

A FRAMEWORK OF COUNSELING STRATEGIES FOR PERSONS WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

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Abstract

Substance use disorder has brought tremendous changes among communities as well as across all countries and it cannot be denied that it has become a national phenomenon that needs to be addressed by accentuating on appropriate intervention, counseling strategies, treatment and rehabilitation. Although a lot of research has been done on this topic, little is known about the experiences of person with substance use disorder inside the rehabilitation center. This research through qualitative approach attempts to describe and analyze the experiences of person with substance use disorder inside the rehabilitation center and come up with a framework of counseling strategies which could provide vital inputs to the intervention programs conducted in treatment centers in the Philippines. Ten (10) male persons with substance use disorder confined in a rehabilitation center for five to six months and with no occurring mental disorder were involved in the study. In-depth interviews generated rich narratives which were later subjected to content analysis. Results showed the following experiences that are evident to most of the participants inside the rehabilitation center such as struggling for cravings, exhibiting defiance, experiencing guilt, accepting reality, reconnecting to the higher power and regaining self-esteem. Finally, a proposed framework of counseling strategies was developed based on the results. The framework of counseling strategies is called 4P's such as pagmamalasakit (concern), pagtuturo (teach), pag-gabay (guide) and pag-agapay (being at the side) which was aligned and patterned to cognitive behavioral therapy and faith-based approach.

Keywords: substance use disorder; counseling; framework; CBT; faith-based approach

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Introduction

For several decades now, substance use disorder had been one of the major concerns of the country's administrations. The government's long standing battle against illegal drugs led to the creation of various agencies and policies that aim to stop and control the manufacture and distribution of illegal substances that could lead to substance use disorder and its unlikely consequences. Furthermore, the law also provides for the establishment of local rehabilitation centers that will offer a variety of treatment programs that will help break the cycle of dependency, likewise to guide and help persons with substance use disorder to become motivated and optimistic on their journey to recovery. As mentioned by Ruiz (2011) in his study, "treatment for substance use disorder is developing every day and has rapidly improved over the years because the need for effective prevention programs is deeply a personal issue". His findings attest that despite of extensive substance use, people engaged in drugs can still recover and be a productive member of the society. This finding is similar to the study of Hunter (2016) who defined recovery in terms of positive behavioural change for a longer period of time. He stressed that recovery is a process that may seek assistance, understanding and support of others. He emphasized that it is a process because recovery is a never-ending cycle which follows certain level and phases. Likewise, when it comes to mental health, the study of Allott, Loganathan, and Fulford (2002) gave emphasis on the concept of recovery as a subjective experience of being in control of whatever circumstances that may come a person's way.

In reality, the concept of substance use disorder creates a negative impact that people who are identified to be using drugs become socially stigmatized as having destructive and risky behavior as well as having a less valuable life (Villar, 2007). Therefore, the researcher being in the field of counseling, was moved to substantiate the possibilities of recovery among persons with substance use disorder. Whether addiction is being viewed by many as a disease, or impairment/distress, recovery is still possible. If these individuals are bestowed with proper treatment and significant support in order for them to develop a sense of motivation and determination, recovery can be achieved with all certainty.

The purpose of the study was to identify and highlight the experiences of persons with substance use disorder inside the rehabilitation center. As mentioned in the findings of Laudet and White (2010), "it is important to

examine the experiences of persons to understand the experience of substance use”, because from these experiences it emphasizes a process of ‘personal’ transformation. But along this line, it is a reality that much work has to be done before persons with substance use disorder can finally move towards the true essence of rehabilitation. With this, the researcher realized that counseling plays a vital part in order for persons with substance use disorder to understand and accept the reality that they need treatment both in medical and mental health (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014), and at the same time getting involved in activities that will commence changes. Similarly, the study of Villar (2007) further underscore that counseling is considered to be the domain and the most important part of treatment in every rehabilitation center. Exploring the experiences of persons with substance use disorder have paved the way to the development of a framework of counseling strategies as a substantial input to the field of counseling.

Latest developments on research about substance use disorder have focused on effects of drugs (Ksir & Hart, 2016), while other researchers focused more on family dynamics in addiction (Abulon & Pandan, 2017) and others studies opted to dwell on spirituality as an important component of recovery (Arias et al., 2008). But studies exploring on the experiences of persons with substance use disorder inside the rehabilitation center seems to be lacking and limited.

Literature review

Substance use disorder can be regarded as a disease or as a symptom of personality disorder. Based on the DSM-V (APA, 2013), the diagnosis of a substance use disorder fall into four main categories, namely: (1) impaired control, (2) risky use, (3) tolerance, and (4) withdrawal. According to APA (2013), the failure to refrain from using the substance despite the harm it causes is risky. Substance use disorder may be indicated when someone repeatedly uses substances in physically dangerous situations. When people need to increase the amount of a substance to achieve the same desired effect, i.e. desire to get high (APA, 2013) tolerance occurs.

In order to address these effects, treatment models and wide range of services are integrated to be able to design intervention that will meet their needs. This include both medical and mental health services, community - or family-based recovery support systems. In the Philippines, through government

agencies have set-up different treatment and rehabilitation centers which are fitted and carefully crafted to meet the needs of the persons with substance use disorder. It follows certain procedures with the aim of improving the person's physical, psychological, vocational, social and spiritual aspects. The following are the common approaches and principles in recovery adopted from the World Drug Report (2017): education and preventive approach, therapeutic community program, faith-based community approach, Narcotics Anonymous (NA) following the Twelve Steps "Minnesota Model" treatment program, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Eclectic approach.

Meanwhile, literature suggests that some of the core symptom of codependency and addiction of persons with substance use disorder could be the following: craving which was the consequence of substance use and is largely characterized by obsessional thoughts about drugs, triggering compulsive drug-seeking such as mood swings, anxiety, frustration, irritability, low energy and drug-taking behavior (Ciccocioppo, 2010). This dangerous cycle is really a downward spiral of increasing craving and escalating substance use. Once the habit loop is firmly established, it cannot easily be undone. This makes overcoming craving a central challenge in addiction treatment.

Followed by resistance and denial which according to Lancer (2014) persons with substance use disorder defy a completely altered life in the center and would successfully resist treatment and interventions. Persons with substance use disorder have resistance to change due to distorted relationship to reality - often acting against their best interests. Persons with substance use disorder may also endure destructive consequences and painful relationships, partly due to defiance and partly due to low self-esteem (Hammersley, 2013). It can also be noted that persons with substance use disorder become emotional and feel remorse which prompt them to ask for forgiveness since they feel that they have hurt, offended and disrespected their family members (Abulon & Pandan, 2017).

The Literature review involves the consolidation of researchers that have been conducted with regard to persons with substance use disorder. Thus, the research study has two major objectives, to explore and describe the experiences of persons with substance use disorder in the rehabilitation center and develop a proposed framework of counseling strategies based on the result.

Method

As one of the most common qualitative methods, the study employed in-depth interview method of research to explore cases in a more in-depth process as well as elicit a vivid picture on the participant's perspective on the research topic.

The researcher conducted the study both in public and private rehabilitation centers in the Philippines accredited by the Dangerous Drugs Board and the Department of Health. For the selection of participants, the specific criteria comprised the following: ten male participants (five participants each from private and public rehabilitation center), whose age ranges from eighteen to sixty years old, has been in the center for five to six months and with no occurring mental disorder. The researcher sought approval from the program directors of the two rehabilitation centers. The recommendation of participants by the psychologist, counselor, social worker, house-parents and staff were based from their reviews on the individual records, observed coping behaviour and recovery condition of each participant. Upon their approval the researcher scheduled the meeting. The informed consent was discussed by the researcher and signed by the respondents a day before the interview. The researcher oriented the prospective participants about the background and the procedure of the study. All interview sessions were held in the Director's office in the facility for privacy.

In formulating and producing the results, the interview session's proceedings were transcribed in verbatim format to identify relevant information about the experiences of persons with substance use disorder. Sets of the transcripts of the interview were produced for analysis of experts who are also experts in conducting addiction counseling and have done qualitative studies in the field of psychology. Significant statements per transcript were consolidated which became the units of analysis. Grouping of significant statements or the units into themes across the transcripts, based on similarities and differences was done through manual coding. Lastly, themes were organized into tables for presentation and interpretation.

Results and discussions

In order to have pertinent information about the participants, Table 1 presents the profile of the participants which includes age, sex, length of stay in

the rehabilitation center and the classification of the rehabilitation center as well. It was very evident that majority of the participants' age are between twenty to fifty-five years old. It can also be noted that five of the participants came from private rehab center and the other five were from public rehab center. All of the participants were male.

Table 1. Profile of the participants

Cases (Pseudonames)	Age	Sex	Length of Stay in the center	Classification of Rehab Center
Case 1: Jed	34	M	5 months	Public
Case 2: Ken	36	M	5 months	Public
Case 3: Gab	27	M	5 months	Private
Case 4: Ron	24	M	5 months	Public
Case 5: Ben	40	M	6 months	Private
Case 6: Vin	50	M	6 months	Private
Case 7: Dan	51	M	6 months	Private
Case 8: Tim	42	M	5 months	Public
Case 9: Rik	54	M	6 months	Public
Case 10: Leo	53	M	6 months	Private

Description of experiences inside the rehabilitation center

There were 5 themes emerging from the experiences of persons with substance use disorder inside the rehab center which could be inferred to as positive change which paved the way for them to embrace sobriety. The themes were focused on how persons with substance use disorder have experienced personal transformation into becoming a better version of themselves. Excerpts from the interviews were likewise presented. Table 3 defines the themes, description of themes and cases where themes were evident.

Struggling from cravings - this theme describes an intense urge or desire of the participant to consume drugs and this usually happens during their first month in the rehab center. In the narration of the participants, they expressed intense urge or desire to consume a specific drug despite of its effects. This kind of struggle from cravings led the participants to developed obsession to drugs which clearly affects their interpersonal relationship in which they manifest uncontrollable behaviour such as having anxiety, low energy and irritability towards others. Consequently, because of the participants' desire to take illegal

substance they wanted to escape from the rehabilitation center and go back to their addiction.

Exhibiting defiance - this theme explains the participants' feelings of being resistant to change in their new environment and showed complexity in adjusting and leaving their comfort zone. Most of the participants based from their narration manifested insubordination to rules with their desire to escape and wanted to give up. Restrictions, house rules, discipline, adjustments and daily routine are some of the concepts in which the participants found difficult to comprehend wholeheartedly. The thought of comfort and pleasure derived from drug-related activities they had before gave them peculiar feelings about the new life they are about to experience at the center. The participants explained the initial reservations they had about being at the center and admitted that they were half-hearted at getting professional help in the first months and it is not easy to accept that things that do not always go the way they wished.

Experiencing guilt - this theme pertains to the constant emotional struggle among persons with substance use disorder during the first few months of stay in the center. After a few months of stay in the rehab center and through the treatment programs being given to them, the participants were able to recall and think about their past mistakes, what they have lost due to addiction and that they felt bad about it. Most of the participants felt sorry for what they have done which led them to criticize and blame themselves and become bothered with worries and guilt for what addiction had brought them. In effect, the participants experienced longings for the families they have left behind which has been a frequent emotion throughout their stay in in the center. In addition, the participants are troubled by the shame they brought to their family in which they expressed heartfelt apologies as well as for the losses they have incurred due to substance abuse such as their job, home, or family.

Accepting Reality - this theme describes the process of acknowledging and submitting oneself into the treatment process. This theme was coined because the participants have reached the point of slowly moving toward overcoming addiction and move to the idea of recovery. This is the period wherein the participants finally initiate change among themselves and transform from a person who has emotional conflicts to someone who finally acceded and settled to the course of treatment and gradually allowed themselves to endure the

process of treatment. Accepting the participants' present situation and embracing the treatment program in which according to the participants was the start of a long journey to recovery. This appreciation is central to their recovery from substance use and provides them a concept of motivation to change. The participants through acceptance, learned to direct their emotional instability to meaningful activities thus, learned to do things passionately and understood the value of humility and reaching out to others.

Reconnecting to the Higher Power - this theme accounted on the participants own versions on how they were able to reconnect to the higher power and led them to develop the habit of constant praying. The concept of the "higher power" is being described by persons with substance use disorder as a way of connecting to a power that extends beyond the daily concerns of living. The participants believed that through pleading and praying with the higher power, they were able to get assistance and help to move towards recovery. The participants' perspective focused from enlightenment to a sense that one was on the right path, slowly learning to reconnect and trust in the higher power. The participants believed that through praying, they were able to seek assistance from the higher power and took refuge in prayer and renewed their relationship with Him. At present based on the findings, the participants have more time to deepen their faith, they have realized that the higher power has always been in their lives despite their disregard of His presence.

Regaining Self-Esteem - this theme centers on the confidence or high regard of participants to their own self despite of everything they have gone through during the period of substance use. The participants gradually ascertained their abilities and strengths and later on acquired their sense of worth. The more they engaged and participated in the activities inside the center, the more they were able to recognize their worth as a person. The experiences inside the center were able to let them see the reflection of themselves and fathom to take responsibility for their own actions. Their experiences from the past did not stop them to overcome their pains and instead pushed them to have the courage to identify their own strengths and see what they are capable of doing. It was evident that the effort of persons with substance use disorder in doing productive undertakings uplifted their confidence and it becomes a manifestation of their appreciation for what they have accomplished and who they have become.

Table 2. Underlying themes on the experiences of persons with substance use disorder in the rehabilitation center.

Themes	Cases	Descriptions	Sample Responses
Struggling from cravings	Case 1	This can be defined as an intense urge or desire of the participant to consume a specific drug.	<i>“For almost 14 years of using drugs on a daily basis, I consider myself as a hard-core drug addict. I have tried almost all kinds of drugs so it is not easy for me to be confined in one place and to say that I will not use again. It is difficult because your body will crave for it. The way you think will become different”.</i>
	Case 3		
	Case 4		
	Case 7		
	Case 8		
Exhibiting Defiance	Case 2	This refers to the participants’ refusal to accept change and participate in the treatment program.	<i>“At first I struggled because I was quite slow in catching up with the lessons. I am sad because it’s difficult to be in the rehab because when I was outside, I only obey myself (or do what I want)”.</i>
	Case 3		
	Case 6		
	Case 7		
	Case 8		
Experiencing Guilt	Case 1	This denotes the participants’ feeling of remorse for all the mistakes and pain in the past.	<i>“It is difficult when I think about my family outside; that’s the most depressing to us. The tasks we were asked to do here (inside the facility) are okay, but then I realized that I do not think about my family before when I was outside and it was only when we were already here, only then that we feel how important our families are to us...how will I ask for forgiveness from my family because I have done so many wrong things to them.</i>
	Case 2		
	Case 3		
	Case 4		
	Case 5		
Accepting Reality	Case 1	This describes the process of accepting their present condition and seek help from professionals and other support group.	<i>“I accepted that I needed help by asking those people that are knowledgeable about recovery. It’s a good thing for me that there are people here inside the rehab during counseling because it’s more important to us, drug addicts, to have someone to talk to especially when we feel something”.</i>
	Case 2		
	Case 3		
	Case 5		
	Case 6		
	Case 10		

Table 2. Underlying themes on the experiences of persons with substance use disorder in the rehabilitation center - *continued*

Themes	Cases	Descriptions	Sample Responses
Reconnecting to the Higher Power	Case 2	This refers to the spiritual awakening as well as recognizing higher power as a source of hope and strength.	“When we had a retreat that is when the prayer hit me. I surrendered myself to the higher power. I was crying because of all of my sins then I spoke to Him, it was dark but I closed my eyes, and I felt good after the retreat. It was different when we came back. I surrendered myself. It does not matter if I do not have riches, no money, what is important for me is my relationship with Him”.
	Case 3		
	Case 5		
	Case 6		
	Case 9		
Regaining Self-Esteem	Case 2	This signifies the participants’ ability to regain self-confidence.	“I took care of myself, I even behaved properly, I followed and did the tasks assigned to me. I got promoted and was given a chance to lead. It was really a challenge but I was still able to do it”.
	Case 5		
	Case 6		
	Case 9		
	Case 10		

Towards a framework of counseling strategies

Based on the discussed underlying themes that were culled from the qualitative data, the following framework of counseling strategies was derived (see Figure 1). The framework provides counseling strategies which are called the 4P’s and are all in Filipino term. The conceptualization of the proposed framework of counseling strategies were crafted based on the experiences of persons with substance use disorder specifically the six underlying themes. The framework of counseling strategies were drawn from the perspective of eclectic approach which aims at applying holistic approach by using various theoretical perspective such as cognitive behavioral therapy and faith based approach. The framework of counseling strategies can be used in aftercare treatment approach which may involve a continuation of individual or group counseling which was also conducive in helping in the recovery of people who have received substance use disorder treatment (Jason, Davis, & Ferrari, 2007).

This will help persons with substance use disorder to move toward recovery through learning different coping skills, developing emotional awareness and acceptance as well as recognizing their spiritual journey with the higher power. The proposed framework of counseling strategies may also assist

the psychologist, counselors, social worker, house parents and staff in meeting the needs of persons with substance use disorder.

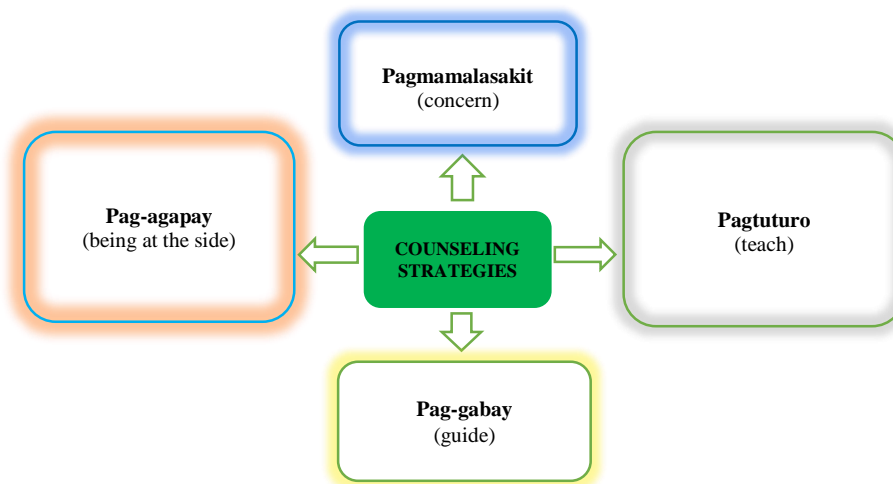


Figure 1. Framework of counseling strategies

Pagmamalasakit (concern) - the first counseling strategy which is a Filipino-term that refers to being altruistic, a form of giving without being asked and not expecting anything in return. It is about establishing rapport and explaining the expectations as well as the importance of the program to the person in order to have a successful treatment. True to its definition, pagmamalasakit (concern) is the counselor's way of expressing his or her willingness to help to ensure that recovery will take place. In this strategy, the counselor must give emphasis on the person's drug usage and treatment history.

Pagtuturo (teach) - the second counseling strategy which was drawn from the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approach. Pagtuturo (teach) as a counseling strategy play a significant role in dealing with triggers and cravings in which the corresponding activities will teach the individuals to deal with irrational beliefs, and learn different coping strategies to overcome addiction. Pagtuturo (teach) is a Filipino-term referring to the process of educating a person. Pagtuturo (teach) does not happen in the classroom only but is also seen in situations where a learned person, in this case, the counselor provides the persons

with substance use disorder with the appropriate armor to protect himself from being lured again to addiction. Consequently, craving is considered to be a personal struggle for persons with substance use disorder and they must be taught to understand the possible consequences of giving in to cravings. The counselor must teach them a number of skills for managing thoughts and cravings.

Pag-gabay (guide) - the third counseling strategy which refers to the concept of giving guidance or to provide assistance to person with substance use disorder in dealing with their irrational beliefs and emotional tensions in order for them to have a chance to contemplate and understand the realities of substance use to their lives. With this, pag-gabay (guide) as a counseling strategy will guide the person to identify and talk about feelings of resistance and guilt by providing the recovering individual the opportunity for emotional expression.

Pag-agapay (being at the side) - the fourth counseling strategy used Christian principles and teachings in dealing with the substance use disorder. In the Filipino language, pag-agapay means to be at the side of, and to be with another person. It can be noted that one of the common experiences of persons with substance use disorder while inside the center is the day they when finally reconnect and turned to the higher power, and formed an optimistic perspective as they renewed their relationship with God. In this counseling strategy, it means assuring the persons with substance use disorder that the counselor is at his side during the whole ordeal – the assurance that the counselor will provide the seeds of hope that the persons with substance use disorder will nurture when he gets out the center and be integrated in the community. Through this affirmation, pag-agapay (being at the side) as a counseling strategy was crafted in which the counselor provides the seeds of hope and the strength of persons with substance use disorder will be nurtured when they get out of the center and be integrated in the community. Recognizing their spiritual journey will help them bring more spirituality in their lives now that they are working towards recovery. This will allow persons with substance use disorder to acknowledge and appreciate the higher power as the wind beneath their wings.

Conclusions

The current study explored on the experiences of persons with substance use disorder. Empirical results showed that five themes emerged to be salient and

notable and these are: a. struggling from cravings, b. exhibiting defiance, c. experiencing guilt, d. accepting reality, e. reconnecting to the higher power and f. regaining self-esteem. This study also provides information about the experiences of persons with substance use disorder in the rehabilitation centers which highlighted four relevant points: first, the positive transformation of persons with substance use disorder while inside the rehabilitation center is a clear manifestation that awareness, acceptance and being responsible toward positive change all helped the participants towards recovery. Secondly, their experiences inside the rehab center gives purpose to their existence and propels them to develop a set of values and beliefs in order to have a psycho-spiritual transformation. Third, strong relationship with the higher power facilitate the interaction of persons with substance use disorder with the underlying issues of substance abuse and affirms them during difficult times. Lastly, recovery is a complex process and personal journey which requires the persons with substance use disorder to be ready and willing to initiate change to their behaviour.

On the other hand, this study has limitations and it must be mentioned clearly to help future research endeavors. The experiences of persons with substance use disorder in the rehabilitation center needs further examination to validate existing studies in the Philippines. Given the number of participants used in this study it cannot be easily concluded and generalized that this is the cases for most Filipinos who have substance use disorder and undergoing treatment in the rehab center. Moreover, a high deal of encouragement is required to further investigate experiences of persons with substance use disorder in the rehab center as regard to sexuality and age.

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