



CASE STUDY ON ADDRESSING SUICIDAL IDEATION IN A YOUNG COLLEGE STUDENT UTILIZING THE EGAN MODEL, ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT), AND ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF SUICIDE RISK (AMSR)

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ABSTRACT Young adulthood can be a tumultuous phase of life where individuals are confronted by complicated psychological, physical, and social transitions. One young adult studying at a women's college presents emotional regulation issues in the classroom. A brief assessment by the counsellor reveals a more critical case with symptoms of severe anxiety, suicidal ideations, and the underlying family trauma of the young adult. This paper illustrates the course of therapeutic treatment for this young adult to resolve the symptoms of anxiety, deep-rooted trauma, and suicidal thoughts. Through a case study approach, the outcomes of the evidence-based techniques utilised by the counsellor- Egan's Skilled Helper Model, Acceptance Commitment Therapy, and the Assessment and Management of Suicide Risk—are shown. This paper illustrates the importance of understanding and tailoring such evidence-based treatment techniques by mental health practitioners, especially for adolescents and young adults with suicide risk.

KEYWORDS : Suicidal ideation, Anxiety, Trauma, Therapy, Egan's Skilled Helper Model, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Assessment and management of Suicide Risk

INTRODUCTION

Given the escalating concern about suicide risk among college students in India, a demographic that is increasingly burdened by psychological, academic, social, and financial pressures, there is a need for mental health practitioners to understand and utilise the right techniques in such critical cases. This paper aims to understand the use of different techniques by a therapist in one such case. The therapist shows how they unravelled the complex interplay of different factors contributing to suicidal ideation, trauma and anxiety of a college student. The following techniques were tailored to the nuanced needs of the young college student.

Egan's Skilled Helper Model (Egan, 1975) is a framework for conceptualising the helping process. This developmental and reality-based counselling model aims to help people manage their problems in life more effectively and develop unused opportunities more fully, ultimately helping people become better at helping themselves in their daily lives. The Egan model emphasises the following stages:

- Problem clarification- to understand the problem situation from the client's perspective in complete detail and define reasonable goals and directions
- Integrative self-understanding- guide the client's perception of the problem to a wider scale and collaboratively brainstorm creative paths towards goal
- Facilitate action- Focus on appropriate strategies to achieve the goal and implement them in several stages.
- Termination intervention- The client's goals are achieved, and they have been taught skills that will allow them to function independently.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Luoma and Hayes, 2017) is an evidence-based therapeutic that increases psychological flexibility, which means being flexible with our thoughts and feelings. Flexibility is the ability and willingness to be open to new experiences and make positive changes towards values or things we care about. Through several activities, the mental health practitioner instils different values and skills in the client to support them in attaining psychological flexibility.

The Assessment and Management of Suicide Risk (Education Development Center. Inc., 2019) is a technique that focuses on recognising, assessing and managing suicide risk and delivering effective suicide-specific interventions. The mental health practitioners trained in the AMSR outpatient technique are skilled at how they approach their work, i.e., they manage their own reactions and focus to build a shared experience with the client. The helper's collaboration skills with the client while knowing their limits allow for a holistic assessment and management. The ASMR-trained mental health practitioner also has a clear understanding and knowledge of suicide, warning signs, and persons at risk.

- Gathering Information- Noticing warning signs, understanding the backstory of the client, and addressing the issue directly to the client while also talking to their social system to gain more depth.
- Formulating Risk: Synthesising the data into the formulation of risk and writing the judgement and rationale in the client's records.
- Planning and Responding: Collaboratively developing a crisis response plan with long-term and short-term goals.

These techniques were deemed suitable for this case study of a college student with emotional struggles.

Case Conceptualization

A 20-year-old female college student comes to counselling services for support. She is referred to by her professor, who finds her withdrawn and tearing up several times in class. When she came into counselling services, she was very distraught; her eyes were cast down whenever she spoke. At certain times, she would be overwhelmed with emotions. The counsellor instructed her to pause and take a moment to breathe.

She came from a background of sexual abuse and physical abuse in childhood. Her family background was unhealthy, and her father would physically abuse her mother. The abuse extended to herself and her brother when they were little. The sexual abuse started in her adolescence and ended when she moved to study in another city.

When she moved out of home, she felt better, but the challenges of living away from home were stressful. Though she understood that she was in a safer environment, she felt the demands of her current college life, plus wondering what was happening to her mother and brother, made her anxious. Ultimately, she had to be on medication for anxiety. Taking the medication helped her but did not resolve her state.

Course Of Therapeutic Treatment

Assessment and Engagement:

In this case study, the 20-year-old college student is seeking support from counselling services due to her distress and emotional struggles. The counselling commenced with assessment and engagement to manage her anxiety symptoms and suicidal thoughts and improve her overall well-being. The counsellor and the student explore different dimensions of the problem situation to help design a therapeutic plan.

The student's emotional struggles are likely related to her history of childhood sexual and physical abuse, as well as her ongoing unhealthy family background (Radell et al., 2021). These traumatic experiences have had a significant impact on her mental health, leading to symptoms of anxiety and distress. The student's current stressors, such as the demands of college life and concerns about her mother and brother, are also. Through assessment, the counsellor identifies the student's need for medication to manage her anxiety symptoms. The

counsellor recognises the importance of providing a safe and supportive space for the student to express her emotions and process her past traumas (Kim et al., 2015).

During the initial session, the counsellor employed assessment techniques to explore the student's current mental state and suicidal ideation. Utilising Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, the counsellor established rapport with the student, validating her emotions and emphasising the commitment to making meaningful behaviour changes.

Integrative understanding and collaborative therapy planning-

The counsellor collaborates with the student to develop a comprehensive therapeutic plan, which include individual therapy to address the trauma and build coping skills, medication management for anxiety, ongoing support for her current stressors, and resources for her family members who may also be in need of support. Overall, the counsellor aims to engage with the student, assess her needs, and provide appropriate support and interventions to help her improve her overall well-being and achieve a sense of stability and healing in her life.

In this case study, the counsellor recognises the significance of the student's history of childhood abuse and ongoing family issues in contributing to her anxiety and distress. This case study highlights the importance of a comprehensive and individualised approach in addressing generalised anxiety disorder. It is important to address both the underlying trauma and current stressors in order to manage anxiety symptoms effectively. Taking the medication helped her regulate her emotions, reduce anxiety levels, and regain control over her daily life.

Implementation and Progress-

The next phase of this case study was Implementation and Progress. At this stage, the counsellor focuses on implementing the therapeutic plan and assessing the progress made by the student. The counsellor closely monitors the student's adherence to the therapeutic plan, and regularly assesses her progress in therapy sessions. The therapeutic plan is adjusted based on the student's response to therapy and medication. How the student responds to therapy and medication, as well as the counsellor's ongoing monitoring and adjustment of the therapeutic plan, are critical factors in her overall progress and success in managing her generalised anxiety disorder and addressing her past traumas.

By considering the specific challenges and traumas the student has faced, the counsellor is better equipped to provide targeted interventions and support that will have a meaningful impact on the student's healing and recovery process. A comprehensive and individualised approach is utilised to ensure that the student receives the specific interventions needed to effectively manage her anxiety symptoms and work through her past traumas.

The significance of a comprehensive and individualised approach in addressing the student's generalised anxiety disorder and past traumas cannot be underestimated. It recognises the importance of tailoring therapeutic to meet her unique needs and experiences, promoting meaningful progress in managing her anxiety and facilitating her healing journey.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy techniques-

Following the collaborative design of the therapeutic plan, the counsellor begins further integrating Acceptance and Commitment Therapy techniques to help the student navigate through her emotional struggles and underlying traumatic experiences.

The counsellor uses the ACT technique of cognitive defusion to help the student separate herself from her thoughts and emotions related to her past traumas and anxiety. This technique allows the student to observe her thoughts without becoming entangled, promoting psychological flexibility and resilience. The counsellor also incorporates mindfulness techniques to help the student develop a present-moment awareness and acceptance of her experiences. Through mindfulness practice, the student learns to ground herself in the present moment, reducing the impact of past traumas on her current emotional well-being. The counsellor guides the student in mindfulness exercises and encourages her to apply these techniques in her daily life to manage anxiety and distress.

Moreover, the counsellor introduces values clarification exercises to

help the student to identify her core values and meaningful life directions. By aligning her actions with her values, the student can find purpose and direction, and foster a sense of empowerment and emotional resilience. The integration of ACT techniques empowers the student to cultivate psychological flexibility, mindfulness, and values-driven behaviour, supporting her in navigating the challenges of her past traumas and current anxiety symptoms.

Assessment and Management of Suicide Risk Technique-

Subsequently, the Application of Assessment and Management of Suicide Risk techniques is utilised to comprehensively address the student's mental health concerns and ensure her safety. The student's current suicide risk, including the presence of suicidal thoughts, intent, and plans is evaluated. This assessment aims to provide a clear understanding of the student's risk level, guiding the development of a tailored safety plan to mitigate potential suicidal crises (Hughes et al., 2016; Bruffaerts et al., 2010).

Integrating the AMSR approach, the counsellor collaborates with the student to establish specific safety strategies and coping mechanisms to address her suicidal ideation and enhance her overall well-being. Together, they identify supportive resources and individuals to engage during heightened distress, fostering a network of support that promotes the student's safety and resilience.

Additionally, the counsellor emphasizes the importance of ongoing monitoring and communication to track the effectiveness of the safety plan and address any emerging suicidal thoughts or behaviours. By fostering open dialogue and regular check-ins, the counsellor aims to empower the student and enhance her sense of agency in managing her mental health challenges and suicidal ideation. It is evident that the counsellor's implementation of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy techniques have significantly benefited the student, empowering her to navigate her emotional struggles and traumatic experiences. The use of cognitive defusion has allowed the student to observe her thoughts without being consumed by them, promoting psychological flexibility and resilience. Furthermore, the incorporation of mindfulness techniques in the therapy sessions has provided the student with the tools to develop present-moment awareness and acceptance of her experiences, ultimately reducing the impact of past traumas on her current emotional well-being. By guiding the student through mindfulness exercises and encouraging her to apply these techniques in her daily life, the counsellor has equipped the student with valuable coping mechanisms to manage anxiety and distress effectively.

The introduction of values clarification exercises has allowed the student to identify her core values and meaningful life directions. Aligning her actions with these values has provided the student with a sense of purpose and direction, fostering a deep sense of empowerment and emotional resilience. The integration of ACT techniques has indeed been instrumental in supporting the student's journey in addressing past traumas and managing her anxiety symptoms.

Overall, the continued dedication of the counsellor to implementing tailored interventions and techniques illustrates the depth of care and attention provided to the student. This individualised approach has undoubtedly contributed to meaningful progress in managing the student's anxiety and promoting her overall well-being and healing journey.

Long-Term Support and Relapse Prevention-

The counsellor begins establishing long-term support strategies and relapse prevention techniques to ensure sustained progress and stability for the student. The counsellor works with the student to identify and strengthen her support network, including family, friends, and community resources. The goal is to create a web of support to provide assistance and encourage coping skills during challenging times (Walsh et al., 2010)(, n.d). The counsellor also assists the student in developing a relapse prevention plan, which includes identifying potential triggers and implementing strategies to manage them effectively. This plan may involve developing healthy coping mechanisms, engaging in regular self-care practices, and establishing a routine that promotes stability and well-being.

CONCLUSION

During the one-month follow-up, the student is coping well by using the techniques discussed in therapy. She reports being quite happy with how life has come about after counselling. She is confident that she is well-equipped to handle challenges in her life and has the support

required to thrive. Even though, at times, there are episodes of her past life, she can put them aside to be more realistic about her circumstances and focus on building her life.

This case study's counselling approach has effectively given the student the tools she needs to manage her difficulties, develop psychological flexibility, and set up safety plans and coping mechanisms to deal with her anxiety, distress, and suicidal thoughts while also improving her general well-being. Integrating ACT methodologies, AMSR methodologies, and the Egan framework aided in and promoted the student's safety and resilience.

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