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The Application of Compassion in the Counseling Process as a Tool

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Abstract:

Compassion, in Pali or Sanskrit, is known as 'Karuna'. This has come under the teachings of Buddhism and Jainism. In Buddhist teachings Karuna is considered as one of the Four Sublime Truths and Buddha has implemented the importance of practicing Karuna. Besides, Karuna is considered as one of the four reflections of universal friendship under Jainism, which can stop the influx of Karma. This research is analytic. It has been used the secondary data collection methods such as e-books and journal information. Although both Buddhism and Jainism have taken Karuna as a religious practice, this can be elaborated as a successful way of dealing with people in daily life, and also the main concern of this topic is to explicate how does this concept 'compassion' can be taken to do a successful counseling session in psychological means. Counseling is a professional relationship that builds between the client and the counselor to guide and resolve the personal or psychological problem. Compassion can help the counselor to show empathy, gentleness, kindness, and to understand the client's problem. Even many psychologists have explained the importance of compassion, not in terms of Karuna, but as a way of doing a successful counseling session.

Keywords: Buddhism, counseling psychology, client-centered therapy, karuna

1. Introduction

Compassion in Pali and Sanskrit is known as 'Karuna'. In a broader sense, this compassion can be elaborated as 'suffering together', which means the feeling when you are facing another person's pain and you are helping the person to get relief from that particular pain. Moreover, compassion cannot be taken as empathy or altruism, because empathy is related to the feeling of the other person's emotions. But compassion comes with the desire to help the person who is suffering. Compassion simply is a form of helpfulness, which means, a person needs to feel the pain of others to help him/her.

This concept of compassion or 'Karuna' in Pali or Sanskrit comes under the teachings of Buddhism and Jainism. In Buddhism, 'Karuna' comes under the four noble truths. It is said that in early Buddhism 'Metta' which is translated as loving-kindness, and in Mahayana Buddhism 'Karuna' usually translated as compassion, both are closely associated with the English sense of compassion.¹ According to Buddhist teachings, compassion is universal.² In Jain teachings, it is a main idea is to spread compassion to all living beings, human and non-human as well. Jainism practices non-violence in a broader idea; therefore, they consider all living beings as sacred, and among living beings, humans come to the first and highest form of earthly existence. Therefore, it can be understood how these religions and philosophies have been discussing the compassion up to now.

While the major consideration of this research is to find how does compassion can be linked with the counseling process, to make it a success, there I have focused on discussing what is counseling? What is the necessity of compassion in counseling? And finally, how does this compassion and counseling can be integrated.

Counseling is linked with psychology and also compassion has associated with the field of positive psychology. Compassion is all about understanding the person with proper communication and building up a better relationship. Counseling is where people communicate their problems with a professional specialized person. There we can see many definitions regarding counseling.

According to the American Psychological Association, 'professional counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals'.³ Since the counseling processes seek to develop the mental well-being of the person, counselors always try to use specific strategies to build rapport with the clients. Counseling is indeed a professional relationship that builds with confidence and trust between the service provider (counselor) and the client. But the necessity of compassion arises here. Which means to build up the positive successful relationship between the counselor and client, why do we need the Karuna or the compassion? What is the need for compassion to proceed with the positive interrelationship between the two parties and

¹ Grosz, M. & Unno, Mark Ty., (2013), 'Compassion', Oxford Bibliographies

² Bloom, Pamela., (2000), 'Buddhist acts of Compassion'

³ American Counseling Association, 2019.01.14 sited, 'What is Professional Counseling?', www.counseling.org

how compassion can be utilized to maintain a successful counseling procedure throughout the counseling profession? These are the main concerns that are to be discussed in this research paper.

2. Objectives

- To understand the ways and means of utilizing compassion within the counseling process.
- To identify why compassion is needed in counseling.
- To identify the importance of compassion within the counselor with relevance to the client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers.

3. Methodology

This research is mainly based on the analytical method, which means, I have referred to the books and other research papers done by scholars with regards to the compassion and implication in the counseling procedure. I have gone through the teachings in Buddhism and teachings in Jainism that is to get an idea about the concepts related to compassion. Secondary resources have been used to accomplish the task, those are the books, research paper articles and, etc.

4. Literature Review

Kristin Neff in her book 'Self-Compassion' offers a powerful solution for fighting against the depression, anxiety, and self-criticism which arises within people due to the pressured and competitive culture. According to Kristin, she emphasizes self-compassion as a tool which helps people to understand and accept our weaknesses and limitations in their lives and to improve self-confidence, contentment, and reach the person's highest potential.⁴ My attempt in this research is to discuss how compassion can be utilized to build a successful counseling relationship. That is, through understanding the client's actual situation, how does the counselor can use compassion in the counseling process? And how does compassion can be used to revolutionize the client's whole life positively?

Karen Armstrong, the author of 'A History of God', 'Islam', and 'Budda', has written the book 'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life'. In this book, she tries to bring an impassioned and practical attempt that can help people to make the world a compassionate place. According to Karen, she believes that compassion as an intrinsic characteristic of all human beings. Also, she explains that all of us should work diligently to cultivate and expand people's capacity for compassion. She suggests a plan which can make the person more compassionate. She starts the book with 'Learn about Compassion' and she ends the book with 'Love Your Enemies'. More than that, she discusses mindfulness, sympathetic joy, the limits of our knowledge about others, etc. She suggests developing ourselves by putting ourselves into the practical means of compassion.⁵ But in my research, the main concern is not to give an account of how compassion work on people's minds and lives does. My concern is to bring up the necessity of compassion to understand others. Compassion is not all about understanding others, but to help them when needed. I expect to reveal how these works with regard to the counseling process.

According to Philip J. Larkin, in his book, 'Compassion: The Essence of Palliative and End of Life Care', suggests that compassion has become a fundamental aspect of palliative care. This book provides insight into the practice of compassion as a palliative care feature, to lead the healthcare professionals, social workers, and educators, etc. This book also comprises examples and experiences which are related to historical and contemporary discourse on compassion in palliative medicine.⁶ My attempt in this research is to elaborate on how compassion can be managed in palliative care but under the counseling proceedings. How does this compassion can be used to identify and recognized the client's actual situation and provide him/her comfort?

Claire Chambers and Elaine Ryder in their book 'Compassion and caring in Nursing' (2009), suggest that 'compassion in its many manifestations, is the key to rediscovering what lies at the heart of nursing practice all over the world. It is absolutely, essential that nurses start to revisit compassion as a central focus for nursing practice...'⁷In this book, it is focusing on a patient-centered approach in caring. In this research, I expect to elaborate the theoretical viewpoints that come in the western psychology, about Carl Rogers' Client-Centered Therapy, and also to identify the importance of compassion within the counselor to continue a successful counseling session.

Roger Charlton's book on 'Compassion: Compassion, Continuity, and Caring in the NHS', suggests that compassion is central to the practice of health care. It is explained that patients need and they expect compassion as much as they need the knowledge and the technical skills of healthcare professionals.⁸ Even though this book concerns the nursing, post-conflict symptoms, suicide prevention, etc., it is related to the field of medicine, my concern in this research is to elaborate the importance in the compassionate caring towards the mental well-being of a particular person. Because counseling mainly concerns the mental health issues of people, to enhance the person's mentality positively.

In this manner, we can elaborate on the topics that have been discussed under the theme of Compassion. Most of the time the researchers and scholars have been focusing on the development of individual well-being, which means they have concerned the compassion with regards to positive psychology and the medical sciences. Very few attempts have been taken under the palliative care with regards to the compassion. Therefore, it is a need to discuss the importance of

⁴ For further details refer Neff, Kristin., (2011), 'Self-Compassion', Hodder and Stoughton Publication

⁵ See for further details Armstrong, Karen., (2011), 'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life', Borzoi Books

⁶ See for further details Larkin, Philip J., (2015), 'Compassion: The Essence of Palliative and End-of-Life Care', Oxford University Press

⁷ For further information refer Chambers, Claire. & Ryder, Elaine., (2009), 'Compassion and Caring in Nursing', Radcliffe Publishing

⁸See for more details Carlton, Rodger., (2015), 'Compassion: Compassion, Continuity. And Caring in the NHS', Royal College of General Practitioners.

compassion, to proceed with a successful counseling session. The reason is that people's mental well-being is another important measurement that elaborates on the real mentality of the people in the state.

5. Discussion

Since compassion is a concept that is more dealing with medicine, palliative care, and religion, it is important to see whether there's a relevance in this concept with the mental health problems as well. Compassion means understanding other's problems and helping them to get through it. This is what counseling does, understanding the client's problem, and guiding the person to overcome the problem. As I attempt to implement counseling and compassion together, I have taken a number of certain characteristics that a counselor should have to identify the necessity of compassion in each level of these characteristics.

Mainly, I am considering Client-Centered Therapy which was introduced by famous psychologist Carl Rogers (1902-1987). It has applications in health and social care, the voluntary sector, and is relevant to work with people who are severely mentally and emotionally distressed.⁹ This Client-Centered Therapy (CCT) is known as Person-Centered Therapy as well, it was introduced and developed in the 1940s and 1950s. This made the counseling proceedings more humanistic and do not try to demotivate the client and do not make them uncomfortable within the counseling procedure. The whole process of CCT is based on the concept called Unconditional Positive Regard. Mainly three concepts that are discussed under CCT. They are as; Unconditional Positive Regards (acceptance), Congruence (Genuineness), and Empathetic Understanding.¹⁰

Unconditional Positive regard means that the counselor should not be pre-judgmental upon the clients.¹¹ For instance, if the client is HIV infected, then obviously the counselor has to treat the client unconditionally. Being unconditional means that, the counselor treating the client as a human. That is, treating the client as a human without considering the client's actual weaknesses and the seriousness of the problem. Simply the counselor must perceive Unconditional Positive regards minimally.¹² The difficulty of understanding clients and building rapport arises when the counselor is a stick into the conditioned self-regard within him or herself. This should be corrected to the unconditional self-regards to the counselor himself and the unconditional positive regard toward the client.

Then let's explore how this concept of unconditional positive regard can be taken under compassion. Compassion is where people understand others with kindness and a gentle spirit. This gentleness is something that a counselor should have to let the client warmth towards the counselor to start communicating. If the counselors behave rudely and aggressively, the client might never speak up.

Then the congruence is another necessary skill that a counselor should develop within themselves.¹³ Congruence is the willingness to transparently relate to clients without hiding behind a professional or personal facade. That is the genuineness in simple words. The counselor has to be genuine to build a strong rapport. The counselor should be able to convince the client what the actual situation is. When it comes to compassion and congruence, that is the unconditional positive regard leading the counselor towards congruence. This means as explained above, compassion together with unconditional positive regard is the basis of congruence or genuineness.

Third the empathetic understanding comes. Empathy has a strong relation to compassion. Empathy is not sympathy.¹⁴ Sympathy is when people suffer the counselor also feels pain but there is no way of getting riding of it. Empathy is where the counselor understands the client's actual situation and responding wisely and intellectually. Here, in Rogers' context, he elaborates on the empathetic responding, which means, the counselor has to respond in a way showing the client that he understood the client's problem. That is the way the counselor should react to the client. Concerning compassion, it is the response that the counselor is making towards the client. That is, through this empathetic responding the counselor can show compassion to the client. On the other hand, compassion is another way of showing empathy towards people.

6. Conclusion

In a real sense, there is no harshness in counseling. It is needed patience, long-suffering, empathy, kindness, and gentle spirit to order to become a good counselor. In the Client-Centered Therapy, the therapist was seen as participating as a whole person in the therapeutic relationship. Through this method, the client can be seen as developing beyond the increased self-esteem, and more than that the clients were involving and showing more openness to the experiences and the willingness to process. CCT method directly deals with the client in a humanistic way to understand their problems and to guide them to overcome the problems.

Compassion along with the counseling procedure was my main concern to elaborate on the importance of compassion within the counseling sessions. According to Rogers' theory, the counselor should develop unconditional positive regards, congruence, and empathetic responding. These characteristics are strongly connected with the compassion, which means, if the compassion understands the real situation of the particular person, these characteristics, comprise the compassion at least a certain amount of compassion inside the counselor. Practicing compassion daily basis to help others is the most important thing. And with regards to the counseling proceedings, caring and the love towards every person in the sense that every person is a human is a necessity. Therefore, the compassion can be taken as a factor

⁹ For further information refer to Wilkins, Paul., (2015), 'Person-Centered Therapy: 100 Key Points', 2nd Edition, Routledge Publications

¹⁰ For more details please refer to [https://en.wikipedia.org/Person-Centered therapy: The necessary and sufficient conditions](https://en.wikipedia.org/Person-Centered%20therapy%3A%20The%20necessary%20and%20sufficient%20conditions), sited 2018/11/22

¹¹ Please refer for more details; Bower, Doug., (2000), 'The Person-Centered Approach: Application for Living', iUniverse

¹² Bower, Doug., (2000), 'The Person-Centered Approach: Application for Living', iUniverse

¹³ For more details: Wyatt, Gill., (2001), 'Congruence', PCCS Books

¹⁴ Decety, Jean. & Ickes, William., (2011), 'The Social Neuroscience of Empathy', MIT Press

that is directly influencing the counseling and it helps the counselor to proceed with a successful counseling session and positively guide the client.

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