

Qualitative analysis of Patients' Goodbye letters

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Introduction

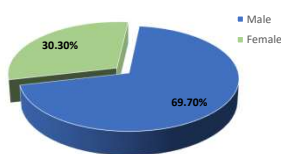
- The termination stage of the psychotherapeutic process has been consistently linked with powerful feelings experienced by both the patient and the therapist.
- Therapeutic letters constitute the framework of the therapeutic process of CAT, by summarizing, validating/expanding session content, sharing clinical thinking, engaging clients and promoting hope¹.
- The patient's letter, invites accurate reflection on the therapy²
- Reflecting on the importance of therapeutic letters as CAT tools, Rayner et. al. ³ introduced a conceptual model about *reformulation and goodbye letters and diagrammatic representations of the reformulation*.
- Despite suggesting a crucial stage in the therapeutic process, little is known regarding the patients' emotional discrepancies upon termination of the therapeutic relationship.
- Taking this fact into consideration we thought about measuring the effectiveness of CAT therapy via patients' subjective experience as it is expressed in their goodbye letter.

Method

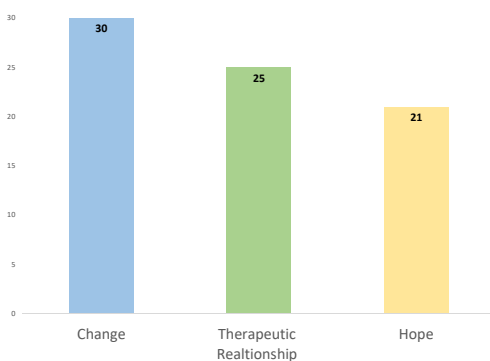
- Randomly selected, 33 goodbye letters were studied deriving from 16-session CAT therapies.
- Thematic analysis was used in order to categorize and sort data into patterns.
- Analysis was conducted by two specialized therapists and six specialized trainees from Hellas CAT, that did not know neither the therapist, nor the patient.
- The whole process was divided into three phases:
 - Goodbye letters were distributed among the therapists. Each one read the letter and kept notes of phrases thought to be more important in describing the therapeutic process.
 - Then phrases gathered together and sorted into different categories by one therapist.
 - Finally, frequencies were measured for every category

Results

- Out of the 33 goodbye letters, 23 were from female patients, whilst the rest 10 were from male patients

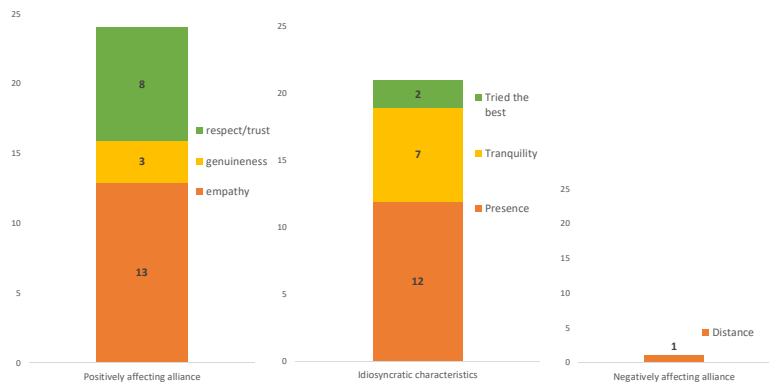


- Thematic analysis of the content led to 3 major categories:



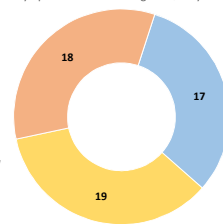
Therapeutic Relationship

- In 25 out of the 33 letters there was a mention in the therapeutic relationship
- By analyzing words and phrases of the letter we developed 3 sub-categories:
 - Factors positively affecting alliance**, such as: empathy, genuineness, respect and trust
 - "thank you for your time and patience", "you showed kindness and patience", "you embraced my problems", "instantly, I felt secure with you"
 - Idiosyncratic characteristics of the therapist**, such as: presence, tranquility/attentiveness and a sense that he tried the best
 - "a was astonished by your tranquility", "your presence was positive in every way", "I was feeling better just being with you"
 - Factors negatively affecting alliance**, such as: distance
 - "after a certain incident I felt that you distant your self from me"



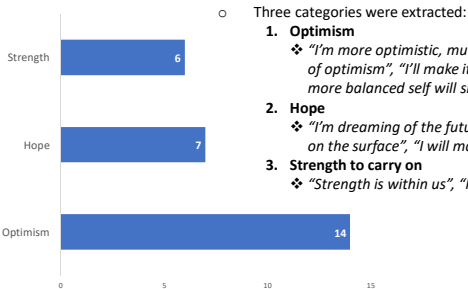
Change

- Change was mentioned in 30 out of the 33 letters
- It was expressed in 3 ways:
 - Relief of symptoms**
 - "the difference is big and obvious", "I'm thinking of my fears less", "panic and fear started to disappear", "the intensity of my pain is less"
 - Functioning**: either improvement in managing situations and awareness, or lack of improvement
 - "if something bad happened I still can't react the way I would like to", "I am able to say no to things that ask pressure on me", "I feel more mature"
 - Change in the quality of life**: understanding, put self first, enhance trust in oneself
 - "I put my self first", "I've set my goals and I'm moving on", "I can judge and being judged", "I've started realizing things", "I can have a better quality of life"



Hope

- Hope was mentioned in 21 out of the 33 letters
- Three categories were extracted:
 - Optimism**
 - "I'm more optimistic, much more optimistic", "It is a different kind of optimism", "I'll make it, I have to", "Hopefully a more optimistic, a more balanced self will show"
 - Hope**
 - "I'm dreaming of the future", "I can dream again", "Hope emerged on the surface", "I will make it"
 - Strength to carry on**
 - "Strength is within us", "From now on I take the lead of my life"



Conclusion

- Termination stage suggests an intense phase for both client and therapist, loaded with positive (emotional strength/relief, recognition of feelings, self-knowledge) and negative emotional schemas (exacerbation of symptoms, cynicism, depreciation).
- Taking things into account, it can be concluded that:
 - Thematic analysis of patients' goodbye letters resulted in the 3 major aspects of CAT therapy (therapeutic relationship, change, hope)
 - Goodbye letters could be considered as a valuable and useful tool in order to measure the effectiveness of CAT in various aspects of life.
 - Further study is needed, of both therapist's and patient's goodbye letters, in order to establish firmer results.

References

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