

Appropriacy of Counselling Approaches in Assisting Rape Victims: A Case Study

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Abstract: As a caring and concerned community, we need to be proactive in ensuring that rape victims are assisted, precluded from feeling alienated and averted from taking drastic actions like committing suicide. Hence, this study investigated the suitability and appropriacy of counselling approaches implemented by teacher counsellor in assisting students who are rape victims. The client was a mediocre student in terms of academic achievement, hails from a broken family whose parents are divorced and is from a low-income family whose father is a labourer. Although, the client was found to be naive, she did not have any disciplinary record. At the initial stage of the study, the mental and emotional state of the client were somewhat unstable as she was confused by what had happened, was depressed and unsure, felt degraded and was not ready to lodge a police report. Subsequent to the implementation of five counselling sessions, positive results were attained, whereby the client regained self-confidence, acquired insights into family relationships and attained support from her family and developed more effective behaviours. She also won her case in court.

Key words: Counselling approach, handle, rape victim, student, secondary school

INTRODUCTION

Statistics from the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) shows that cases of physical abuse, sexual assault and rape of children are increasing every year, from 2,236 cases in 2005 to 5,744 in 2008. In the first 7 months of this year alone, 2,193 cases have been reported to PDRM. Meanwhile, cases involving the disappearance of children are also becoming alarming, where, of the 982 cases reported in 2008, 500 were still classified as missing.

Rape can happen to anyone regardless of age and position. Children and adolescents are more susceptible to becoming rape victims because they are physically weak. Rape can also occur when the rapists are provided with opportunities to conduct the heinous acts. This often happens to women who walk alone at night, children who are left alone at home, the elderly who are frail and helpless and school uniform clad female students walking home from school. The assault on Nor Suzaily, who was raped in an express bus, is a typical case exemplifying how rape can occur to anyone who is not in a position to defend herself and her honour. The contention that even women donning the hijab could be raped should not be made an argument that a female's dress code does not contribute to the rising incidence of rape cases in the community. Nevertheless, it should be noted that women should not be fully blamed in rape cases as they are victims of men's voracious lust.

The number of reported rape cases in Malaysia is on the rise. The increase in rape cases, indecent acts and sexual assaults can be attributed to two main factors. First, it is an indication that rapes and sex crimes are becoming more common in our society. Second, it suggests that victims are more willing to report rape cases. However, for every reported case, there are at least four unreported ones. A study by the Criminal Investigation Department of the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) found that most rapes are caused by negligence, encouragement, provocation and lapse on the part of the victims themselves, namely the women themselves.

As a caring and concerned community, we need to be proactive in ensuring that rape victims are assisted, precluded from feeling alienated and averted from dangerous and drastic actions like committing suicide. In Malaysia, the One Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC) is being developed in stages. The first center was established in 1986 at the University Hospital, Kuala Lumpur which is now known as the University of Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC), following the anti-violence campaign against women championed by women organizations. To expand this service, a second centre was opened eight years later at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital (HKL). Prior to this, all cases were handled on an ad hoc basis. In 1996, the Ministry of Health stipulated all state hospitals to open an OSCC for victims of domestic violence. By 1997, OSCCs

have been established in almost 90% of government hospitals across the country with the current number exceeding 100 centres. When a woman who claims to have been a victim of violence seeks treatment at the Accident and Emergency Unit at any hospitals, the OSCC is required to arrange for immediate medical examination and treatment by a physician.

The question is whether teacher counsellors serving in primary and secondary schools have made the necessary preparation to handle students who have been raped. This is because once the courtroom procedures are over or subsequent to the teenager giving birth due to being raped, they will return to school and continue with the routine of student life prior to the rape incident. School administrators, teachers and particularly teacher counsellors should assist these students, who would no doubt be emotionally and mentally disturbed, due to the untoward unexpected incident. Family members, particularly parents of the school going victims must also be provided appropriate support so that they continue to be rational for the common good. This is because family support is much needed by the school going rape victims.

Adolescents' ability to make social and emotional adjustments and subsequently develop healthy relationships, is greatly influenced by the relationship the adolescents have with their parents when young. During the developmental stage of adolescents, peer influence can be discerned. Nevertheless, a strong bond with parents would enable the influence of the family to dominate the lives of adolescents in important decision making, choice of friends, or the practice of religious values and culture (Brown *et al.*, 1993; Mounts 2001; Santor *et al.*, 2000).

According to Kenny and Rice (1995), students who are secure in their bond with their parents have clearer self-concept, higher self esteem, better social capabilities, as well as make more effective emotional adjustments compared to their counterparts with a troubled family. The secure bond is built through the caring and friendly attitude of parents, who at the same time display clear parental roles and are themselves role models in the application of regulations and standards expected of the children. Such a parental trait is important in guiding, supporting and encouraging children to grow into independent individuals who are able to make their own decisions.

Definitions and statistics of rape: The word 'rape' is derived from the Latin word 'rapere' which means to steal or hijack. Rape means being forced or coerced to have sex. The law of the country as established in Section 376 of

the Penal Code states: Any individual who commits rape shall be imprisoned for 20 years and be subjected to whipping. In criminal law, the term 'rape' refers to sexual assault committed by men to women other than his wife. According to Professor Granville Williams, a rapist can be divided into several categories. The first group of rapists comprises rapists who are not known (stranger) while the second group of rapists comprises rapists involving husbands, ex-husbands, cohabiting partners and former cohabiting partners.

The 6,963 cases of rape and 2,506 cases involving sexual assault on children were reported from 2008 to August 2011 while the number of illegitimate children or those born out of wedlock totaled 17,303, as indicated in the 2009 birth registration record and this figure continues to increase every year. Rape is indeed an act of malicious intent, which violates the criminal law, or in the context of our country, it is against the 1987 Penal Code.

Rape is a form of adultery where in fact this crime is even more heinous and evil. Rape is an act worse than adultery where it is a known fact that the latter is forbidden and a despicable behavior and one of the major sins in Islam. There is not a single religion in the world that permits such an action. Therefore, Islam decrees a grave punishment be meted out to the perpetrators, particularly in view of the fact that adultery and rape are crimes that damage consanguinity and descent. Islam views the issue of consanguinity and descent seriously, where they are positioned among the five groups of Maqasid AsSyari'ah () that must be protected. This crime is assured by Allah SWT to attain His wrath and be subjected to an ominous punishment in this world and the hereafter. Allah decrees:

أَلَيْسَ عَاسٍ وَءَشْحَافٍ
أَلَيْسَ عَاسٍ وَءَشْحَافٍ
أَلَيْسَ عَاسٍ وَءَشْحَافٍ
أَلَيْسَ عَاسٍ وَءَشْحَافٍ

And you shall not commit adultery; indeed adultery is a shameful and heinous act and it is an evil path (opening the door to other evils) (Surah Al Israa': 32).

Counselling approaches in handling rape victims:

Counselling is derived from an English word. To counsel is construed as providing advise consultation. In brief, when translated into the Malay language, the term counselling refers to advisory or consulting sessions. However, experts in the field of counselling state that counselling is not only advisory in nature. A person who goes through the counselling process does not only receive advice. In fact, the person should discuss and analyse the problems faced together with the counsellor to find a solution. Counselling here is viewed as an

assisting relationship between a person who is trained and skilled in the verbal techniques of assistance and has knowledge of human behaviour with someone seeking assistance, whether voluntary or coerced (Cormier and Cormier, 1991).

Professional counselling services have been found to have a positive impact on short-term and long-term transformation. This indicates that counsellors have important roles in reducing social ills. Counselling services should be developed using a variety of approaches to help adolescents who need continuous emotional support in the face of challenges.

Gladding (2000) defines counselling as a process that assist a normal or psychologically healthy individual in solving problems pertaining to developmental tasks and life situations. The process is short term in nature and based on a theory. In particular, Gladding wrote that counselling has the following characteristics:

- Focuses on assisting people to make changes
- As a process of the profession
- handles personal, social, vocational and educational problems
- Assists 'normal' human beings
- Based on a counselling theory and is structured
- Teaches the client to make decisions
- Involves several specialties such as education, sociology, psychology, communication, study of the family and other related human development

The three general goals of the counselling process are: Rehabilitation of negative or antisocial behaviour; Prevention of negative behaviours or circumstances from occurring or recurring; development or formulation of existing or potential. These goals align with rape victims of school going students as they need to be guided and assisted through a counselling process in the hope of finding ways to overcome the difficulties encountered achieved through an analysis of the problem conducted together with a counsellor. In addition, they are also guided through the stages of identifying the problem, the source of the problem and how to find alternative solutions. Therefore, it is hoped that the counselling experience is able to provide guidance to clients on how to overcome problems in the future.

Additionally, cultural factors should also be taken into account in the implementation of a counselling approach, what more in view of a multi racial society like Malaysia. Culture is defined as congruence in thinking, practices and behaviour of a person in terms of history, religion, social organization, economic organization, political organization and collective production (Sue and

Sue, 1990, 2008). Meanwhile, cross-cultural counselling is defined as a counselling relationship between the counsellor and the client, complying with different cultural systems. All counselling are cross-cultural in nature (Pedersen, 1994). Successful counsellors will take into account various factors, namely those related to the family, cultural background, socioeconomic status and classification in society. This is because ignoring these factors will have an impact on empathy, resulting in the counsellors lack of understanding which in turn limits the success of the counselling sessions (Sue and Sue, 2008). To play the role of an effective counsellor, all factors relevant to cross-cultural counselling should be noted and mastered by the counsellor. The main thing is to explore and understand it as the basis for self-assessment, enabling the successful formulation of reflection, perception and belief in relation to the issue being addressed.

Application of theories selected: Practitioners have a wide choice in using proven effective theories which can be customized with personal beliefs. There is no single theory that can provide all the answers to a client (Okun, 1990). Therefore, practitioners in Malaysia should make an effort to implement theoretical diversity without being too bounded by basic theories in order to avoid their practice to become rigid and obsolete. According to Kottler (2002) and Petterson and Nisenholz (1990), a counselor must understand basic theories before creating a 'personal theory' of their own that can be used in practice. In this case, the researchers have used two theoretical approaches, namely the Person-Centered Therapy by Carl Rogers and Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) by Albert Ellis.

The researchers have selected the Person-Centred Therapy postulated by Carl Rogers as the theory allows diversity and discourages the adherence to the belief of only one guru. A therapist can actually utilise this theory in a variety of ways, yet maintaining the basic theory. Therapy practitioners should not limit themselves while reacting where the reaction forms the foundation of feedback attained by the clients.

In addition, the researchers have also selected the REBT theory as the theory is both comprehensive and integrated, emphasizing reflection, evaluation, selection and behaviours. Therapy begins with a problem faced by the client where the aim is to reject any negative beliefs that exist in the client's indoctrination. Therapists use direct methods like teaching, giving suggestions, compelling, assigning tasks and challenging the client to change their irrational belief system and negative beliefs that can lead to negative behaviours.

Person-Centred theory: Rogers makes the assumption that humans are individuals who can be trusted, have the potential to understand themselves and solve their own problems without the intervention of a therapist. Individuals can stimulate their own personal development if they undergo specific therapeutic relationships. At the very outset Rogers stressed the importance of attitudes and characteristics which should be possessed by a therapist and the quality of the relationship between client and therapist as important foundations for the success of the therapeutic counselling process.

Rogers (1987) emphasizes three characteristics of a therapist which can create an environment which is conducive in promoting the development of a person, thereby allowing the person to move forward, to be what they envisioned themselves to be and achieving their aspirations. The three attributes are: Congruence, involving sincerity and purity, unconditional acceptance comprising being receptive and caring, precise emphatic understanding (ability to delve deeply into the person's feelings). According to Mizan and Halimatun as counsellors, it is not possible to become alienated from the personality traits of a counsellor, comprising being friendly, honest, displaying unconditional acceptance and empathy.

According to Aminah the success of counselling services in schools depends on two main factors: The personality of the counsellor, the acknowledgement of superiors and members of the organization. The teacher counsellor is the main thrust in achieving the well-being of the students. Corey (2005) suggests that the most important element in becoming an effective counsellor is the counsellor himself/herself which he succinctly articulated as follows: 'the most important instruments you have to work with as a counsellor is yourself as a person'

Behavioural Theory-Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT): REBT theory is based on the view that human beings are born with rational and irrational thinking. Humans have the instincts of self-preservation, to be happy, to think, speak, love, socialize and expect self actualization. However, humans can also destroy themselves, refrain from thinking, procrastinate, repeatedly make mistakes, believe in superstition, become intolerance, not too concerned with perfection, blame themselves and prevent themselves from achieving their full developmental potential.

REBT theory emphasizes that disturbed emotions and feelings are the result of human thoughts and ideas. Ellis believes that emotional disorders experienced are due to erroneous or illogical ideas in relation to a particular

situation. Because clients want joy and excitement in their personal lives, there is a tendency towards self-destruction. Ellis cited in Corey (2005) created an emotional disturbance formula based on the A-B-C-D-E-F concept. A is the activating event, B is the belief system, C is the consequence of emotions and behaviours, D is the disputing intervention, E refers to the effect and F refers to new feelings.

The principal researcher, who is also a teacher counsellor and a faculty member at a secondary school, recorded her experience of a case she handled which relates to irrational thinking and non-assertive nature. Three questions raised in this case were:

- What are the effects experienced by adolescent clients who are victims of rape?
- What measures are being used by counselors to assist clients in overcoming irrational thinking and non-assertive nature?
- What are the consequences experienced by the client in terms of emotions, thoughts and behaviors subsequent to a counselling session?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Respondent: Selection of the respondent was made based on the referral by the School's Discipline and Religious Unit, thus making the selection process to be purposive sampling in nature. This is a case study in an attempt to assist in solving the issues and challenges faced by the client. This study involved a 14 year old client who was raped and suffered from irrational and non-assertive thinking.

Data analysis: Data were obtained via observations, reports and counselling records as well as five recorded interview sessions. The recorded data were analyzed by means of listening and writing verbatim any articulation and statements made during the sessions. Once completed, the transcribed data were then categorised accordingly. The verbatim analysis was compared with the counsellor's written data made during the counselling sessions. Making such a comparison would result in more accurate conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of case study: Client 1; the client was a 14 year old Malay student, studying in secondary two. The student was a mediocre student in terms of academic achievements. The client was somewhat naive but had no disciplinary record. The parents have long been divorced.

The client is the youngest of four sibling with all siblings living with the father who is a labourer.

Chronology of case study: The client talked to both the religious and disciplinary teachers following the incident of her being raped by her school bus driver. The disciplinary teacher referred the matter to the teacher counsellor where eventually the school administrators were notified. The father was then called to the school premises, where he agreed make a police report. The client was then put under the supervision of the police and a qualified medical practitioner. Throughout the court proceeding, which lasted for 2 years, the client attended school as per normal. The client eventually won the court case.

Application of counseling approach: There are five processes in the course of action to the case study in relation to the respondent. The process implemented emphasizes three main aspects analyzed in the case study, namely:

- What effects are experienced by the raped adolescent client?
- what measures are implemented by the counselor in assisting the client to deal with irrational thinking and non-assertive nature?
- what effects are experienced by the client in terms of emotions, thinking and behaviours, subsequent to the counselling sessions?

Building relationships and identifying problems was the first process implemented. At this stage, the principal researcher as the teacher counsellor attempted to build a therapeutic relationship with the respondent so that the respondent trusted the counsellor teacher cum principal researcher. Client's acceptance is a very important aspect of the counselling process as clients have the right to select any counsellors. Additionally, clients also have the right to terminate any counselling session when it is felt that their needs as clients are not fulfilled, they are not understood or they feel offended with the verbal or non-verbal behaviour of the counsellor. Clients will formulate their own perceptions and will assess and evaluate the counsellors capability. If the clients doubt the ability of the counsellors or if the counsellors display perceptions which are dubious or lacking in cognizance, then the counselling process would certainly not be able to be conducted effectively and efficiently. When confidence and trust in the counsellor disappears, feelings related to sincerity and honesty would vanish and anything occurring subsequent to that would be

pretentious as the development of the counselling process depends on a dynamic counselling relationship (Boy and Pine, 1980).

Based on observations by the principal researcher during the first process, it could be discerned that the respondent seemed confused and was hesitant to share information, spoke with a voice that was hardly audible and generated short and staccato utterances (an expression of being unsure), facial expression which denoted anxiousness and sadness, lacked eye contact (an expression of fear and guilt), sat with arms crossed (an expression of blocking), seemed depressed and apprehensive, suffered abdominal and vaginal pain and displayed some emotional and mental instability. The respondent was crying because she did not understand what was being experienced and seemed naïve. She also had never had sexual intercourse and was confused with what had happened to her.

Exploring and seeking alternatives was the second process used by the researchers in identifying the causes and effects of the rape incident on the respondent (the rape victim). At this stage, the principal researcher gave the respondent space to remain calm. Expressions from the victim were coaxed through the use of basic counseling skills like reflecting of content, reflecting of feelings, showing of empathy and providing minimum impetus. Gradually the respondent recounted what had happened.

Based on the counselling session record, it was found that the respondent was raped by her school bus driver on the way home from school. The incident took place on the bus when all the other students had alighted. The respondents admitted to not screaming because she was in a panic and did not understand what was happening. In addition, the respondent made the decision not to inform her family out of fear, shame and not knowing how to explain the incident.

The findings also show that at the initial stage, the respondent was not willing to report the matter to the authorities as she neither understood the procedure nor was she aware of the welfare repercussion on herself. Furthermore, she was fearful of the public knowing what had happened, of becoming the subject of talk and of not attaining family support.

The principal researcher utilised reflection of feelings and listened with interest and empathy, yet at the same time was compelling. Apart from these, several alternatives were suggested:

- Recounting the actual situation to the family
- Summoning family members to the school premises, following which the client will be assisted by the school administration

- Seeking assistance from the closest family members to help explain the matter to the family

Formulating a goal was the third process of this study, where the respondent was given the option to select alternatives. To achieve this aim, the teacher counsellor cum principal researcher strove to reduce and eliminate all obstacles and oppositions that existed within the client. Four conditions were focused in the endeavour to assist the client: Congruence between what is understood and what is communicated, where the teacher counsellor must act purely and sincerely until the client's trust is won, Unconditional acceptance involving readiness to accept and care for the client, in-depth understanding and empathy that refers to the precise ability to delve into the client's feelings.

The teacher counsellor cum principal researcher applied the REBT therapy which emphasizes the ABC Theory, where A is the activating event involving the rape event demonising the client. B is the belief system, where the client believed herself to be tainted, immoral and useless. C is the emotional and behavioural consequence where the client felt embarrassed, worried, oppressed and depressed, D is disputing intervention involving fighting against the client's irrational beliefs, E refers to the effect where the formulation of new beliefs were able to enhance the client's self confidence. Finally, F refers to new feelings leading to the client's positive behaviours, insights and peace of mind.

Techniques utilised involved the cognitive technique which refers to the A-F theory and the emotive technique which focuses on the emotions of the client. Additionally, the imagery and relaxation techniques were utilised with the aim of assisting the client to accept herself and to view the situation which arises in the right context and perspective, as well as to reduce stress. The imagery technique used was to depict the resistance towards the traumatic heinous event by making a bibliography of action which needs to be taken in order to build self-confidence. The relaxation technique was used to deal with fear and stress.

Subsequent to gaining strength and conviction, the respondent agreed to select the second alternative discussed during the exploring and seeking alternatives process. Thus, the school administration called the client's family, where a family counselling session was conducted, with the principal research being one of the involved parties. The findings of the study indicated that the client's family was shocked, but after being pacified, the family was able to accept and assist the client. Following the family counselling session, the respondent's father lodged a police report.

Training oneself to be assertive was the fourth process implemented on the respondent. In this

affirmative or assertive training, the client was taught how to express an opinion firmly without fear or worry. This was to assist the client to make appropriate decisions in achieving set goals, particularly when the client first attended court proceedings and was required to answer questions posed consistently and confidently. This training was essential in developing self-identity and confidence within the client so as to enable her to say no to acts which could be self destructive in future with the hope that the same mistake will not be repeated.

Assessing was also an aspect emphasized by the researchers to determine the strength of the counselling approaches in relation to assisting rape victims. At this stage, analysis of the effects experienced by the client in terms of emotions, thinking and behaviours after undergoing the counselling sessions was conducted. This is important because according to Zuria, the effectiveness of the counselling process can be assessed through the client's behaviour, thinking and feelings throughout the counselling sessions. The findings of the study indicated that at the initial stage, the respondent appeared to feel cornered due to being questioned, stressed and had negative expectations of the ability of the counselling sessions in assisting her. The emotions expressed were clearly visible both verbally and non-verbally. This action is closely related to the initial negative perception and irrational thinking.

However, support from the teacher counsellor, school administrators and family members generate moral support and positive reinforcement which has a positive impact on the client as she was able to get past the traumatic phase in her life. This can be seen by the change in the respondent's behaviour which became more relaxed, cheerful and enthusiastic compared to at the start of the counselling session. In addition findings of the study showed that the respondent's school attendance record was good and she was able to complete tasks assigned by her teachers as well as socialize with her peers.

Summary: As a whole the counselling approach utilising the Person-Centered Theory and the REBT Theory has been successful in guiding the client to overcome a life challenging experience. The client was eventually able to accept the heinous incident as fate and had the courage to complete her studies up to the Malaysian Certificate Education level (Secondary Five level) before joining the workforce.

CONCLUSION

Social ill victims like rape victims are not uncommon now a days. The rise in the number of cases throughout

the community regardless of age and gender could negatively influence the mental, emotional and behavioural development of the victims. Such negative development should be constrained and given due attention. The findings clearly demonstrate that the counselling approach used in this study has shown positive results in the process of assisting rape victims, with the client regaining self confidence, acquiring insights into family relationships and attaining family support in formulating more effective behaviours. Thus it is only logical that school administrators employ a similar counselling approach in their endeavour to assist traumatised students in a more specific and structured manner. An effective counselling approach is indeed very significant in assisting rape victims to forget the traumatic and bitter experience in their lives by opening their minds and hearts, thus allowing them to build a new fulfilled life.

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