

Perceptions of bibliotherapy sessions participation: a qualitative focus group study with insider approach

Postrzeżenie uczestnictwa w sesjach biblioterapeutycznych: jakościowe badanie fokusowe przeprowadzone z pozycji wewnętrznej

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STRESZCZENIE

POSTRZEŻANIE UCZESTNICTWA W SESJACH BIBLIOTERAPEUTYCZNYCH: JAKOŚCIOWE BADANIE FOKUSOWE PRZEPROWADZONE Z POZYCJI WEWNĘTRZNEJ

Cel pracy. Zbadanie i zrozumienie postrzeżenia uczestnictwa w sesjach biblioterapii.

Materiał i metody. W ramach jakościowego zogniskowanego badania grupowego prowadzonego z pozycji wewnętrznej, przeprowadzono zogniskowane wywiady grupowe z ośmioma uczestnikami biorącymi udział w sesjach biblioterapii w Chorwacji. Wszystkie zogniskowane wywiady grupowe zostały nagrane, transkrybowane i przeanalizowane przy użyciu indukcyjnej analizy tematycznej.

Wyniki. Zidentyfikowaliśmy trzy tematy: (i) rezonowanie emocjonalne i empatia, (ii) rozwój osobisty i akceptacja oraz (iii) biblioterapia w ochronie zdrowia. Uczestnicy uznali, że biblioterapia poprzez opowiadanie historii ma moc wywoływania emocji, promowania rozwoju osobistego, tworzenia empatycznych więzi między jednostkami i może być wdrażana w placówkach ochrony zdrowia. Uczestnicy mieli pozytywne doświadczenia i wierzyli, że biblioterapia jest cennym narzędziem do wprowadzania zagadnień klinicznych i rozwojowych, promowania skutecznej komunikacji i wspierania bezpiecznej eksploracji emocji oraz osobistych doświadczeń. Teksty mogą skutecznie służyć jako środek do przekazywania trudnych i niepokojących tematów dotyczących reakcji emocjonalnych doświadczanych przez pacjentów w związku z diagnozą, leczeniem i jego wynikami.

Wnioski. Uczestnicy badania podkreślali korzyści płynące z biblioterapii. Wskazywali, że jest ona korzystna dla osób w różnych grupach wiekowych i z różnymi stanami chorobowymi, od dzieci po starszych pacjentów objętych opieką długoterminową.

Słowa kluczowe: biblioterapia, komunikacja, upodmiotowienie, pielęgniarstwo

ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF BIBLIOTHERAPY SESSIONS PARTICIPATION: A QUALITATIVE FOCUS GROUP STUDY WITH INSIDER APPROACH

Aim. To explore and understand perceptions of participating in bibliotherapy sessions.

Material and methods. In a qualitative focus group study using an insider approach, focus group interviews with eight participants taking part in bibliotherapy sessions in Croatia were conducted. All focus group interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis.

Results. We identified three themes: (i) resonance and empathy, (ii) personal growth and acceptance, and (iii) bibliotherapy in healthcare. The participants perceived that bibliotherapy demonstrates the power of storytelling to evoke emotions, promote personal growth, create empathetic connections among individuals, and can be implemented in the healthcare setting. The participants had favorable experiences and believed that bibliotherapy is a valuable tool for introducing clinical and developmental concepts, promoting effective communication, and supporting the secure exploration of emotions and personal experiences. Texts can effectively convey challenging and distressing subjects about the emotional responses experienced by patients regarding diagnosis, treatment, and treatment outcomes.

Conclusions. The participants highlighted the benefits of bibliotherapy, suggesting it is beneficial for individuals across various age groups and medical conditions, from children to elderly patients in long-term care.

Key words: bibliotherapy, communication, empowerment, nursing

INTRODUCTION

The foundation of bibliotherapy lies in the focused engagement with written material, which encourages the reader's active involvement [1, 2]. Reading and comprehending text are seen as catalysts for fostering a well-balanced personality, based on the perceived influence of attentive reading on one's character [3]. Positive outcomes, observed across different genres and methods of selected texts and books, are particularly relevant for those facing symptoms of depression, anxiety, or social isolation, offering a promising tool for support and improvement. However, it remains relatively unfamiliar and often overlooked [4]. Research highlights the role of bibliotherapy in enhancing compassionate, person-centered nursing care by fostering comprehensive approaches that respect individual dignity and improve healthcare quality. As a therapeutic and holistic approach, it creates a supportive, empathetic environment across various settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, and community centers. Its flexibility allows it to address diverse mental and emotional health needs, benefiting patients of all ages [5]. Bibliotherapy has proven effective in enhancing nursing students' self-esteem and emotional awareness, both essential for therapeutic nurse-patient relationships [6]. It fosters emotional growth and alleviates stress for students [7], nursing professionals [8], and patients across demographics, aiding emotional resilience and building coping skills [9-11].

In Croatia, knowledge about bibliotherapy can be acquired through participation in the Bibliotherapy Laboratory (BibLab), an experimental program organized by the Balans Association [12]. The laboratory sessions are conducted cyclically, consisting of six workshops [12, 13]. These workshops are designed to explore various methods of poetic therapy, including bibliotherapy conversation, songwriting, expressive writing, writing a dyadic poem, writing a story from multiple perspectives, and working with cards for poetry therapy. It targets professionals such as educators, social workers, psychologists, healthcare professionals, and anyone interested in using bibliotherapy techniques for therapeutic purposes [12].

AIM

We aimed to explore and understand perceptions of participating in bibliotherapy sessions and to describe and explore potential applications in healthcare, especially nursing.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this qualitative study, the authors conducted focus groups with participants of bibliotherapy BibLab sessions, employing insider approach [14-16] to explore and describe potential applications in healthcare, especially nursing. The authors adhered to the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) [17].

The study took place in a public elementary school library during the BibLab sessions in Zagreb, Croatia.

Purposive sampling was used, with inclusion criteria defining all participants as individuals who regularly attended BibLab sessions over six months. Sessions were focused on exploring bibliotherapy practices. Eight participants – one nurse (researcher), one entrepreneur, one aromatherapist, two librarians, and three elementary school teachers consented to participate in the study. All eight participants were female, with a minimum age of 29 and a maximum age of 55. The selection included individuals from diverse professions to provide a range of perspectives on the potential applications of bibliotherapy in healthcare. This heterogeneity was intentional, as each participant's background offered unique insights related to the focus of the study.

Data was collected from March to April 2023. A semi-structured interview guide featuring open-ended questions and prompts for deeper probing was developed and reviewed by the research team. The first author conducted focus group interviews during three sessions, while the second and third authors were leading the BibLab program. The interviewer demonstrated responsiveness by posing follow-up inquiries to obtain further clarification in response to the interviewee's answers. To acquire inductive data, the interviewer assumed a more passive role of following rather than actively leading during the interview [18]. The duration of the semi-structured focus group interview was roughly 30 minutes. The interviews were captured in audio format, then stored, and transcribed exactly.

Inductive thematic analysis was employed by Braun and Clarke [19]. Two researchers, both qualified nurses with expertise in qualitative methodologies conducted data analysis (TG, DV). This analysis involved thorough initial readings and subsequent re-readings of the transcript, identifying key information, taking notes, and generating preliminary codes, namely 27. Following this, the researchers assessed the codes based on patterns, relevance, and recurrence within the data to determine their interconnections and to develop overarching themes as suggested by Braun and Clarke [19]. The study adhered to Lincoln, Guba [20] trustworthiness criteria, which include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Researchers adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined in the Helsinki Declaration [21]. Before their participation, respondents were provided with comprehensive information regarding the study. They were ensured anonymity throughout the study and informed of their right to voluntary participation. All participants gave their written informed consent before data collection. The Balans Association does not have an ethical commission; however, the Association's assembly resolves issues related to the Association's work without a specific body or commission. The assembly approved the author's research (number: 2023-20/1).

RESULTS

The participants perceived that bibliotherapy demonstrates the power of storytelling to evoke emotions, promote personal growth, and create empathetic connections among individuals and can be implemented in a healthcare setting.

We identified three themes that explicate these perceptions: (i) resonance and empathy, (ii) personal growth and acceptance, (iii) bibliotherapy in healthcare.

Resonance and empathy

Participants initially entered the bibliotherapy sessions with certain expectations, anticipating that the stories might aim to evoke emotional responses.

„And so every text awakened something else in someone and that experiential part was very big for me great treasure.” (Participant 2)

A significant insight for participants was discovering that any story, regardless of its apparent depth or emotional charge, could evoke emotions.

„What pleasantly surprised me was how many stories can seem superficial to you, but just by someone giving you the task ‘come on, underline something that touched you’, you realize that any, every kind of story can actually touch you, even if at first glance you don’t think it will happen.” (Participant 1)

Participants shared their insights gained through active participation in bibliotherapy, highlighting moments of emotional openness and vulnerability.

„Just that beautiful thing... I think about it for days afterwards. Just that beautiful thing.” (Participant 3)

Through the shared experience of exploring narratives, participants not only became more aware of their own emotions but also developed a greater empathy towards others.

„I felt that no matter what I said, maybe someone wouldn’t even agree with it, but hmmm, but I didn’t really feel at any moment that anyone, that anyone would think to themselves, well, this person is crossed for me.” (Participant 7)

Personal Growth and Self-Discovery

Personal growth and self-discovery encapsulate the participants’ transformative journey through bibliotherapy, leading to profound personal insights, overcoming judgment, and cultivating an environment of acceptance and growth.

„Naranča (one of the texts for the session) showed me how much I, for example, am affected by people who are ‘victims’... I was very angry that I didn’t recognize it at all, but I thought I got over it, and when I saw that I was very angry about it, I literally never had to do anything with it again.” (Participant 2)

Participants shared instances where they confronted their own biases or preconceptions, fostering a more open-minded and non-judgmental perspective.

„So, I think that bibliotherapy kills judgmental mentality, that it dissolves us for empathy.” (Participant 4)

The participants described the bibliotherapy sessions as a safe and supportive environment where they comfortably shared their thoughts, emotions, and vulnerabilities. The creation of a safe space enabled participants to openly discuss their experiences, fears, and desires, contributing to a collective sense of trust and support.

„One of the benefits for me is, hm, as an insight that we can, as always, create our own safe place... I always felt okay, I go to the library, there is (name of one manager),

then there is (name of another manager), so I will drink coffee, then someone will come...” (Participant 4)

Participants described how the bibliotherapy sessions catalyzed personal growth, providing a platform for self-reflection, and empowering them to navigate challenges with greater resilience.

„I actually realized that everything, hmmm, I won’t say that I swallowed everything inside me over the years because I’m okay. This, but hmmm, how much actually, hm, I had different fights and debates inside myself and how long it lasted and how painful it was in some moments because I simply couldn’t or didn’t have the need to express some things.” (Participant 8)

Bibliotherapy in Healthcare

Participants discussed the potential application of bibliotherapy in healthcare settings, specifically in hospitals and long-term care facilities.

„I’m sure that especially for psychiatric patients who need this kind of thing, let’s say, if a group is formed, so that someone who has been hospitalized for a long time, I don’t know, does the same thing together, so that some kind of warmth, an opening which, which can be hmmm, and it can be like some, some, some nice moment of support for people who actually feel bad in that, in that whole process.” (Participant 5)

Participants acknowledged the potential of storytelling to offer emotional and psychological support, helping individuals deal with the challenges related to illness and medical treatments.

„The first thing that comes to mind for me is the seriously ill, hm, people and, hm, on palliative care... He doesn’t know what to say and you actually offer a story that makes some sense.” (Participant 1)

The stories shared during bibliotherapy sessions are considered powerful tools capable of positively influencing patients’ emotional states.

„I am personally most attracted to stories... So, in fact, to give people the opportunity to express their pain and suffering, but also their love and happiness and satisfaction, in fact, to express all their emotions, but also the opportunity to mirror those emotions in other people and to find the answers within themselves, and what actually gives them strength to find some, some new spark of life in themselves.” (Participant 3)

DISCUSSION

Bibliotherapy is not only cost-effective and easy to administer but also holds potential as a viable therapeutic modality for certain patient populations [2]. This study used a thematic analysis of participants’ experiences and insights regarding the emotional influence of narratives, personal development, self-exploration, and the potential application of bibliotherapy in healthcare settings. Participants had favorable experiences and believed that bibliotherapy is a valuable tool for presenting clinical and developmental concepts, promoting effective communication, and supporting the secure exploration of emotions and personal experiences. While the experience of diagnosis

and treatment varies for each individual, research suggests that up to 75% of individuals experience significant distress upon receiving diagnosis [22, 23]. Additionally, bibliotherapy has been shown to improve quality of life [4].



Numerous studies have examined the impact of bibliotherapy on the general population, but research on its efficacy in adult patients is limited, with only a few relevant papers identified. Five studies have used bibliotherapy as a didactic tool for various purposes [2, 24-29]. These findings were positive, with participants reporting emotional support, enhanced empowerment and quality of life, reduced distress, improved coping abilities, and decreased levels of depression and anxiety, along with improvements in quality of life, health-related quality of life, and social functioning [28].

Participants in our study discussed the potential uses of bibliotherapy in hospital settings and expressed confidence in its effectiveness for different age groups and medical problems. They regarded the therapeutic efficacy of narrative discourse as a valuable supplement to conventional medical therapies, offering potential benefits for patients in hospitals and long-term care institutions. Recent research indicates that bibliotherapy can be a valuable adjunctive tool in oncology care and nursing, particularly navigating complex emotional challenges associated with cancer [29]. A recent literature review also highlights the potential benefits of bibliotherapy in reducing anxiety, depression, and stress among patients, suggesting it as a beneficial supplement to traditional oncology care. The authors advocate for the integration of bibliotherapy into oncology practices to support patients' emotional well-being [4].

CONCLUSIONS

The study underscored participants' positive perceptions towards the diverse impacts of stories within the bibliotherapy sessions by fostering empathy and personal growth. The participants highlighted the benefits of bibliotherapy, suggesting it could benefit individuals across various age groups and medical conditions, from children to elderly patients in long-term care. However, we need to be aware of some challenges and risks. Inappropriate material selection can cause emotional distress if poorly matched to an individual's needs. Additionally, bibliotherapy should ideally be facilitated by trained professionals to ensure appropriate guidance and support. While bibliotherapy is beneficial as a complementary intervention, it may be insufficient alone for those with severe mental health conditions. These limitations highlight the need for careful implementation, evaluation, and personalized selection to ensure its safe and effective use.

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