The Effects of Clinicians’ Views on Relating Christianity to Psychological Practices on Treatment Outcome

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Introduction

- 95% of American adults believe in God, and 84% of adults say that religion is an important part of their lives (Betsy-Hall, Miller, & Bison, 2013).
- Less than 20% of adults actually incorporate spiritual discussions in therapy (McCaulley, 2005).
- 68% of patients believed it was the clinician’s job to bring up religion and spirituality in therapy (McCaulley, 2005).
- Stroppa & Moreira-Almeida (2011) found that clients’ quality of life was positively correlated with intrinsic religiosity and negatively correlated with both depressive symptoms and negative religious coping.

Objectives

- Purpose: to examine the effects clinicians’ views on relating Christianity to psychology have on treatment outcomes.
- Hypothesis 1: Christian clinicians that hold evidence-based practice and topics of religion/spirituality hand-in-hand, particularly the integrationist perspective, will yield greater score improvements on all religious coping measures.
- Hypothesis 2: Christian clinicians that believe in relating on more Christianity than secular psychology in therapy, particularly the transformational perspective, will yield greater score improvements specifically on religious coping measures.

Method

Participants

- Christian psychologists, marriage and family therapists, professional counselors, and counseling interns working at one of the Richmond counseling centers (N = 59; 75% female; M age = 38.27)
  - Bio-psycho-social perspective: N = 12
  - Integration perspective: N = 14
  - Christian psychology perspective: N = 7
  - Transformational perspective: N = 6
  - Biblical counseling perspective: N = 8
  - Clinicians differed on a variety of treatment approaches
  - Clients (N = 1286; 71% female; 48% adults; M # of sessions = 3.18)

Measures & Procedures

- Clinicians were asked to choose one of five vignettes created by Greggo & Sisemore (2013) based on Johnson et al.’s (2010) five views of relating faith to psychology.
- Clinicians were asked to make suggestions for change in trauma:
  - Change in self-help (F (3, 107)) = 1.17, ns
  - Change in substance abuse: F (3, 96) = .90, ns
  - Change in symptoms: F (3, 116) = 2.52, ns
  - Change in trauma: F (3, 420) = 2.35, ns

When comparing the results of clients treated by clinicians from each of the four perspectives, there were no significant differences in clients’ scores on the self-help, substance abuse, symptoms, and trauma measures.

Conclusion

- Clinicians who held the transformational perspective had a significantly stronger therapeutic alliance with their clients (see figure 1).
- Clinicians treated by clinicians of the transformational perspective showed significantly greater change on the global distress scales, daily functioning, and religious coping scales (see figures 2, 3, and 4).
- Therefore, our first hypothesis was not supported. The data does not reflect that the majority of clinicians held the integration perspective improved significantly better on all the treatment measures.
- However, the data did support our second hypothesis. Clinicians from the transformational perspective improved significantly better on the religious coping measure than clients from other perspectives.

Limitations

- No clinician chose the Biblical Counseling Perspective on the Relating Faith Survey; thus, we did not have any data from this perspective.
- Clinician responses on the Relating Faith Survey were significantly correlated with age, gender, and experience of clinician, which could have confounded the results.
- Women were aware they were coming to a Christian counseling center; thus, results at a secular counseling center could show different findings.
- There was a small number and uneven distribution of chosen perspectives among clinicians. For further study, we should recruit more clinicians from especially the Christian psychology and transformational perspectives.
- Perspectives were determined by short statements attempting to summarize a position, so these statements may not be conclusive of the perspective.

Implications

- The results of this study suggest that a transformational approach to therapy could be the most effective approach in improving a client’s global distress, daily function, and religious coping from the bio-psycho-social perspective.
- For clients who seek treatment from Christian-based counseling centers, relating more faith and Christianity to therapy could yield a stronger therapeutic relationship.
- Overall, this study supports the notion that faith and spirituality play key roles in effective therapy.

References