

# The effect of the existential approach through group practices on reducing the frustration of disabled SCI

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**ABSTRACT: Objective:** Existential psychotherapy is a philosophical approach that deals with the man and his world. This kind of approach is a kind of perspective towards some of the concepts rather than a range of techniques and methods. Present study investigated the effect of the existential approach through group practices on reducing the frustration of disabled SCI. **Methods:** This is done through an experimental study in which the existential theory tactics were taught to two experimental groups in 10 sessions. Each session lasted for an hour and 30 minutes. In addition, the study used Beck's despair questionnaire to gather the data. **Results:** Group counseling with existential approach was found to have a significant impact on reducing subscales of despair (despair in achieving the desires, hopelessness about the future, attitudes towards the future, and life outlook) in disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. However, it didn't have any effect on the subscale confidence in the future. **Conclusions:** group counseling with existential approach can be effective in reducing the despair in these people. The mechanism that is influential in reducing the disappointment and despair in disabled SCI is probably in the way this method helps the patients not to concentrate on what they have lost but to search for meaning.

**Keywords:** Existential theory, Disappointment, Spinal cord injury.

## INTRODUCTION

Meaning, purpose and hope in life are among the components of mental health. So if life is purposeful and meaningful, it is natural that every event -as though demanding- such as intense pressure and deadly diseases will find meaning in the course of life, (Jamali, 2000). Disabilities are among the great problems of human society and human scientific and technological progress has not yet been able to dominate the disability and its effects (Taylor and Fraser, 1982). One of the common problems of the disabled with spinal cord injuries is the disappointments in life. Disappointment is hopelessness that results from depression and can be in the form of loss of future expectancies. In this situation, one feels unpleasant and in severe cases, one feels that there is no future ahead (Abbasabadi, 2004). Disappointment is defined as a mediator of depression and a disappointed person is someone who is placed in a system of negative expectations about the future and the self and has a close relationship with the concept of learned hopelessness (Shekarkan et al., 1997).

Existential psychotherapy is a philosophical approach that deals with the man and his world. This kind of approach is a kind of perspective towards some of the concepts rather than a range of techniques and methods. These concepts include life, death, hope and despair, relationship and isolation, consciousness and responsibility towards self and others, self-actualization and searching for meaning in a life where death is in front of us (Sharf, 2009). Previous studies have shown that the existential approach and other approaches in psychotherapy can be effective in changing the process of life of people who suffer from hopelessness and despair.

Research by Breitbart et al (2004) showed that psychological interventions are quite effective in the treatment of psychological disorders and can bring about serious changes that last to the end of life. Kyung Ah and colleagues (2009) expressed through research that therapeutic has a significant impact in reducing suffering and improving the life of people. Therapeutic also help reduce stress and improve quality of life and health in adolescents with cancer.

Peterson (2010) reported that knowing the meaning and search for meaning in life is positively related to life satisfaction, well-being and happiness, and negatively associated with depression. In addition, meaning in life enhances mental health and social welfare.

Hassan Zadeh, (2009) and Zarandi Ghanbari, (2009) reported a consulting group in a therapeutic way to reduce frustration in the lives of SCI Disabled and to improve the mental health of women significantly affected by the earthquake in the city of Zarand. Thus efforts to treat or reduce anxiety and frustration are an important issue in the lives of people with disabilities. Based on the research conducted in this area, present study focuses on two hypotheses. 1. Group counseling with existential approach has a significant impact on the reduction of despair among the Disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. 2. Group counseling with existential approach has a significant impact in reducing subscales of despair in disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz.

The end goal of this research is to make the spinal disabled familiar with the trainings required for their beliefs and attitudes that can solve some of their problems and make them more adaptive, convenient and efficient people for their society.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### **Method**

#### **Subjects**

The population was all SCI disabled males in the city of Shiraz. Using simple random sampling, the hopelessness questionnaire was administered to 70 of them. Later 20 patients who scored above 9 (cut-point scale) were selected. The participants were divided into two groups including 10 in the experimental group and 10 in the control group. The present study was a quasi-experimental pre-test - post-test study with a control group. The Pretest-posttest control group design composed of two groups in which the participants in each group were measured twice. First the pre-test was given to the participants and two weeks after the clinical intervention the posttest was administered. The experimental group received the Logotherapy education for 10 sessions, 90 minutes each, before the posttest but the control group received no intervention. Table 1 presents the content of the sessions held for the experimental group:

Table 1. the content of group sessions through the existential approach

Session	Content
1	Familiarizing the group members, building confidence, setting goals and rules for the group, explaining the group counseling procedure and answering questions, presenting the guidelines and setting the treatment convention.
2	Self-explanation and statement of the problem by members, Building rapport with members and encouraging them to express their feelings
3	Raising consciousness on self determination, taking responsibility, and freedom of choice
4	Encouraging the members to express and assess self values and attempt to understand values imposed by others, recognizing previously made choices and their influences on life, determining constructive choices and replacing the bad ones
5	Raising consciousness on previous problems and crises and leading people to find meaning in the face of them and making people aware of the fact that if they change attitudes, they can change the kind of their existence
6	Leading members to find meaning considering values such as creativity, experience, and attitude.
7	Recognizing the anxiety of members and making the members to face them
8	Making the members face loneliness and death anxiety and leading them to accept and give meaning to these concepts
9	Making members aware of being frank and try to release themselves from self deception into their real selves. Preparing the members to end the group practices
10	Feedback from members and expressing the attitudes and feelings of the members about the sessions, summarizing and concluding, running the post test

### **Instruments**

The hopelessness questionnaire by Beck included 20 questions. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was 81/0 as measured by Beck et al. In addition, Dezhkam (1383) measured the reliability scale (Cronbach's alpha) to be 7962/0. According to the instructions of the questionnaire, respondents are asked to judge the statements about themselves being either true or false. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was 72/0 for the pretest and 74/0 for the posttest.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Result**

To evaluate the effectiveness of group counseling practices with existential approach in reducing the despair, we used the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) which makes it possible to compare the disappointment scores in both control and experimental groups. These results are shown in the tables below. Initial analysis includes one way analysis of variance.

Table 2. ANOVA Dependent variable: The test hopeless

Indicators	Variable	square	degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F ratio	significance level F
Groups		1,589	1	1,589	0,485	0,496
Pretest despair		23,723	1	23,723	7,241	0,016
Band pretest despair		4,850	1	4,850	1,480	0,241

a. R Squared = .502 (Adjusted R Squared = .408)

As can be seen in Table 1, there is no significant group effect. However, the effect of the disappointment pretest is significant. The interaction of the disappointment pretest is also found not to be significant. Later, the equality of variances was examined.

Table 3. Assumption of equal variances in Table 3

Dependent variable: The test hopeless			
F	df1	df2	Sig.
.441	1	18	.516

As can be seen in Table 3, there is no significant difference between the error variances.

Table 4. ANCOVA table

Indicators	Variable	square	degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F ratio	significance level F
Pretest despair		19,131	1	19,131	5,679	0,029
Group		39,038	1	39,038	11,588	0,003

a. R Squared = .456 (Adjusted R Squared = .392)

As can be seen from Table 4, the auxiliary random variable (pretest of disappointment) is significantly related to the dependent variable (the posttest). The second row represents the group's main effect that is meaningful.

Table 5. Adjusted mean posttest score of the control group and test hopelessness

Group	Mean	Std. Error
Control	11.638	0.589
Experiment	8.762	0.589

Table 5 shows the adjusted scores of the post-test of hopelessness in both the control and experimental groups after the removal of the auxiliary random variable (pretest scores of despair). Therefore the first hypothesis is confirmed based on the above tables. In other words the counseling practices with existential approach are found to have a significant impact in reducing the despair of disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. The second hypothesis: Group counseling with existential approach has a significant impact in reducing subscales of despair (despair in achieving the desires, hopelessness about the future, attitudes towards the future, life outlook, confidence in the future) in disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz.

Table 6 shows the effect of group counseling on subscales of despair through the covariance method.

Indicators	square	degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F ratio	significance level F
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Variable					
Pre-test					
Jasmine in achieving desired	19.044	1	19.044	6.664	0.034
Group	35,511	1	35,511	8,390	0.010
Pre-test					
hopeless about the future	8.820	1	8.820	4.720	0.119
Group	9,940	1	9,940	6,946	0.030
Pretest					
attitude to the future	3.889	1	3.889	9.298	0.007
Group	3.800	1	3.800	3.913	0.085
Pretest					
Prospects for life	4,667	1	4,667	4,735	0.035
Group	5,748	1	5,748	5,983	0.026
Pretest					
confidence in the future	2.600	1	2.600	3.545	0.131
Group	3.400	1	3.400	7.182	0.014

As can be seen in table 6, only the auxiliary random variable (pretest of despair in achieving the desires) and (the pretest of attitudes toward the future) have a significant relationship with the dependent variable and the relationship is not significant in other subscales.

### Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the effect of group counseling with existential approach on the reduction of despair and its subscales among the Disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. Results showed that group counseling with existential approach has a significant impact on the reduction of despair among the disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. The study suggests it is possible to use group counseling in order to reduce the despair among Disabled SCI. These findings are consistent with (Akajy and Bass, 2001's; Peterson, 2010), (Patterson, 2010), (Sheikhpoor, 2007), (Nassiri and Latifian, 2008), (Hassanzadeh, 2009) and (Ghanbari Zarandi, 2009). According to the principles and the existing evidence, when we talk about the disabled SCI, disappointment and despair are definitely considered as one of their most common psychological and mental problems.

Disappointment is hopelessness that results from depression and can be in the form of loss of future expectancies. In this situation, one feels unpleasant and in severe cases, one feels that there is no future ahead (Abbasabadi, 2004). As this situation continues, these people are faced with more severe crises and can trigger other feelings such as feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and helplessness. Studies conducted have shown that the depressed and hopeless lose their ability to think and are not able to analyze the situations as they are. The importance of negative events are so magnified that facts will be distorted and it becomes almost impossible to distinguish right from the wrong. Feelings of worthlessness are often the result of internal critique. Self-suggestions such as (I'm not a good person) (I am weaker than the others), (I am worthless), and the like are the main causes of despair and low self-esteem. (Bronze, Qrachh translation, 1996).

This study shows that group counseling with existential approach can be effective in reducing the despair in these people. The mechanism that is influential in reducing the disappointment and despair in disabled SCI is probably in the way this method helps the patients not to concentrate on what they have lost but to search for meaning. In this approach, the counselor emphasizes what is important and valued in human beings and distinguishes them from the nonhuman, that is, the spiritual dimension of existence and thereby concentrates on enabling the patient to overcome the tragic triangle of life, the pain, guilt and suffering. This has led to Logotherapy to be recognized as a valid approach in reducing frustration. Finally, based on the findings of the present study which confirms the findings of other research, psychologists and counselors can make use of the counseling group with existential approach to reduce the amount of despair in disabled SCI patients. It also recommended that future studies use this approach for other groups of disabled people. The major limitation of this study was to find 20 handicapped patients who were almost homogeneous in terms of their gender, age, and the amount and duration of disability as well as coordinating them to hold the treatment sessions.

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