Crisis Intervention: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract. Crisis intervention is a method used by psychologist, counsellors, social workers and helpers to handle crisis issues. It is an immediate and short-term psychological aid to help disruptions and disequilibrium individual. Crisis intervention aims to support individual with mental health crisis and stabilise or restore equilibrium to normal functioning. Some issues and challenges arise among crisis counsellors or helpers. Educating individual with crisis can be the hardest tasks if they are not well prepared. Professionalism and ethical issue creates challenges among helpers. Challenges such as religiosity, culture, beliefs and values among helpers and individual in crisis will create a new crisis if not handle professionally. As suggestions, helpers in crisis setting need to improve and adapt their knowledge, experience and skills in handling different types of crisis and as well in different cultures. Helpers need to be creative and try avoiding a one-size-fit all approach to crisis intervention.

Keywords: Crisis intervention, issues, challenges

Introduction

Crisis results from ineffective coping skills and problem solving. Crisis is a personal difficulty or situation that immobilises people and prevents them from consciously controlling their lives (Belkin, 1984). Crisis may presence as both danger and opportunity; therefore, a method to reduce crisis intensity is needed. James (2005) considers crisis as a danger because it can overwhelm individual to extent serious pathology, including homicide and suicide. However, crisis may also provide opportunity to individual self-growth and self-realization. Since crisis is subjective and sometimes difficult to understand, a flexible, practical and creative ways or methods need to be implemented in handling crisis situations. A specialised method, which offers short-term immediate help to individuals who have experienced an event that produces mental, physical, emotional and behavioural distress such as crisis, is called crisis intervention.

The major goal of crisis intervention is to increase client’s functioning by using effective coping and problem solving. Greenstone and Leviton (2002) present a list of six components in crisis intervention:

- Immediacy: When crisis appeared, intervention need to be given to client immediately. This is to attempt to relieve anxiety, prevent further disorientation and ensure that client do not harm themselves or harm others.
- Control: (a). Be clear about what and whom you are attempting to control. (b). Enter the crisis scene cautiously. (c). Appear stable, supportive and able to establish structure. (d). Be clear in introductory statements. (e). Do not promise things that might not happen. (f). Direct and arrange the pattern of standing and sitting to gain client’s attention. (g). Guide with helper eyes and voice rather than physical force. (h). Physical force used only as a last resort and only if helper are trained and authorized to use it. (i). Helper need to remove client from the crisis situation if possible. (j). Be creative in taking control. (k). Break eye contact. (l). Separate client if necessary.
- Assessment: It is very important to assess the crisis situation to get accurate information on crisis intensity. To accomplish an effective assessment, helper need to do the following: a) Evaluate on the spot, b) Make the evaluation quick, accurate and comprehensive to get a total picture. c) Do not take a lengthy life history. d) Ask short, direct questions. e) Ask questions one at a time. f) Allow client adequate time to answer questions. g) Decrease client’s confusion by not asking them many questions at once. h) Earn to accept discomfort with silence. i) Interrupt client to get clarification, accuracy and not often than absolutely necessary. j) Clarify the crisis. k) Allow the crisis to be the client’s crisis. l) Assess both the actual and symbolic meaning of the crisis event. m) Use non-behaviour as source of information. n) Listen also for what is not being said. o) Recognise that helper personal attributes contribute to overall effectiveness. p) Ventilate client feelings. q) Help client see crisis as temporary rather than chronic. r) In group setting with multiple clients, allow each person to speak without interruption. s) Return control to client as soon as possible.
- Disposition: Helper need to on decide how to handle the situation after all factors have been assessed. It is to: 1. Help client identify and mobilise personnel resources. 2. Mobilise social resources. 3. Hold out hope that solutions are possible. 4. Develop options. 5. Help make an agreement.
- Referral: Client need to be referred as needed and do follow up if possible or as agreed. Follow up with clients also helpful to ensure that client made contact with the referral agency.

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Crisis Intervention Model

There are few models that can be utilized in crisis intervention such as Robert’s seven stage crisis intervention model and Gilliland’s six step crisis intervention model. ABC model of crisis intervention is another one of the examples. The ABC model is a problem-focused approach (Kanel, 2012), most effective when applied within four to six weeks of the stressor. This model identifies the client’s cognitions as they related to the precipitating event, then alter cognitions to decrease unmanageable feelings. In addition, providing community referrals and other resources is also essential in applying this model (Kanel, 2012). This model roughly based on Jones’ in 1968 A-B-C method of crisis management, with its three-stage process: A - Achieving contact, B - Boiling the problem down to basics, C - Coping.

This model was later improved by Moline in 1986. Over a period of 24 years, Kanel (2012) has expanded and revised the ABC model to what is known today. Other model has also influenced the ABC model of crisis intervention such as Adlerian counselling. The phases that Adlerian developed are: Establishing the relationship, exploring individual psychological dynamics. Encouraging self-understanding and insight, reorientation and re-education. These four phases of Adlerian theory are similar to the ABC model: A - Developing and maintaining contact (corresponds with Adler’s phase 1). B - Identifying the problem and providing therapeutic interaction (corresponds with Adler’s phase2 and 3). C - Coping (corresponds with Adler’s phase 4).

Even though ABC model has three-stage approach, any one stage could be used at any time. All crisis intervention models are only as guideline for dealing a crisis. Therefore, crisis counsellors and helpers must be aware the types and intensity of crisis nor issues and challenges while dealing with a crisis.

Besides strong knowledge and understanding on crisis intervention model while handling crisis, counsellors and helpers also need to observe strong ethical behaviours because crisis clients usually in a vulnerable state of disequilibrium and instability. As Kanel (2012) states, counsellors or helpers need to have a strong ethical practice in order to help the clients throughout the crisis situation.

Ethical and Professional Issues. Jordan (2010) have stated that making an ethical decision in crisis are compulsory because of its critical and demanding nature of crisis counselling. Therefore, each of crisis counsellors or helpers should be aware of the local practitioner code of ethics and routinely practice ethical decision making. There are ten steps guide of ethical decision making for crisis counsellors (Jordan, 2010). The steps of an ethical decision making for crisis counselling’s are: (1) Identify the ethical concern within the context of the disasters, (2) Consider personal (the crisis helper’s) self’s, beliefs and values, skills and knowledge, (3) Identify the code of ethics involved, (4) Determine possible ethic traps, (5) Frame a preliminary response, (6) Consider the consequences, (7) Prepare an ethical resolution, (8) Get feedback/ consultations from other crisis helpers, (9) Take action and (10) Review the outcome.

According to Kanel (2012), the counselling profession has very specific standards regarding confidentiality, dual relationships, mandatory reporting of abuse, informed consents and helper’s training and supervisions. Countertransference is one of the issues that mostly could happen in crisis interventions. Countertransference might happen from time to time during the crisis situations but the counsellors or helpers should know their ability to remain calm, objective and client’s focused. Counsellors need to have self-awareness and recognise the limit so that they would not unintentionally harm the clients. They should aware that the basis of these professions needs to be followed so that the relationships between counsellors-clients are therapeutic and professionals to gain trust and confidence in clients towards the counsellors. In that case, crisis counsellors shall improve their ethical knowledge and professional issues throughout time as a learning process and adding their knowledge by implements skills based on situations.

Cultural Sensitivity Challenges. Multicultural competences can be challenging as crisis counsellors or helpers should be sensitive to various cultural norms and behaviours in helping clients work through the crisis. Counsellors should be aware the differences of culture might lead to different views. Awareness of various cultures, ethnic, religious and gender issues can be helpful. Therefore, it is a necessity that crisis counsellors refraining themselves from imposing personal values on clients (considered unethical). If they fail to respect differences, the crisis interventions may end up as a failure. Cultural sensitivity is an ethical mandate and it helps strengthen clinical practice (Kanel, 2012).

Method

This research used qualitative approach to help in obtaining in-depth and detailed information using semi structured interviews. The information is gathered from counsellors in schools, higher learning institutions and public services. 25 counsellors have been selected and involved. The aim is to obtain information about the issues and challenges they are facing while handling crisis situations.

The data from semi structured interview were analysed with content analysis. To facilitate the analysis, the information from interview had been converted to written text obtained by transcript or notes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). This process is to create themes and subthemes.

Result

Issues in handling crisis intervention. The result showed that only seven out of 25 counsellors using crisis intervention models such as Roberts 7 stages, Gilliland 6 steps model and Critical Incident Stress Management model in handling crisis intervention.
Other respondents were found not using specific models in crisis management but applying some of the counselling theories and basic attending skills. This result gave impact on issue of professionalism that counsellors still lack of knowledge and understanding on handling crisis intervention systematically. Majority of the counsellors also found unfamiliar with rules and regulations while dealing crisis issues. Even though they agreed that strong ethical practice is important in the field of crisis intervention.

Challenges in handling crisis intervention. The results of the semi structured interviewed found that there are few challenges that been faced during crisis interventions. The challenges that been stated by the respondents have been categorized:

Challenges in handling crisis intervention: Religion. The data shows that many respondents (counsellors) having difficulty in handling crisis intervention when they are facing victims from different religions. Some of the respondents stated that:

“...the victims seem to lost hope and blame the deity for the situations that they are facing...”

This kind of statement made the counsellors feels challenged since clients seems to lost hope and put the blames on God. Some of the respondents also stated that other helpers have the tendency to put their own religions values and elements on the victims from different religions.

“...counsellors tend to put their own religions values and elements towards the victims from different religions...”

Most of the respondents agreed that is challenging when it comes to religions differences. The respondents also stated that as counsellors they need to have more knowledge about other religions so that they could overcome the challenge and could help the victims without having difficulty for having different religions.

Challenges in handling crisis intervention: Culture. The results of this research also showed that most of the respondent stated that the other challenge in handling crisis interventions is culture.

“...different culture comes from different family background. Each of them has their own house rules...”

The respondents stated that even families have their own culture and it affected the way they perceived the crisis situations. The other statement given by the respondents is that the helpers understanding towards the culture of the victims is also important.

“...the understanding of the differences culture between counsellor and victims is important.”

Most of them agreed that they are having multicultural challenged in handling crisis interventions and admitted that they need to have better knowledge and understanding regarding other culture.

Challenges in handling crisis intervention: Belief. Respondents stated that helpers tend to be biased and having different beliefs from victims. They clarify that, beliefs also means trust that needs to be gain from victims. In crisis situation trust is one of the important element to gain from victim before helpers can start the crisis intervention.

“...helpers perceptions tend to be biased based on gender...”

There are helpers that might tend to be biased in terms of belief when it comes to different gender.

“...the challenges to build trust in clients...”

The respondent seems to have difficulty in building trusted relationships between the victims and the helpers. Some of the victims having trust issues towards the counsellors and this could interfere with the crisis interventions.

“...challenged the helpers beliefs in handling crisis interventions to make sure they trust themselves...”

Some other respondents stated that the challenged is from the inside the counsellors themselves. The counsellors need to be sure and have faith in themselves in order to handle the crisis interventions. These are including acknowledging their limitations towards the crisis situations.

Challenges in handling crisis intervention: Value. Having different values also been stated as one of the challenges faced by respondents in handling crisis interventions.

“...there is conflicts between the counsellors and the clients value...”

The victims tend to feels that they are at lost and might feel that nothings left for them, meanwhile the counsellors might not having same issues but they told them that they understand the situations. This makes the victims feel that the counsellors failed to understand or empathized their values as the crisis did not happened to the counsellors themselves.

“...clients tend to be worried towards others perception when attending counselling session with counsellors.”

This statement also means the stigma or the values from the society itself towards the victims that needs crisis interventions.

Challenges in handling crisis intervention: Others. Besides having the challenges as stated, there are other challenges in handling crisis interventions such as mental illness issues, time constraints, language barriers, confidentiality, or level of educations.

Conclusion

Crisis intervention is a method used to handle crisis situation that offer immediate, spontaneous help to clients. With the goals to reduce intensity of crisis among clients, crisis intervention help clients return to their level of functioning and developing new effective coping skills and problem solving. During the process, counsellors and helpers also face issues and challenges. Lack of knowledge and understanding an effective ways to handle crisis may create another crisis to clients. Professionalism and ethic issue facing by counsellors need to be taken serious considerations as counsellors need to help clients understand their crisis and response for further interventions. Challenges regarding religious, cultures, beliefs, values and others are among concerns
that need counsellors’ attention in conducting effective crisis intervention. It is suggested that helpers in crisis setting need to improve and adapt their knowledge, experience and skills in handling different types of crisis and as well in different cultures. Helpers need to be creative and try to refraining from a one-size-fit all approach to crisis intervention.

References


