

Integrating Multiple Counselling Approaches for Addressing Extreme Unlovable Feelings in a Muslim Client

Suwarjo Suwarjo^{1*}, Natri Sutanti¹, and Luky Kurniawan²

¹*Educational Psychology and Guidance Department, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Colombo Street Number 1, Karangmalang, 55281 Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

²*Guidance and Counselling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Science, Universitas Mercu Buana Yogyakarta, Wates Street Km 10, 55753 Yogyakarta, Indonesia*

ABSTRACT

Integrating spiritual counselling with other counselling approaches is an important factor in achieving a positive outcome for Muslim clients. This study aimed to analyse the process and outcome of counselling for a Muslim client experiencing extreme unlovable feelings, who participated in ten sessions of an integrative counselling focused on the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) for 10 sessions. The research employed a qualitative approach, using a systematic case study. The data included counselling notes, interview results with the client and the counsellor, and a standard rating scale. This research identified five important results in the counselling process, 1) personal growth after undergoing counselling; 2) the integrative counselling including Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) is effective for the client in this context; 3) the counsellor personality had an important role in the changes and the growth; 4) the client and the counsellor were able to demonstrate good ethical boundaries; and 5) there was a transpersonal process of getting closer to the God (Allah). This research recommends the importance of a combination of the modalities used by the counsellor, the counsellor's personality, and ethical boundaries in supporting the discovery of direction and personal development.

Keywords: Integrative counselling, Muslim client, process-outcome therapy, Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT), transpersonal process

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E-mail addresses:

suwarjo@uny.ac.id (Suwarjo Suwarjo)

natrisutanti@uny.ac.id; (Natri Sutanti)

luky@mercubuana-yogya.ac.id (Luky Kurniawan)

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

Research focussing on therapeutic process-outcome has been widely carried out and demonstrates great progress, especially in identifying the mechanisms of change that occur within counselling (Crits-Christoph

& Gibbons, 2021; Stephen et al., 2022; Wall et al., 2017). Counselling outcomes in general are greatly influenced by the alliance or relationship between the counsellor and client; therefore, strengthening this alliance and focusing the cognitive approach on clear assignment therapy treatment are essential (Stubbe, 2018; Watson & Geller, 2005). These new results have the potential to help refine and modify existing counselling so that more clients receive maximum benefit. Counselling process-outcome studies have been conducted using a hermeneutic approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative data (Stephen et al., 2011, 2022; Wall et al., 2017). Other studies use a case study model through an in-depth qualitative approach (McLeod & Elliott, 2011; Rafaeli & Markowitz, 2011; Wright, 2019). Case studies allow researchers to reveal the counselling process and results through evidence collected in depth (Fishman, 2011).

This research aims to analyse the process and results of counselling for a client with extreme feelings of unloved, by integrating multiple counselling approaches, including SEFT, person-centred therapy (PCT), cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), and rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT). This study emphasises qualitative data, with modest support from quantitative data. According to CBT, clients with problems involving feeling unloved are experiencing issues related to their core meaning (Jannah et al., 2019; Makwa & Hidayati, 2019; Stiles et al., 2006; van Dis et al., 2020; Wolf et al., 2022). This can be caused by various

factors, for example, childhood trauma that can lead to the belief that no one loves them. This is like REBT, which perceives the root issue as the emergence of irrational beliefs in an individual. Therefore, they need to be helped by adopting more rational thoughts (Mu'afa et al., 2020). Meanwhile, if it is viewed through a person-centred approach, this client's problem is caused by repeated patterns in the past, which until now have become the subject of internal criticism. This is often referred to as a condition of worth, where it is associated with acceptance or a feeling of love from a particular person, which is an important aspect in evaluating oneself as worthy or unworthy (Rogers, 1959).

Therefore, in this context, the client was assisted with interventions that involved the four counselling approaches mentioned above. However, this study paid considerable attention to the use of SEFT because it considered the background of the counselee, namely, a Muslim. According to Smith, interventions that consider spiritual background become quite relevant in the context of multicultural culture (Smith et al., 2019). SEFT itself is a development of the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) with the addition of a spiritual aspect (Wahyuni et al., 2022). EFT is a meridian energy therapy that combines psychology and simple acupuncture techniques, which works directly to stimulate the body's meridian system by tapping the acupuncture points (Church et al., 2018). Meanwhile, in SEFT, the tapping is accompanied by positive affirmations and prayer. In the context of

this study, SEFT is expected to help a client focus on the problems she faces in relation to spiritual relationships and positive affirmations that can bring about change. The client can express all emotions freely with the help of the counsellor through tapping on eighteen important points. Although several studies claim that SEFT is considered effective (Salami & Fatmawati, 2019), it cannot be denied that this approach is also limited because not all clients are willing to use this method. The spiritual realm is quite private, and the effectiveness is determined by how convinced the client is of the method she follows.

A client with extreme feelings of being unloved often tends to generalise these feelings to the people around them. One way to help this client is usually by combining a cognitive and humanistic approach to make them aware that the world is not that bad to be generalised in such a way. A meta-analysis shows that the PCT, CBT, and psychoanalytic counselling approaches are equally effective in helping clients' problems (Cuijpers, 2019; Cuijpers et al., 2019; van Dis et al., 2020; Wolf et al., 2022). Another study found that extreme anxiety arising from feelings of being unloved or incompetent can be reduced with CBT (Otte, 2011). The method used involves replacing the client's negative automatic thoughts with more adaptive ones. However, in this context, the client showed a tendency toward the spiritual domain in several of the counselling sessions conducted; therefore, SEFT was introduced to the client.

Essentially, the intervention given was intended to help the client become aware of the feelings within herself. Thus, in the end, this study can provide insight into the counselling process carried out by the counsellor in dealing with the problem of feeling unloved.

METHOD

The method was a systematic case study with a qualitative approach, as this study investigated an in-depth and rigorous investigation in a specific individual (Fishman, 2011; McLeod & Elliott, 2011). This research aimed to analyse in-depth the process-outcome of counselling for a client with indications of extreme unlovable feelings. The case was chosen based on the criteria of case uniqueness and valuable learning process. The steps were: (1) data collection consisted of collecting counselling notes, periodic client condition questionnaires, interviews with the client, and the counsellor; (2) the data were then processed using a systematic analysis approach to identify thematic patterns that emerged in the counselling process; and (3) finally, all data were confirmed with the client to obtain comprehensive and credible results. This research process received ethical approval from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta and was approved by the counselling centre in the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where the data were collected. Both the client and the counsellor provided informed consent before the interviews and counselling.

A Client

This client, named Anna (pseudonym) for this research, was a female Muslim student (21 years old). When the data were collected, she lived in a boarding house near her university. Anna's parents lived in a small town quite far from her campus. Anna underwent ten counselling sessions using online and offline platforms due to the pandemic period. She said that the main reason for seeking counselling services was to discuss family and friendship issues. Anna said that she had sought help from friends to tell her story but had not found relief.

Anna complained of difficulty sleeping and often used non-prescribed sleeping pills to help her. She often missed the prayer and felt far from Allah. At home, Anna lives with her father, mother and sister. However, she said that her relationship with her father was bad. Unlike her father, she was very close to her mother, and they supported each other. While undergoing counselling, Anna was a student studying while working.

A Counsellor

The counsellor, who facilitated the client's sessions, was one of the senior male counsellors at the counselling centre. He began practising counselling in 1990 for four years at school and then joined this counselling centre in 1995, approximately 27 years ago. He was a Muslim counsellor, and he is also one of the supervisors at the counselling centre. The modality he used was more integrative, where he often combined SEFT, PCT, CBT, REBT, behaviouristic, and Tapas Acupressure Technique (TAT).

Authors

The authors of this study were the counsellor and two external researchers. The first external researcher was a counsellor at the same counselling centre as the counsellor. She was a junior female counsellor with approximately 8 years of counselling experience. The researcher had relevant experience in process-outcome therapy studies. Her modality was humanistic PCT. The second external researcher was a male counsellor in an educational program, as one of the external judges. Considering that the main researcher has direct involvement as a counsellor, reflexivity measures were applied to reduce bias. In the data analysis process, the two external researchers played an active role in collecting the interview data, notes, and rating scales. Meanwhile, the process of synthesising the data was carried out collaboratively between the main researcher and the two external researchers to check the validity of the data. In addition, the analysed data were confirmed with the client and repeatedly compared with the raw data, such as interview transcripts and counselling notes. Thus, it is expected that the data presented are objective and trustworthy.

Treatments

Counselling sessions attended by the client were not held at fixed intervals, ranging from every week to once every 3 weeks, with each session lasting 60-90 minutes. The online mode was conducted through an e-counselling chat system and via video conference.

Meanwhile, offline face-to-face sessions were held at the university counselling centre. Sessions one to four, six and ten were conducted online due to the pandemic, whereas the other sessions were offline. There were three stages in the counselling session with the client that could be observed in Figure 1. The first stage aimed to explore the client’s issues, followed by the treatment to dispute the irrational beliefs or automatic negative thoughts, and ended by understanding the problem through SEFT treatment.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected in this research were primarily qualitative, derived from counselling notes, client and counsellor interview results. As the counselling centre collected rating scale data on clients' conditions periodically; therefore, this study also collected those data to complement the qualitative findings. The rating scale data on the client's condition were collected at sessions 1, 5, and 10 (last session). The rating scale consisted of twenty feelings that the client needed to self-evaluate.

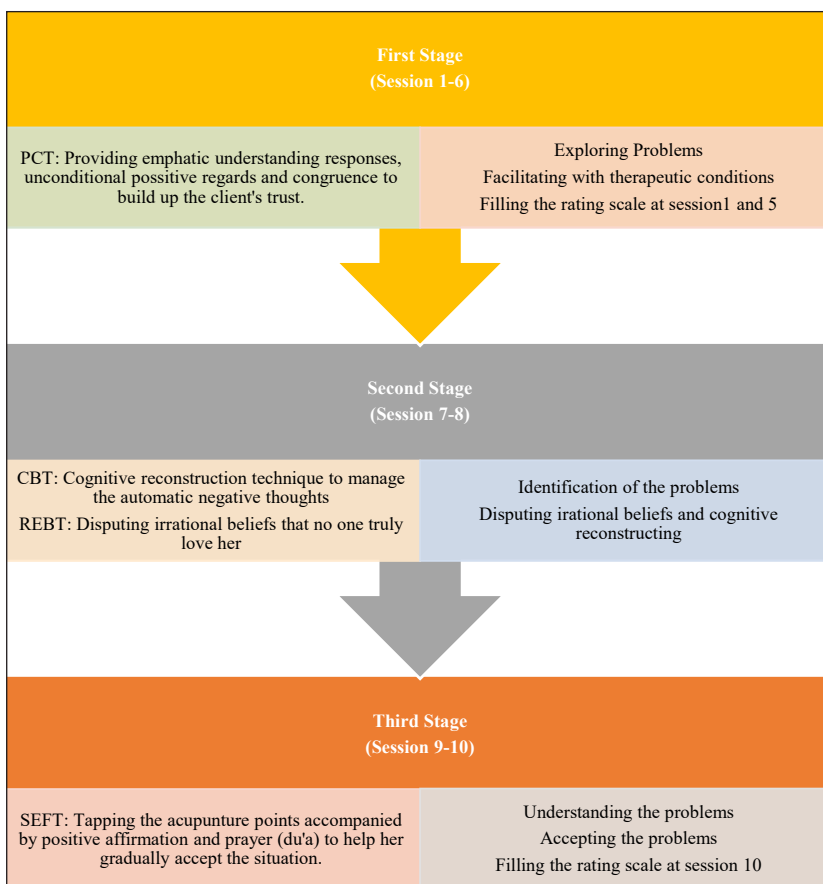


Figure 1. The counselling stages

The listed feelings included anxiety, depression, hallucination, loss of spirit, sleeping problems, anger, excessive energy, emotional explosion, panic, withdrawal, headache, sensitivity, crying, guilt, self-harm, hatred, disappointment, hopelessness, full of suspicion, and overwhelming. The interviews were in an unstructured form with an initial question asking about the client and counsellor's experience within counselling. The interviews were transcribed before being analysed.

Data analysis involved synthesising counselling notes from the ten sessions, comparing the rating scale and confirming the findings through the results of interviews with the client and counsellor. Data were compiled using a thematic analysis approach to identify relevant themes. The procedure referred to is from Braun & Clarke, which includes: (1) familiarising oneself with the data, which consisted of three data sources; (2) generating initial codes from the data; (3) searching for themes that emerged from the data; (4) reviewing potential themes together with all researchers; (5) defining and naming the themes obtained; and (6) writing the results of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). These results were then presented in Table 2.

FINDING

The results of the counselling notes that the client has attended ten times showed several important findings as presented in Table 1.

Interview results indicated that the client perceived significant changes after

attending counselling. The client stated that by the sixth meeting, she began to believe love and care existed. The client conveyed that she was difficult to accept her situation and feelings of hatred of her father at the initial meeting. She described that she was a fiery person before undergoing counselling. Meanwhile, after completing all stages of counselling, she felt calmer and calmer. The client also reported that she could reduce the intensity of watching murder films, which she had used as an outlet for frustration toward her father. The client also stated that her current education could provide a better understanding of her problems. Gradually, the client became a person who cared more about her surroundings after understanding her condition during counselling. The client felt that the genuine care of the counsellor, such as adjusting the room temperature, was also taken into consideration, and this made her realise how much the counsellor cares.

The results of interviews also showed that the intense use of sleeping pills had reduced, and she felt calmer and could carry out her activities well. The figure of the counsellor who was genuine and showed authentic concern also impressed her. She said that the counsellor embodied the father figure she had longed for but never received from her own father. There was a growing belief that there were many good people who cared around her, such as the counsellor. However, the client said that she still had to maintain boundaries and did not want to enter the realm of privacy. The client realises that the counsellor had a family of her own and might not actually be the father.

Table 1
 Summary of counselling notes

Counselling Session	Type	Results
Session 1	Online-chatting	The client reported family problems where her parents did not get along, and her father often used violence. She felt tired, disappointed, and angry with him and desire for revenge due to his cruelty.
Session 2	Online-chatting	The client could never tell anyone about her problems. Counselling with the current counsellor was a new experience. She used to cope with problems by biking around town to relieve her emotions when she was not feeling well. She had many difficult times, one of which was when her younger sibling had an accident and her mother was deceived by quite a lot of money. She also feared of going to college that would burden her mother financially.
Session 3	Online-chatting	The client doubted whether there was love in this world. She felt that what she was experiencing was merely misery due to lack of love. Her father did not realise that he was hurting the family. However, the separation was not an option for her mother as they would be even more miserable without a house. The client's frustration of love was getting worst since her boyfriend fooled her.
Session 4	Online-chatting	The client felt better being with her friends, but when she was alone she felt terribly sad. Furthermore, to help with the financial situation during college, she worked and really enjoyed her job. However, she was still worried about " <i>is it possible for her to survive in the future?</i> ". She often stayed up late thinking about future.
Session 5	Face-to-face	PCT: The client feels sorry for telling everything to the counsellor. On the other hand, she also said, " <i>I don't care about that, because I am very sick and suffering. I want to be free from that suffering.</i> " The client's belief that there was no love in the world began to waver, seeing examples of love around her, including when she received the attention of the counsellor.
Session 6	Online-chatting	The Muslim client said, " <i>Thank you very much sir, I thought you were just taking me for granted but it turns out you genuinely care, and I was moved.</i> "
Session 7	Face-to-face	CBT: The client found it difficult to control her thoughts (automatic negative thoughts) that was often worrying about the future and other people's perceptions of her. She noticed that she often overthought. However, by the end of the session, she began to realise that she could not control other people's thoughts.
Session 8	Face-to-face	REBT: The client felt that her father was not responsible to the family. She felt that her love issues and lack of belief in love stemmed from her father. At the end of the session, she said that she just wanted to be heard and if possible, found a solution to be better prepared to face her problems.

Table 1 (continued)

Counselling Session	Type	Results
Session 9	Face-to-face	SEFT: The client wanted to feel free from feelings of hatred towards her father and her ex-boyfriend who only took advantage of her. The counsellor provided SEFT with accupunture tapping and positive affirmation. During the session the client showed great emotional turmoil, her body shakes, her breathing became short, and she cried (a process punctuated by relaxation). In the end of the session, she felt relief.
Session 10	Online-chatting	The client said that at the end of last year, her parents had a major fight and her father kicked her mother out to return to her parents. The conflict continued for some time. However, after counselling, the client felt more in control of her feelings and learnt to be less emotional and upset about her past.

The client maintained these boundaries and conveyed them directly to the counsellor. At the end of the interview, the client stated that spiritually she was getting closer to Allah (the God) by increasing her worship. She said this made her much calmer and able to control her emotions well.

Interviews with the counsellor revealed that he employed multiple approaches to help the client understand her feelings. At the initial session, the counsellor used the PCT approach to build a good therapeutic relationship. However, by considering that the client had a deep hatred for her father and a feeling of disbelief in the existence of love, the counsellor helped the client to think more rationally with REBT. After the client's thoughts were reconstructed using CBT, the counsellor observed that there was a feeling of hatred that had not yet been resolved. After deeper digging, it turned out that there were many disappointments from her father, who had not accepted. Considering the client's religious background and exploring

the client's spiritual side, the counsellor offered the use of the SEFT. During SEFT sessions, the client expressed her emotions and even cried profusely. The counsellor found that the client felt more relieved afterwards. The counsellor noted the sign of transference as she associated him with her father. However, she managed to maintain the boundaries by good awareness, which she openly communicated to the counsellor. The counsellor observed that the client, over the session, showed significant changes to be more adaptive, despite initially appearing stuck and emotionally unstable.

At the first, fifth, and tenth sessions, the client was asked to fill out a rating scale about the feelings or what she might have felt, consisting of 5 graded options, in which scale 1 means very unsuitable and scale 5 means very suitable. The results showed that there was a consistent decrease in the rating scale points related to the disappointment felt by the client from 4 to 2 after the tenth session. In general, the points regarding

anxiety, difficulty sleeping, anger, emotional outbursts, panic, sensitivity, and feelings of guilt showed an increase at the fifth meeting, and consistently decreased by one level after the tenth session. These results indeed do not show a significant reduction in symptoms within ten sessions. However, the counselling that the client underwent appears to have had a significant impact on her feelings of disappointment. This is in line with the results of the interview with the counsellor, that in the early sessions, the client's emotions tended to be unstable. In addition, the process of helping the client with SEFT to address her feelings of disappointment was also carried out in the ninth session. Therefore, such results appear reasonable as the counselling is indeed not something for fixation but a process for growth.

Based on the results of counselling notes, interviews with the client, interviews with the counsellor and counselling questionnaires, five significant points were found in Table 2.

The five themes found in this study show things that are commonly found as factors that influence the effectiveness of counselling and the client's therapeutic journey, such as the integration of counselling approaches (Zarbo et al., 2016) and counsellor personality (Norcross & Wampold, 2011). However, considering that this study used a single-subject research design, the results obtained could not be generalised to different cases and different clients. The level of effectiveness of the intervention given was also considered relative and applied only to this case within the time frame of ten counselling sessions.

DISCUSSION

Five main points emerged from the counselling process with the client: 1) personal growth; 2) counsellor modalities; 3) counsellor personality; 4) ethical boundaries; and 5) transpersonal journey. These five points came from a synthesis of counselling notes, interviews with both the client and the counsellor, and intake assessments. These results indicate that the counselling process typically covers the following five topics with the client.

Personal growth is essential for individuals to continue developing in the face of various challenges (Andreou et al., 2020; Gallagher et al., 2018; Joseph, 2004). Studies found that personal growth is a commonly used parameter for evaluating therapy outcomes (Choi et al., 2010; Novella et al., 2022). Quantitative personal growth is often measured using authenticity scales, subjective general well-being, personal questionnaires, and resilience (Diener et al., 2009; Jungers & Gregoire, 2016). Qualitatively, the insights that emerge during counselling with real changes in understanding and behaviour also demonstrate a person's personal growth (Novella et al., 2022; van Dis et al., 2020; Wolf et al., 2022). Counselling results revealed that the client had a good level of personal growth, characterised by 1) increasing resilience towards her family situation, 2) increasing self-understanding of the importance of reducing the intensity of watching thriller films, 3) awareness of controlling herself and her emotions, and 4) gradually accepting the existing situation and hateful feelings.

Table 2
Codes and themes

Codes	Themes
[TN=therapist notes; CI=client interview; TI=therapist interview; QS=questionnaire]	
True love and care [TN; CI]; accepting situation and hated feeling [CI]; reduce thriller movies [CI]; self-control [TN]; reduce of sleep pills [CI]	Personal growth: resilience, self-understanding, and absence of substance
Cognitive therapy [TN; TI] PCT [TN; TI]; SEFT [TN; TI]	The dynamic of modalities, including person-centred therapy, cognitive therapy and SEFT (transpersonal counselling)
Idea father [CI]; counsellor's care [TN; CI]; genuineness of counsellor [CI]	Counsellor personality, including trust and modelling
Boundaries [CI; TI]; transference [TI]	Understanding of ethical boundaries
Spiritual [TN; CI; TI]; religion [TI]; close to the God [CI]	Transpersonal journey and religiosity

Moreover, the client began to realise the importance of reducing her use of medication for sleeping. Based on existing research, the growth of self-awareness in clients is an indication of a person's self-development, and this also happened to the client in this case (Hays, 2013, 2020).

The counsellor's modalities are also a supporting factor for the success of the counselling process. According to previous research, counsellors can use an integrated approach based on the client's needs (Bastemur et al., 2016). In this case, the relationship-building paradigm with a humanistic approach used by counsellors in initial counselling was able to foster a sense of self-confidence in the client (Cornelius-White & Carver, 2012; Stephen

et al., 2011; Sutanti, 2020). The client, who initially did not realise that love existed, then gradually began to revise her perception. The counsellor was able to strengthen the client's thoughts through the REBT approach. Identification of demandingness and awfulising was done before disputing irrational thoughts that arose in the client (Mu'afa et al., 2020). The process of adjusting modalities was also carried out after the discovery of the client's difficult feelings towards her father. The anger and resentment felt by the client were helped to regulate using the SEFT. Through this long process of counselling, the client then found a better understanding of herself and the people around her. Based on the results of meta-analysis research, the approaches

considered to be the most effective include humanistic, cognitive and psychodynamic approaches, which in this study were also applied by the counsellor (Stiles et al., 2006).

An interesting finding from this research was the significant influence of the counsellor's personality on the client. Norcross (2010) argued that an essential counsellor quality lies less in the approach used and more in the counsellor's personal qualities. Norcross emphasised that the counsellor's personal qualities should be considered when recruiting counselling students. Consequently, the counsellor's personality can act as a catalyst in the counselling process, a topic of ongoing research with emerging findings (Delgadillo et al., 2020). For example, humanistic counselling research highlights that empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard are key parameters of counselling outcomes which reflect the counsellor-client relationship (Chen et al., 2022; Elliott et al., 2018; Farber et al., 2018; Sutanti, 2020). This indicates that stronger counsellor-client relationships lead to better therapeutic outcomes. These findings offer insights that challenge research concluding that counselling success depends solely on the approach used. The counsellor's identified qualities include genuine caring, authenticity, and a warm, idealised presence. From a psychodynamic perspective, the client's feelings, perceiving the counsellor as an ideal father figure, reflected a transference tendency (Høglend et al., 2012; Jenks & Oka, 2021). However, from a humanistic

perspective, this enhances the therapeutic nature of the counsellor-client relationship (Cornelius-White & Carver, 2012).

In Eastern culture, distinguishing a professional relationship from a friendship between counsellor and client is sometimes difficult. Research showed that ethical boundaries between counsellors and clients are crucial for effective counselling (Herlihy & Corey, 2015; Jungers & Gregoire, 2016). Counsellors must follow an ethical framework to maintain professional relationships and ensure the counselling process is effective (Grace et al., 2020). The counsellor and the client demonstrated excellent awareness. The client realised that her perception of the ideal father figure did not change her way of thinking about professional counselling relationships. Similarly, counsellors established clear boundaries within the developing relationship. From a psychodynamic perspective, transference issues can be minimised by counsellors and clients maintaining strong ethical awareness (Werbart et al., 2022). A positive counsellor-client relationship develops into a therapeutic relationship maintained through a strong ethical understanding.

The inclusion of spiritual elements via the SEFT and the counsellor's exploration of the client's spiritual experiences had a significant impact. Understanding her experiences enabled the client to understand how she relates to herself, her environment, and Allah. The client reported that feeling close to Allah helped her to feel calmer. In Eastern culture, incorporating spiritual thoughts and practices was an essential

component of psychological healing (Asmawati et al., 2020). In general, the client's calmness was influenced by her feeling of closeness to Allah and the perceived meaning of her life (Mufid, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The case study conducted on the Muslim client found that the counselling process brought about positive changes, including increased self-development marked by enhanced self-understanding, increased resilience, and a reduced use of sleeping pills. The integrative approach including SEFT, PCT, CBT and REBT, had helped the client to have a good therapeutic relationship and strong bonding with the counsellor, before the client accepted her situation. The client was helped by reconstructing her thoughts to realise the extreme feeling of being unloved, which causes some tendency to hurt her father. To support comprehensive change, the client was helped to express her feelings of hatred mainly using the SEFT. The counsellor's character also apparently influenced the changes that occurred in the client. The client perceived the counsellor as examples and learnt about trust and care from the counsellor. The good client understanding in counselling also supports changes, such as a good understanding of boundaries, so that the counselling process remains objective. Another significant change experienced by the client was an increased transpersonal understanding of her relationship with Allah (the God).

Implications of the Study

This research found that supporting factors for the client change could include counsellor modalities, a good therapeutic relationship, good self-awareness of the client and the client's personal values. Although this study does not lead to generalisation, there are some important implications for counsellor training in which the integration of counselling approaches in helping clients becomes very necessary to be provided to students, considering the complexity of counselling problems that they may encounter. In addition, clinical supervision for counsellors becomes an important part of counsellor development, which will encourage the effectiveness of the counselling by upholding the ethical code and professional boundaries.

Limitation and Recommendation for Future Research

Even though this research identified five key elements in the counselling process with the client, other clients might experience different outcomes, even when the counselling approach was the same. Each individual is unique, and this study is limited to this context; therefore, similar studies with other participants are necessary. In-depth case studies can offer insights into how counselling should be tailored to individual differences. Although this study provides a comprehensive view from both client and counsellor perspectives, quantitative instruments to measure personal growth or standardised therapy outcomes remain necessary.

Such instruments can reinforce qualitative findings derived from the experiences of counsellors and clients.

Future research may use outcome measurement instruments such as subjective general well-being (Longo et al., 2017) or authenticity scale (Jungers & Gregoire, 2016; Wood et al., 2008), measured periodically during the counselling process, or even adapt international outcome instruments such as the Clinical Outcome in Routine Evaluation–Outcome Measure (CORE-OM) (Zeldovich & Alexandrowicz, 2019) to fit the Indonesian context. Studies involving a greater number of clients with similar tendencies are also important to measure the extent to which general factors influence the success of the counselling process.

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