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Effects of forgiveness therapy on recovery among residents of drug rehabilitation centers

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Abstract

The study determined the effects of forgiveness therapy on the residents' recovery. Recovery includes the residents' level of risk of relapse and gratitude. The participants of the study were the residents admitted for drug treatment and rehabilitation in a government-based drug rehabilitation center in the Philippines. The experimental group ($N=29$) was exposed to a 12-session forgiveness therapy whereas, the control group ($N=29$) was exposed to traditional method of treatment and rehabilitation program. The results show that forgiveness therapy decreased the level of risk of relapse and increased the level of gratitude of the experimental group. However, the level of risk of relapse and the level of gratitude of the control group did not change. The study implies that the participants who underwent forgiveness therapy sessions showed improvement in their recovery than those who were exposed only to traditional treatment method of the center.

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1. Introduction

The life of a drug dependent is not easy. He is under the control of the substance and is forced to continue taking the substance in spite of the fact that he already knows it is destroying his life and his loved ones' lives. This is so due to what is called physiological and psychological dependence on the substance. To just stop is quite impossible. Treatment and rehabilitation facilities are designed to help the drug addict or drug dependent to overcome the

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physiological dependence but overcoming psychological dependence is a life time struggle for the patient (Orbon, 2013).

Rehabilitation programs are important for one's recovery. New lifestyle, principles, and coping styles are taught to help residents overcome drug addiction. Several studies suggest that out of 100 patients rehabilitated, only 20- 30 percent (20 to 30) residents get well. They are able to live a substance-free life. They became functional again and not anymore a threat to the society (Gordon, 2003). Nonetheless, 70-80 percent relapsed due to anger, anxiety and depression (Lin, Enright, Krahn, Mack & Baskin, 2004).

Relapse is an alarming problem. The results of relapse are tremendous. Drug rehabilitation residents who experience relapse become more likely to hurt themselves and even become a threat to the society as well. They are prone to be involved again in drug-related violent crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault (Ricker, 2012; Xinhua, 2012). A study conducted in Asia found that results of relapse include depression, heavy use of substance, family disruption, suicide, theft, murder (Drug & Alcohol Rehab Asia, 2011) and other dreadful crimes (Visperas, 2011). In the study conducted by Caron Treatment Center (2005) in Pennsylvania, 50-90 percent (50 – 90 residents) of the 100 recovering residents relapsed. Recently, a study conducted in China reports that out of 170,000 residents who are undergoing treatment and rehabilitation, the relapse rate is 90 percent or 153,000 (Intellasia East Asia News, 2012). In the Philippines, a 2005 Dangerous Drugs Board year-end survey showed that 15 percent of residents undergoing drug rehabilitation treatment experienced relapse (Tuliao, 2010) and that shabu is the highest substance used in the Philippines (Esplanada, 2012).

A study conducted by Toussaint and Friedman (2009) found that gratitude and forgiveness were both positively and strongly associated with well-being among clinical outpatients undergoing psychotherapy. Their study implies that higher gratitude and forgiveness result to higher well-being and lower problematic behavior. According to Bartlett and De Steno (2006), gratitude influences prosocial behavior. Being grateful results to increased helping behavior and lessened negative or antisocial behavior.

According to the Promises Treatment Center (2012), forgiveness therapy is one of the key elements helpful in the progress of recovery. Forgiveness plays a big role on addiction recovery. The 12-step groups on addiction treatment such as Alcoholic Anonymous and Narcotic Anonymous have similar philosophies in giving importance to forgiveness. The meta-analysis study on forgiveness therapy found that process-based individual forgiveness interventions increase hope and self-esteem and lessens depression, anxiety, anger and grief (Baskin & Enright, 2004). In Taiwan, the study of Lin (2010) among those with substance abuse disorders found that those who underwent forgiveness intervention have significantly increased their levels of self-esteem and forgiveness while at the same time they experienced decreased occurrence and intensity of depression, anger and anxiety; and most importantly, they reduced vulnerability to drug use.

Several studies proposed a model of forgiveness therapy such as by Enright, Luskin, Stanford and Worthington (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Worthington, 2003). However, despite the popularity of various forgiveness models, there is no empirical support for the proposed models (Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000). Wade, Bailey et al. (2005), noted that there have been few empirical outcome studies on the forgiveness interventions with actual residents admitted in a rehabilitation program. Thus, the aim of the study is to determine the effects of forgiveness therapy on the residents' recovery in terms of risk of relapse and gratitude.

Specifically, the study identified the following: (a) pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control group on gratitude, and risk of relapse, (b) the difference in the pretest scores of the experimental group on gratitude and risk of relapse, (c) the difference between the pretest and posttest scores on the control group and the experimental group on their level of gratitude and risk of relapse and (d) the effects of forgiveness therapy on the level of gratitude and risk of relapse of the experimental group.

1.1. Forgiveness therapy

According to Wade and Worthington (2003), forgiveness interventions can help people deal with feelings of unforgiveness by helping victims put transgressions into perspective, see the offender's point of view, and consider one's own need for forgiveness. Berez (2001) posited that forgiveness and psychotherapy processes seem similar in that they both involve empathy and reframing. Berez considered reframing to be "the very heart of forgiving,

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