

Literature Review on Logotherapy

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Abstract

This article is a literature review on logotherapy developed by Viktor Frankl following the years of World War II. Firstly, background information of logotherapy is introduced. Afterwards, philosophical background of logotherapy is discussed. Then, effectiveness of group logotherapy based on researches conducted at last 10 years was presented. Finally, techniques and structures of group logotherapy were given.

Keywords: *Logotherapy; Group Counseling*

Introduction: Background of Logotherapy

The concept of existential search for meaning can be said to be as old as the history of self-conscious human beings. Sooner or later, every person naturally asks herself about what she is doing in this life or what is the thing that she wants to achieve with it. Is life worth living or not? If yes, how to live it? Also, life is pretty pleasing when we feel successful, happy and joyful. However, what about the hardships that all of us go through at some point in our lives? Is it still worth living when it is painful? And if we should keep going, why exactly are we enduring these adversities? What is the meaning of it all?

Apart from all these questions above, psychology developed as a secular field of science. And positivist science, studies what is observable and measurable, it doesn't actually answer the "why"s but it answers "how"s. Since the subject of "meaning" is not an observable thing, it was not a particular interest of psychology and psychologists at the beginning.

Founder of logotherapy, Viktor Frankl was one of the few to integrate meaning into psychotherapy. He developed logotherapy after he was held captive in Nazi camps during the World War II. Frankl [1] mentions his experiences throughout the years of captivity in his book called *Man's Search for Meaning*. He observed behaviors of other captives, how they lived or died. In order to briefly mention the conditions of camps, firstly people were divided into two groups. The ones who were physically disabled or sick were sent to gas chambers. And the ones who seemed to be healthy had to work during the harsh winter without a coat or jacket to develop railways for Nazis to be able to stay alive. They were paid with a handful of stale bread and sometimes with soup. Some of the captives got ill and died, and some committed suicide due to the abusive conditions. However, many of them insisted on staying alive. Some of them kept living by detaching from the circumstances they are in or with the help of humor, but these were the answers of "how". Therefore, Frankl contemplated on the reason "why" they stayed alive. According to him, it was the meaning of life [1].

Frankl [1] suggested that people have no power over the conditions. However, they have power over their actions in every condition. They can choose how to act and behave. This power is the thing that gives people their freedom. People are free as long as they have the right to choose. Even in a situation where you have to work as a slave under the command of your enemy, you still have a choice, for example to live or to die. This is what makes people responsible; since you have the choice, you are responsible for your actions. Similarly, Frankl asserts that people do not need means to be able to live, what they need is a meaning or an ultimate goal to serve. Frankl found meaning in his love for his wife and the book he wants to write. At the time, he did not know that his wife was already dead at another camp. In addition, he lost essential drafts of his book in the camp. However, he held onto the love he felt and his goal to write the book helped him survive [1]. Considering the extremely deprived conditions of concentration camps, even though Frankl and all other captives had no means, some of them were still able to live.

Principles of logotherapy

Logotherapy comes from the word of logos, which means meaning. Frankl [2] stated that the name of therapy could be spiritual, too. However, the word spiritual has a religious meaning, yet the meaning people find in their lives is not necessarily religious. Based on the philosophy presented above, Frankl [2] explained fundamentals of logotherapy as following; “the freedom of will, the will to meaning, and the meaning of life”. First principle stands in contrast to the deterministic view of human action. As discussed above, although a person cannot alter the conditions and the circumstances she is in, she still has the free will to act the way she wants, options may be limited from time to time but it exists in every situation. Secondly, will to meaning he says is not a drive of a person. Frankl suggests that what one needs to achieve is to become what is beyond one’s self. Drives of a person only help to achieve inner equilibrium or self-actualization. However, what is to achieve is beyond one’s self, which is called self-transcendence. And the way to achieve it is by the will to meaning. Since people are more than creatures who only live to satisfy their desires and urges; when they discover their will to meaning than they can cope with adverse situations and sufferings. If not, they may develop a noogenic neurosis (existential frustration). Thirdly, meaning of life is ultimately subjective, it changes from person to person. Meaning of life can be discovered by one’s values. On the other hand, one’s struggles about will to meaning and meaning of life is called “existential vacuum” in which one complains from feelings of emptiness [2]. And this existential vacuum or commonly called existential crisis is linked to anxiety, depression, isolation and etc [3].

Empirical evidence on logotherapy

Looking at empirical findings on effectiveness of group logotherapy in the last 10 years, results of studies show that group logotherapy is effective in improving hope, depression, meaning of life, post traumatic embitterment, anxiety, existential anxiety, adjustment, well-being, quality of life and self-esteem.

Some of the studies indicated that group logotherapy is effective in improving hope levels of people with medical diseases such as cancer and with psychological disorders such as depression.

Ebrahimi, Bahari, and Zare-Bahramabadi [4] studied hope levels (Snyder’s Hope Scale) of patients with leukemia. Treatment group (n = 10) received 10 sessions of logotherapy. According to the results, group logotherapy was effective in improving hope of leukemic patients, and 1 month follow up findings were significant [4].

Similarly, Hosseinzadeh-Khezri, *et al.* [5] examined hope (Schneider Life Expectancy Scale) of cancer patients going through chemotherapy. 18 participants in treatment group received 8 sessions of group logotherapy, whereas 17 in control group did not receive any intervention. Although the results showed that logotherapy significantly improved the hope of cancer patients, 6 months follow up results did not show any difference between two groups. Therefore, the authors suggested that logotherapy interventions may need to be repeated over time [5].

Furthermore, Mohammadi, Fard, and Heidari [6] studied hope (Adult Hope Scale) of depressed (Beck Depression Inventory) women. Treatment group (n = 18) received 10 sessions of group logotherapy. The findings showed a significant decrease in depression levels and increase in hope of treatment group compared to control group [6].

Likewise, Robatmili, *et al.* [7] searched how logotherapy affects meaning of life (Purpose in Life) and depression levels (Beck Depression Inventory) of college students. 10 of 20 participants were randomly assigned to treatment group and received 10 sessions of group logotherapy. According to results, the authors suggested that logotherapy helps to foster meaning and a sense of direction in life, and reduce the depression level [7].

Furthermore, some other studies showed that group logotherapy can help improving post-traumatic embitterment disorder and decreasing anxiety and stress levels of women with infertility, breast cancer, and metabolic syndrome.

Düşünceli and Koç [8] examined the effectiveness of logotherapy on post-traumatic embitterment disorder (Post-Traumatic Embitterment Disorder Scale). Treatment group received 10 sessions of group logotherapy. And the final comparison between groups showed that logotherapy was effective in improving post-traumatic embitterment disorder symptoms such as resentment, disappointment, anger, helplessness and etc [8].

Mosalanejad and Koolee [9] conducted group logotherapy with infertile women and examined their distress (Penn State Worry Questionnaire and Perceived Stress Scale). 65 participants were randomly assigned to treatment (33) and control (32) groups. Participants in treatment group received 12 group therapy sessions. Consequently, perceived stress level of women in treatment group was significantly lower than the control group (which received no treatment but a seminar on infertility treatment) [9].

Mohabbat-Bahar, Golzari, Moradi-Joo and Akbari [10] examined the effectiveness of group logotherapy on anxiety levels (Beck Anxiety Inventory) of women with breast cancer. Half of 30 participants were assigned to treatment group and received 8 group logotherapy sessions. Consequently, there was a significant decrease in anxiety of treatment group compared to control group [10].

Alimohammadi and Sharifi-Daramadi [11] examined the effectiveness of logotherapy on existential anxiety (Existential Anxiety Questionnaire) of women with metabolic syndrome. Participants consisted of 30 people who were randomly assigned to control and treatment groups equally, and treatment group had 10 sessions of logotherapy. Findings of the study showed significant decrease in meaning anxiety and death anxiety scores; however not on loneliness anxiety and responsive anxiety scores between groups. Significant findings were stable after 2 months. Thus, the authors argued that logotherapy helps people to explore the meaning of life and experiences and become aware of the reality of death to take action and responsibility [11].

What is more, group logotherapy was also effective in improving well-being of elderly women, quality of life of youth and people with irritable syndrome, self-esteem and adjustment of people with physical disability, and forgiveness flexibility.

Saffarinia and Dortaj [12] examined life expectancy (Snyder's Hope Scale) and mental well-being (Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-being Scale) and social well-being (Social Well-Being Scale) of elderly females. According to the findings, the authors argued that logotherapy can effectively help elderly women enhance the meaning in life and improve psychological and social adjustment [12].

Ghamari and Branch [13] conducted a research on impact of logotherapy on quality of life (World Health Organization Quality of Life Questionnaire) of college students. 20 students were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups equally. Treatment group received 8 sessions of group therapy. And according to the findings, logotherapy was effective in improving quality of life consisting of "physical health, mental health, social relationships, and life status" [13].

Ghorbani Taghliabad and Tasbihsazan Mashhadi [14] studied the quality of life of patients with irritable bowel syndrome. 30 participants who had severe scores on Irritable Bowel Syndrome Severity Scoring System were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups equally. Treatment group had 5 weeks of logotherapy. According to the results, there were significant decrease in severity of irritable bowel syndrome and increase in quality of life including "boredom, interfering in the activity, body image, anxiety, health, food avoidance, and social reaction, as well as sexual and interpersonal concerns" of the participants [14].

Moein and Houshyar [15] studied self-esteem (Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory) and adjustment (Adjustment Scale) of people with physical disability. After receiving 10 group logotherapy sessions, treatment group (n = 15) showed significant improvements in both self-esteem, and social and personal adjustment. Intervention effects were significant at 1 month follow up. The authors argued that understanding the meaning of things, such as what people do as a job is not of importance, but the way they do is, helps people gain self-esteem and adjust better to situations they are in [15].

Çolak [16] examined the effectiveness of group logotherapy on forgiveness flexibility (Forgiveness Flexibility Scale) with college students. Treatment group (n = 12) received 8 sessions of group logotherapy whereas control group (n = 12) did not. According to the results, group logotherapy was effective in improving forgiveness flexibility [16].

Comparison studies showed that group logotherapy was less effective than acceptance and commitment therapy on stress levels of people with health problems. However, there was no difference between the effectiveness of group logotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy on depression and life expectancy levels of people with drug addiction. Group logotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy were both effective in improving depression and life expectancy.

Amir, Ahadi, Nikkhah, and Seirafi [17] compared effectiveness of logotherapy to acceptance and commitment therapy on stress levels (Perceived Stress Scale) of MS patients. One of the treatment groups (n = 11 in both) received 12 sessions of acceptance and commitment therapy and the other group received 8 sessions of logotherapy. According to the results, acceptance and commitment therapy was more effective than logotherapy in reducing stress of MS patients [17].

Khaledian and Mohammadifar [18] studied the effectiveness of logotherapy on depression levels and life expectancy of people suffering from drug addiction compared to cognitive behavioral therapy. In an addiction treatment center, 30 participants who scored highest on Beck Depression Inventory and 30 participants who scored lowest on Snyder's Life Expectancy Test were included in the study. Total of 60 participants were randomly assigned to three different groups equally (logotherapy group, cognitive behavioral therapy group and control group). Treatment groups received group therapy 10 to 13 sessions. And the results showed that, although, there was no significant difference between the outcomes of logotherapy group and cognitive behavioral therapy group, decrease in depression levels and increase in life expectancy of people with drug addiction were significant for both groups compared to control group [18].

Techniques of logotherapy

Frankl [2] mentions two techniques: dereflection and paradoxical intention. Dereflection is about detaching a person from her disorder so that she can have a minute to relax and clearly think about her problems. On the other hand, paradoxical intention deals with anticipatory anxiety. Aim of paradoxical intention is to help the person face her fears so that she can break the vicious cycle of phobia.

In order to mention the techniques utilized in the studies reviewed above; Mosalanejad and Koolee [9] led an anxiety oriented group with infertile women. Therefore, the group first focused on sharing the meaning they find in their lives and how they experience anxiety. After that, the group focused on meaning of love and relationships. And then, the meaning of suffering that might lie behind infertility was discussed. To create hope, information about infertility treatment was given. Then the group focused on ways of keeping the values alive by serving others, connecting with nature and art to be able to see the beauty in them.

Alimohammadi and Sharifi-Daramadi [11] conducted group logotherapy with women who have metabolic syndrome. Firstly, participants shared their problems concerning their illness. Secondly, members focused on their own existence, meaning of their existence, freedom and choice, and practiced paradoxical intention. Thirdly, the group focused on discovering values and responsibilities that members have. Afterwards, ways of setting goals and objectives were discussed. Then, the group focused on existential anxiety and meaning of suffering, and practiced dereflection.

Ghorbani Taghlidabad and Tasbihsazan Mashhadi [14] firstly focused on values by raising awareness over one's self and life, discovering creative values based on their observation on their actions, projecting values to events and persons, and recognizing responsibilities that come with these values. Afterwards every participant set and defined goals in accordance with their values. Then they planned how to achieve their goals by discussing it with the group.

Khaledian and Mohammadifar [18] assisted drug addicts with group logotherapy. Throughout the group therapy, they focused on the concepts of meaning, responsibility, values and hopes. In addition, the group focused on the meaning of life and death.

Discussion and Conclusion

As mentioned above, group logotherapy is an effective psychotherapy in treatment of various psychological disturbances. However, there were only a limited amount of studies on its effectiveness. The lack of interest in logotherapy as a distinct psychotherapy can be said to stem from Frankl's [2] view that what logotherapy does is adding another dimension to psychotherapy; not presenting another school of therapy. Likewise, follow up studies were a few. According to follow-up findings, intervention effects were significant at 1 month [4,14,15] and at 2 months [11]; however, not significant at 6 months [5].

In addition, studies were mostly conducted in Iran. There were no studies on group logotherapy conducted in the West to my knowledge. Thusly, cross cultural examination of effectiveness of group logotherapy needs further studies. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is an observable interest in Iran on logotherapy, although logotherapy did not continue as a separate branch of psychotherapy.

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