the concept of ‘resilience.” Each client deserves a unique therapeutic intervention, and as the therapist's role becomes more of an evolution, the intervention will reveal itself in the client's unique experience. This study's research findings validate the philosophical assumptions of Existential and Process-Oriented approaches to therapy with elders with dementia.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What comprises effective clinical treatment with elders with dementia within the theoretical frameworks of Existential and Process-Oriented approaches to psychotherapy?

METHODOLOGY

Phase 1: Qualitative Interviewing

Ten predoctoral and postdoctoral therapist interns at Pacific Institute, who had been working with their elder clients with dementia for a total of 6 months, were interviewed using semi-structured questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of their self-perceived effective approaches to therapy.

Phase 2: Data Management

All interviews were transcribed and imported into the QRS Nvivo 11 computer software program, a qualitative research tool for sophisticated management and analysis of textual data.

Phase 3: Inductive/Driven Coding

The interview transcripts were coded using a qualitative thematic analysis method designed to identify and distill emergent themes.

Phase 4: Inter-rater Reliability

The first two interview transcripts were coded by two independent coders, and the resulting themes were refined through a methodological process to ensure inter-rater reliability. Reliability of this code was determined by two factors: (a) the consistency of thematic development of two separate coders, and (b) the consistency of derived themes over the span of six different interviews.

Phase 5: Validity – The Final Code

The final four interviews were coded with the newly established reliable code to validate the identified themes across the entire sample. Any resultant discrepancies of judgment between the interviewers were again discussed and reconciled in this final stage of further refining the definitions and determining the saturation density of the distilled themes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the philosophical underpinnings of Pacific Institute did not explicitly foster this study’s findings, it must be taken into account that Pacific Institute fosters the clinician to think outside the box, to be open, and to be ready to think critically about the client’s experience. These results are intended to inform clinicians and researchers interested in either or both the elderly and their caregivers and the implications of this work. For instance, the intense focus of this research may be encouraged to gauge the effectiveness of these approaches with elders with dementia in other settings as well as other populations using the Existential and Process-Oriented Therapeutic Approaches.

RESEARCH CONCLUSION

This study’s research findings validate the philosophical assumptions of Existential and Process-Oriented psychologies as being not only relevant, but also uniquely appropriate and effective, in the therapeutic treatment of elders with dementia.