Aotearoa New Zealand Strengths-Based Counselling Practice Framework for Social Work

By Petro Booysen
Introduction

→ The role of counselling and its place in social work is part of a long-standing debate around the primary function of social work

→ Social work practice and the balance between the therapeutic perspective and the social change perspective is shaped by contextual factors

→ The focus of social work may differ over time and from place to place
The researcher

- SA born and qualified in SA
- Masters degree in clinical social work
- Counselling or therapy domains of social work
- Interested in the strengths-based approaches
- The position of counselling in social work in New Zealand
- PhD study that explored strengths-based counselling in social work practice in the Aotearoa New Zealand context
- Private practice
Counselling in social work

→ A change continuum - therapeutic work/counselling perspective on one end and a community work/social change perspective on the other

→ One perspective favoured above the other at a particular time and context or both could be supported

→ Many social workers indicate therapeutic practice or counselling to be an integral part of their social work role

→ A number of research respondents reported that they did not feel adequately supported and equipped
Counselling in social work (2)

→ ANZASW committed to a dual perspective in social work in Aotearoa New Zealand

→ Commitment to bicultural as well as culturally competent practice in Aotearoa New Zealand

→ Culturally appropriate social work often draws on strengths-based theories

→ Literature indicate an alliance with strengths-based practice
Research Focus

Explore the core contextual considerations and practice components that are vital for strengths-based counselling in social work practice in the Aotearoa New Zealand context

Produce a practice framework for strengths-based counselling practice in Aotearoa New Zealand
Qualitative methodological approach with an exploratory purpose

A multi-method sequential study, which followed a linear progression

Explored the experience and knowledge of key stakeholders and focus group participants

Utilised purposive sampling expanded through the use of a snowball technique

Employed a general inductive and thematic data analysis method
Phase 1: In-depth interviews with key stakeholders.

The development of a draft framework.

Phase 2:

Focus group interviews.

The consolidation of the practice framework.
Research Findings

The views of participants regarding counselling in social work reflected:

→ Counselling is a legitimate component of social work practice

→ Social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand utilise counselling in their regular social work role

→ Social workers indicated a need for initial or continued professional development regarding their counselling or clinical skills

→ Context sensitive models or frameworks would be valuable
The Practice Framework

→ This framework was developed from what practising social workers reported that they do on a daily basis

→ The research aimed to develop a practice framework, as opposed to a model

→ This practice framework
  ○ provides a broad map for practitioners
  ○ to apply and adapt according to the practice situation, the client and the client requirements
  ○ is guided by the practice philosophy
  ○ it can be used in different fields of practice, and can be adapted to particular practice contexts
→ The visual representation shows the framework sections nestled in contextually sensitive practice

→ With formal and informal strengths-based knowledge at the core of the framework

→ It shows the practice philosophy (based on the strengths perspective) informing and connecting all the framework sections

→ As well as the practice components that are guided by the practice philosophy, knowledge, and practice context

→ The practice components are strengths-based skills and activities, phases of practice, and positive client outcomes
Practice Philosophy

- All people have strengths, resources, abilities, and capabilities

- People’s strengths, resources and abilities provide the keys to growth and change

- People are the experts on their own lives

- Collaborative practice is essential in strengths-based counselling and underscored by socially just practice

- Strengths-based counselling is not just about the problem, but also about hearing positives and exceptions
Context of practice

This practice framework is contextually sensitive and adopts a broadly inclusive view of various contextual and cultural factors that may impact a person’s life.

Culturally appropriate practice includes:
- a respectful and non-judgemental approach, collaborative practice, culturally appropriate engagement, recognition and acknowledgment of the client’s culture, the engagement of a cultural advisor and supervision, attention to whanaungatanga, the involvement of larger family groupings, and practitioners’ awareness of their own cultural views and backgrounds.

Collaborative practice is an essential component of bicultural and culturally appropriate practice in Aotearoa New Zealand and is consistent with the principles of The Treaty of Waitangi.

There is a synergy between strengths-based practice and culturally appropriate practice.
The Aotearoa New Zealand Strengths-Based Counselling Practice Framework
The theoretical assumptions and research from the strengths perspective and strengths-based practice approaches inform the knowledge base of this practice framework.

This framework therefore offers the scope for eclectic practice and may incorporate various strengths-based approaches, including Western strengths-based approaches with Indigenous approaches or cultural constructs.

Practitioners will therefore select the knowledge and approaches aligned with the practice philosophy and applicable to the particular practice environment and client concerns.

Further knowledge components of this practice framework include:

- the practitioner’s self-awareness, self-knowledge and practice knowledge as well as an awareness of local knowledge.

Research is also a key element of the framework’s knowledge component.
The Aotearoa New Zealand Strengths-Based Counselling Practice Framework
Practice Components

→ The three practice components of this framework are strengths-based skills and activities, phases, and positive client outcomes

→ Strengths-based skills and activities:
  - Various strengths-based skills and activities are used to explore or highlight the client’s strengths and resources throughout the process
  - These practice skills and activities include strengths-based questioning; strengths-based listening; validation, affirmation, and acknowledgement; making meaning and reframing; normalisation; externalisation; strengths-based language; strengths-based resources and tasks; using the self; storytelling; and awareness of spirituality
  - Strengths-based questioning
  - Strengths-based listening
Practice Components (2)

- Validation, affirmation, and acknowledgement
- Reframing
- Normalising
- Externalisation
- Strengths-based language
- Resources, tasks, and tools (http://innovativeresources.org)
- The use of the self
- Storytelling
- Awareness of spirituality
The Aotearoa New Zealand Strengths-Based Counselling Practice Framework
Phases

- Initial engagement, assessment, the work phase, and closure

- Initial engagement: respectful, non-judgemental, welcoming, collaborative, validating, focusing on strengths and resources, change is implied, strengths-based conversations, safe space, trust and rapport, giving information, confidentiality, culturally appropriate engagement, customs or tikanga

- Assessment phase: concerns, needs, risks, strengths, skills, abilities, capacity, successes, exceptions, and resources are assessed collaboratively; holistic assessment; culturally sensitive; whanaungatanga and tikanga; about the client, but also for the client

- Work phase: goals, hopes, the preferred future, solution finding, plans, and steps; incorporating the client’s growing awareness around strengths, abilities, and competency

- Closure phase: reflecting, reviewing, evaluation, reinforcement, and termination; client progress and successes are acknowledged and celebrated; maintenance plan; collaborative process
The Aotearoa New Zealand Strengths-Based Counselling Practice Framework
→ Positive Client Outcomes

- An effective way of working
- Support client power
- Uplifting
  - Enhance hope, courage, self-esteem, and client engagement
- Validating and acknowledging
- Reduce anxiety
- A broader neurobiological benefit
- Recording client outcomes for treatment programme’s development and evaluation, as well as for funding purposes
## Practice framework summary

### Practice philosophy
All people have strengths, resources, abilities, and capabilities; People’s strengths, resources and abilities provide the keys to growth and change; People are the experts on their own lives; Collaborative practice is essential in strengths-based counselling and is underscored by socially just practice; It is not just about the problem but also about hearing positives and exceptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice component - Skills and Activities</th>
<th>Practice component - Phases</th>
<th>Practice component – Positive Client Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Strengths-based questioning: open-ended questions, exception-finding questions, exploring the preferred-future/goal-oriented questions, coping questions, scaling questions</td>
<td><strong>Flexible process</strong></td>
<td>• Effective and fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strengths-based listening</td>
<td><strong>Initial engagement</strong></td>
<td>• Facilitate empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Validation, affirmation, and acknowledgement</td>
<td>Rapport, therapeutic alliance, develop trust, set up as a strengths-based process, give information, whanaungatanga and tikanga, respectful, warm welcome, attentive to strengths and resources.</td>
<td>• Uplifting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Making meaning and reframing</td>
<td>• Assessment</td>
<td>• Enhance hope, courage, self-trust, self-esteem, and engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Normalisation</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Validating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Externalisation</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Acknowledging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strengths-based language</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reduce anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strengths-based tools and tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Neurobiological benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using the self</td>
<td><strong>Work phase</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Storytelling</td>
<td>Goals, hopes, preferred future, plans, collaborative process, build and focus on strengths and resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awareness of spirituality</td>
<td>• Closure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluate; acknowledge and celebrate achievements; reflect, deconstruct, reinforce, and review change; maintenance plans; and collaborative process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Formal and informal strengths-based knowledge
Incorporates:
- Practice theory from strengths perspective and strengths-based practice approaches (Indigenous and Western approaches) as well as strengths-based research.
- Local knowledge - cultural and ethnic concepts and narratives, tikanga, whanaungatanga, knowledge about the community and its structures, processes, services, resources, systems, organisational systems and public and political issues.
- Practice knowledge from various fields of practice.
- Practitioner self-knowledge and self-awareness.

### Context of practice
Contextually and culturally informed and sensitive. Includes broad cultural dimensions. Respectful and non-judgemental, collaborative practice, culturally appropriate engagement, honours self-determination, recognises and acknowledges the client’s culture, the engagement of cultural advisors and supervision, attention to whanaungatanga, and the involvement of larger relationship groups.
Strengths of this practice framework

- It is a usable tool, applicable across different fields of practice and adaptable to various practice environments and situations.
- It is guided by a strengths-based practice philosophy, that together with knowledge and contextual awareness influences the practice components.
- The practice framework is also culturally and contextually sensitive and supports culturally competent practice.
Strengths of this practice framework (2)

- It is developed by social workers for social workers
- It integrates different knowledge types, and is supported by research
- It is based on the expression of social workers’ practice and so it is based on scholarly and practitioner insights
- It is based on Aotearoa New Zealand’s bicultural nature
Whakataukī

He toka tū moana, arā he toa rongonui

➔ Your strength is like a rock that stands in raging waters