

# The effect of the existential approach through group practices on the development of spirituality among the disabled SCI

Nazanin Honarparvaran<sup>1</sup>, Zahra Ghaderi<sup>1</sup>, Dariush Esfandiari Bayat<sup>2\*</sup> and Mehrzar Cheraghi<sup>3</sup>

1- Department of Counseling, Marvdasht Branch, Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht, Iran

2- MA in counseling, Counselor at the office of education Shiraz, Iran

3- MA in counseling, office of education, Zarghan , Iran

*Corresponding author:* Dariush esfandiari Bayat

**ABSTRACT:** This study used a quasi-experimental method to evaluate the effectiveness of group counseling through the existential approach on the development of spirituality and its dimensions (spiritual prosperity, unity, and bond) among the disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. The population included all SCI disabled in the city whose disability was between 5 to 10 years long. Using simple random sampling, 70 participants were selected from the database at the office of welfare in the city. Later 20 patients who scored above 9 in the test of hopelessness and below the mean in the test of spiritual growth were selected and randomly divided into two experimental and control groups. The experimental group went through 10 Session of training in existential approach techniques each lasting for an hour and a half and the spiritual questionnaire was used to collect the data. Results showed that group counseling with existential approach significantly affects the spiritual growth and its subscales.

**Keywords:** Existential approach, spirituality, disabled SCI.

## INTRODUCTION

Disabilities are among the greatest problems of human society and human scientific and technological progress has not yet been able to dominate the disability and its effects. Every year around the world, many accidents occur that often interlace the social systems and disrupt the social balance and harmony (Taylor and Fraser, 1982). Industrialization, urbanization, and various other factors pave the way for disability to occur. Among these are spinal cord injuries which have recently been considerably growing (Sabaghinezhad, 2005).

A lot of research suggests that mental health problems and psychopathology increases among the disabled people (Drabk, 1986) and in many cases it may be long -lasting and sustainable (Rabonis and Bykmn , 1991 as mentioned in Zarandi Ghanbari, 2007). In addition " post traumatic stress " leaves major negative effects on physical and mental health of people. Rather than being a science or a clinical activity, mental health is a crucial and vital effort that encompasses social and humane obligations(Gymvn, 2004, mentioned in Ghodrati et al., 2010).

Existential psychotherapy is a philosophical approach that deals with 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, translated by Firooz Bakht , 2009).

Logo therapy, purposefulness 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). Based on the above definitions, the therapist's task is to help patients to discover the meaning of life. However, (s) he does not suffice to this and attempts to develop special treatment methods for the patients (Mohammadpoor, 2006).

To complement what was said, we can refer to Frankel (1997 as cited in Karden, 2003) in that logo therapy attempts to enable patients to overcome life's tragic triangle including pain, guilt and suffering.

Side effects of the disability can be examined at the individual, family, social, and economic levels. At the individual level, aside from personal discomfort, depression, low self-esteem, impaired self-concept, sexual problems, anger, rage, and problems of compromise, the person may feel guilty because of the disability and feel that this disability is the result of his sins (Shafi Abadi, 2003).

In the past few decades, spirituality and spiritual growth has attracted the attention of psychologists and mental health professionals as one of the important factors of life satisfaction. Advances made in psychology on one hand and the dynamic and complex nature of modern societies on the other, has led the spiritual needs of human beings to stand against the material needs and to be regarded more important. It seems that modern people have been drawn towards spirituality and spiritual factors more than ever. Psychologists and psychotherapists too have realized that traditional simple methods are not enough to cure mental disorders. Hardy writes: It seems that the key characteristics of human spiritual and religious experiences are revealed in his enthusiasm and passion towards an extra ordinary reality often shown in early childhood. This feeling which is something (present) accessible and understandable, is realized in the form of a deity or a relationship (you and me) established through Prayer (West, 2003 cited in Fnla, 2010). Spirituality is regarded as a "special " topic in the social and natural sciences. These growing professional inclinations have coincided with the growing popularity of spirituality among the general population. Results from surveys show that 80 percent of people in America believe in the power of prayers in healing diseases. (Wallis 1996, cited in Bahrami et al , 2005). On the other hand it can be mentioned that spiritual growth is considered as an influential aspect of all areas of human life. (Piedmont 2001 cited in Bahrami et al., 2005).

To encounter the pressures of life in which humans are in need of help, the spiritual dimension plays an important role in finding meaning. He describes this encounter as an attempt to find meaning in stressful situations and determines two kinds of defense mechanisms in this regard. These are two separate supportive and modifying mechanisms that complement each other (Pargament, 1998, Miller, 2003, quoted Pooladian , 2010).

Therefore, therapeutic efforts to enhance the spiritual lives of people with disabilities are an important issue. So the main question is whether Logo therapy through group counseling is effective in the spiritual development of the disabled.

Logo therapy through the existential approach in simple terms involves healing through meaning or sense. But since this definition has religious connotations, Logo therapy can be defined as clinical psychotherapy with an emphasis on meaning. Logotherapy perceives life to be meaningful under any circumstances. People who are determined will be motivated towards meaning and enjoy free will (Frankel, 1969 cited in Logas and Zuangirsh, 2002).

In a study Bireitbart and colleagues (2004) showed that through psychotherapy, medical and psychological disorders change significantly near the end of one's life. Sunhek Cho, (2008) showed that group counseling through the existential approach has a significant effect on the levels of meaning and purpose in life and overcoming the temptations of alcohol use among the students. Kyung Ah et al, (2009) expressed in their research that logo therapy is effective in reducing pain and improving lives. It was also found to be significantly effective in reducing stress and promoting health and quality of life among adolescents with cancer.

In a study by Patterson, (2010), it was reported that understanding the meaning and the search for meaning in life is positively related to life satisfaction, well-being and happiness and negatively associated with depression. Moreover meaning in life enhances the mental health and welfare.

Research by Poorebrahimi, (2006), Nasiri and Latifian, (2007) demonstrated that methods Logotherapy and multi-models is effective for geriatric depression. Moreover, there was a significant correlation between attachment to God, and the variables under study including happiness, life satisfaction, and depression. Based on research conducted with regard to Logo therapy and spiritual development, this study attempts to examine two hypotheses. 1- Group counseling through the existential approach is significantly effective in increasing spirituality among the disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz 2 Group counseling through the existential approach is significantly effective in increasing subscales of spirituality (spiritual prosperity , unity, and spiritual bond) among the disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. The final goal of this research is to introduce training in beliefs and attitudes required for people with the spinal disability which can partly solve their problems so that they can be more adaptive and efficient and lead more convenient lives in the society.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### **Method**

#### **Population and sampling**

The population of this study was all the disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. Using simple random sampling, patients whose age ranged between 20 to 30 years and whose disability lasted between 5 to 10 years were selected and the questionnaire of Spiritual growth was administered to them (n=70). The 20 patients who scored below the mean on the

questionnaire were then selected to participate in the study. They were randomly divided into two experimental and control groups each with 10 participants.

**Instruments**

- Spiritual questionnaire: developed by Piedmont (1999), the questionnaire is composed of three components: Spiritual prosperity, unity, and bond. Piedmont reports the reliability of the subscales to be desirable. For spiritual unity, prosperity, and bond, reliability values of 0/83, 0/87 and 0/64 are reported. Within the context of Iran, the reliability and validity of the scales measured by Razavieh and Hashemi (2008) for the Principal components of the subscale of unity ranged from 0/53 to 0/73 and for the principal components of the spiritual prosperity subscale from 0/48 to 0/51 and for the principal components of the subscale of spiritual bond from 0/57 to 0/61 respectively. Results showed that except for the spiritual bond subscale whose alpha coefficient is low (0/23), the other subscales and the total scale and subscales showed high reliability values. For spiritual unity, prosperity and bond, the total value amounted to 0/67, 0/59, and 0/71 respectively. The reliability of the questionnaire in the present study was calculated through the Cronbach's alpha (pre-test - post-test). This amounted to 0/76 in the pre- test and 0/79 for the post-test respectively.

**Research design and procedure:**

Present study used a quasi-experimental method with pre-test, post-test and a control group. Pre-test and post-test control group design is composed of two groups which are both measured twice. The first measurement was through a pretest while the second was applied two weeks after the intervention in the form of a post-test. After the pretest, the experimental group received 10 sessions of training in Logo therapy each for 90 minutes while the control group received no intervention. These sessions are briefly presented as follows.

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

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Result**

Analysis of covariance was applied to examine the effectiveness of group counseling through the existential approach on the spiritual growth of the participants. At first, Table 1 presents the results of ANOVA conducted to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the spiritual growth test.

Table 1. ANOVA to compare the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in spiritual growth Dependent variable posttest of spiritual growth

	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean squares	F	sig
Group	.225	1	.225	5.754	0.31
	997		997	54	
Pretest	1055	1	1055	26	.001
	0.180		0.180	.867	
Group *					
pretest.	179	1	179	4,167	0.67
	363		363		0.67

a. R Squared = 658 (Adjusted R Squared = .585)

As shown in Table 1, group effect (P <0.05, F =5.745) and the pretest of spiritual growth (P <0.05, F=26.867) is found to be significant. But the interaction of group, pre-test and spiritual growth is not significant (P>0. 05, F =4.167). Next, the equality of variances was examined.

Table 2. Examining the assumption of equal variances Dependent variable posttest spiritual

F	Df1	Df2	Sig.
.441	1	18	.516

As can be seen in Table 2, there is no significant difference between the error variances ( $P > 0.05$ ,  $F = 0.441$ )

Table 3. Analysis of covariance

Indicators Variable	Sum of squares	df	mean squares	F	sig
Pretest of spiritual growth	875,907	1	875,907	18.018	.001
Group	228,834	1	228,834	4,707	.047

a. R Squared = 546. (Adjusted R Squared = 486.

As can be seen from the first row of the above table, the covariate (pretest of spiritual growth) is significantly correlated to the dependent variable (posttest of spiritual growth) ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 18.018$ ). The second row shows the effectiveness of the experimental intervention (spiritual growth). ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 4.0707$ ).

Table 4 Adjusted mean scores of post-test in experimental and control groups

Group	Mean	Std. Error
Control	74.021	2.659
Experimental	82.183	2.344

The above table presents the results of the posttest of spiritual growth for the experimental and control groups after the elimination of the covariate (pretest scores for spiritual growth). Based on these tables, the first research hypothesis is confirmed. In other words, the practice of group counseling through the existential approach can effectively increase the spiritual development of the disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz.

Second hypothesis: group counseling through the existential approach can significantly increase the subscales of spiritual growth (spiritual prosperity, unity, and bond) among the disabled SCI within the city of Shiraz. ANCOVA was used to examine this assumption by comparing the mean scores of both control and experimental groups as shown in the tables below.

Table 5. ANCOVA to examine the effect of group counseling through the existential approach on the subscales of spiritual growth

Indicators Variables	sum of squares	df	mean	square	F
Pretest of Spiritual prosperity	40,788	1	40,788	7,077	.025
Group	140,091	1	140,091	15,769	.000
Pretest of spiritual Unity	25,084	1	25,084	19,537	.000
Group	31,345	1	31,345	25,476	.000
Pretest of spiritual bond	141,719	1	141,719	12,569	.002
Group	241,755	1	241,755	21,441	.000

As can be seen from the above table:

- Covariate (pretest of spiritual prosperity) has a meaningful relationship with the dependent variable (posttest of spiritual prosperity) ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 7.077$ ). The main effect of group was significant ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 15.769$ ).
- The covariate (pretest of spiritual unity) has a meaningful relationship with the dependent variable (posttest spiritual unity) ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 19.537$ ). The main effect of group was found significant ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 25.476$ ).
- The covariate (pretest of spiritual bond) has a meaningful relationship with the dependent variable (posttest of spiritual bond) ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 19.569$ ) and the main effect is significant ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F = 21.441$ ).

### Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of group counseling through the existential approach on the development of spirituality and its dimensions (spiritual prosperity, unity, and bond) among the disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. In this respect, two hypotheses were developed and both were confirmed. Results showed that group counseling with existential approach significantly affects the spiritual growth and its subscales among the disabled SCI in the city of Shiraz. These findings are consistent with some of the previous findings such as the. Logo therapy greatly improve the consistency and quality of life among the disabled SCI (Thompson, AC, Cruise, Henry 2003, cited in Sabaghi nezhad, 2005). Existential approach can significantly affect the sense of purposefulness in life among the spinal cord disabled and the meaning of life in men and women addicted to alcohol (Cho, 2008). Logo therapy significantly affects the promotion of the meaning of life (Kiung Ah et al. 2009). Mets (2005) holds that spirituality is one of the basic principles of life with which many other aspects such as the meaning and purpose arise. This definition indicates that spirituality is a very important dimension in all aspects of life. On the other hand, existential psychotherapy is an approach that deals with man and his world. Regarding the definition a provided for spirituality and existential approach, one can discern the

affinities and similarities between them. In support of this view, Frankel believes that the existential approach includes two interlocking concepts which are like two sides of the same coin so that logo involves both meaning and spirituality. This conceptual similarity can justify the existence of a relationship between them. Therefore we can justify the effectiveness of group counseling with existential approach on the spiritual growth or religious growth among the disabled SCI. In addition the existential approach may be effective for people involved in crises since loss and severe trauma deviates the man from the normal routine of life and draws his attention to the temporary nature of objectives and values. In this case humans need instruments through which to find lasting values and goals and it is likely that this approach could provide an opportunity for these people.

Finally, Based on the findings and those confirmed by other researchers, psychologists and counselors can apply this approach to increase the spirituality among the disabled SCI. It also recommended applying this approach for other groups of disabled people in subsequent research. A major limitation of this study was to come up with a group of disabled SCI who were almost homogeneous in terms of sex, age, disability duration and then coordinate them to run the course of treatment.

## REFERENCES

- Bahrami F and Ramazaniferrand A. 2005. The role of internal and external religious orientations on mental health and depression among the elderly. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, (1).
- Bireitbart W, Gibson C, Poppito S and Berg A. 2004. Psychotherapeutic interventions at the end of life. A focus on meaning and spirituality Canadian *journal of psychiatry* 25:230-235.
- Bireitbart W, Gibson C, Poppito SR and Berg A. 2004. Scico traputic interrention at the end of life : focus on meaning and spirituality canadian *journal of psychiatry*,49(6, 366-372).
- Carden TF. 2003. Victor. E. Frankle and logotherapy. Available online at: <http://www.tearden.com>.
- Drabek TE. 1986. *Human system responses to disaster*. New York: springer-verlig.
- Fenella Q. 2010. The right to choose Existential Phenomenological psychotherapy with primary school, aged children. *journal of Counseling psychology review*, Vol. 25, No. 1. The British psycholocial society.
- Ghodrati S, Tabrizi M and Esmaeili M. 2010. Effectiveness of group therapy based on Frankl's view on the rising public health among MS patients. *Journal of the Iranian Boad of counseling*.
- Ghanbarizarandi Z. 2007. *Effectiveness of mental health promotion through group counseling on health improvements among women affected by the earthquake in the city of Zarand*. Unpublished master's thesis, Tehran Azad University, Iran.
- Jamali F. 2002. *The relationship between religious attitudes, sense of meaning in life and mental health of students at Tehran University*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Alzahra, Tehran, Iran.
- Kang KA, Lm JI, Kim H, Kim SJ, Song Mk dnd Sim S. 2009. The effect of logotherapy on suffering, finding meaning, and spiritual well-being of adolescents with terminal cancer.*journal of korean Acad Child Health Nurs Vol.15 no.2 , 136-144 April 2009*.
- Lukas E and Zwang HB. 2002. *Comprehnsive handbook of psychotherapy*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Vol: 3. Pages: 338-356.
- Mohammadpoor YA. 2006. *An overlook on existential psychology and psychotherapy*. Tehran: Danzh.
- Mutles R. 2005. Spritual need one: spiritual development: The aging process: A journey of lifelong spiritual formation. *Journal of Religions, Spirituality & Aging*, 17(3-4), 55-72.
- Najarian B and Barati CF. 2000. *Psychological consequences of disasters*. Tehran: track.
- Nasiri C and Lotfi M. 2007. Attachment to God, life satisfaction and positive emotions. *Fourth national seminar on student mental health*.
- Porebrahimi H. 2006. *Comparing the therapeutic efficacy of group counseling and a multi-model individual counseling on reducing depression in Tehran Hospices*. Unpublished PhD thesis, AllamehTabatabai University, Tehran, Iran.
- Puladyan N. 2009. *The relationship between spiritual growth and life satisfaction among the elderly in Shiraz*. Unpublished MA thesis, MARVDASHT: Islamic Azad University.
- Peterson C. 2010. When is the search for meaning related to life satisfaction.*Journal of international Applied psychology: health and wellbeing*, 2(1), 1-13.
- Piedmont RL. 1999. Does spirituality represent the sixth factor of personality? Spiritual trancecndence and the five factor model.*Journal of personality*, 7(6), 985-1013.
- Sharf RE. 2007. *Theories of Psychotherapy and Counseling*. Text in Farsi: The Firoozbakht, Tehran: Rasa.
- Shafiabadi A. 2003. *Personal and professional rehabilitation of disabled people*. Tehran: Forest.
- Sabaghinezhad M. 2005. *Effects of mannequins times on the improvement of health problems - spinal motor disability welfare in Yazd*. Unpublished master's thesis, Institute of Psychiatry, Iran.