DEFENSE MECHANISMS AND SELF-CONTROL IN RECOVERING SUBSTANCE ABUSE CLIENTS

Mekanisma Helah Bela Diri dan Kawalan Diri dalam Kalangan Klien Penyalahgunaan Bahan

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Abstract

The appraisal of defense mechanisms and self-control in recovery substance abuse clients in Malaysia is vital as it provides self-support for maintaining recovery. This study aims to investigate types of defense mechanisms in recovering substance abuse clients and its relation to self-control level. The study was carried out on 138 respondents. The respondents were randomly selected among recovering substance abuse clients in a rehabilitation centre. The data indicated that neurotic defence mechanisms (M=14.29, SD=3.93) are the most prominent among the respondents. Meanwhile, the respondents' self-control scored at average level (M=47.03, SD = 8.76). There was a positive correlation between immaturity defense style and self-control (r = 0.36, p = 0.0). This study concludes that with continued treatment and support, they can remain in recovery and sober.

Keywords: defense mechanisms, self-control, substance abuse.

Abstrak

Penilaian ke atas mekanisma helah bela diri dan kawalan kendiri dalam kalangan klien penyalahgunaan bahan adalah penting kerana ia menyokong kepulihan mereka. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji jenis mekanisma helah bela diri dalam kalangan klien penyalahgunaan bahan dan kaitannya dengan tahap kawalan kendiri. Kajian ini telah dijalankan pada 138 responden yang dipilih secara rawak dari sebuah pusat rawatan di Malaysia. Dapatan kajian menunjukan mekanisma helah bela diri neurotic paling menonjol (M=14.29, SD=3.93). Manakala tahap kawalan kendiri berada pada tahap sederhana (M=47.03, SD=8.76). Terdapat hubungan korelasi positif antara mekanisma tidak matang dan kawalan kendiri (r = 0.36, p = 0.0). Kajian ini membuat kesimpulan bahawa dengan rawatan dan sokongan berterusan, klien penagih dadah dapat mengekalkan kepulihan.

Kata kunci: Mekanisma helah bela diri, kawalan kendiri, penyalahgunaan bahan.

INTRODUCTION

Defense mechanisms occur without conscious intentionality and function to change an internal psychological state and are considered to be a relatively stable characteristic of an individual (Cramer, 2015).The study of understanding defense mechanisms carried out by Cramer (2015) support theoretical assumption that the function of the defense is to protect the person from experiencing excessive anxiety, undue negative effect, and/or losing self-esteem.

Mechanisms are learned responses, which develop unconsciously and are used to cope with a stressful situation. Ed Yong (2016) in his writing stated that self-control used the same skill as empathy, which is one's ability to overcome his or her perspective, appreciate someone else's and step into their shoes, instead other shoes belong to his or her own future. The article explained that among recovery addict what is differ which who slip and maintain in sober is the perspective of their brain and self-react either impulsive or empathy. For the cases of drug addicts, they have high impulsivity and low in empathy score. If a recovery person who can apply these theories, they will have to think more when decide to engage with drugs again. This will help them to maintain sober.

Baumeister et al. (2007) emphasize that self-control is the main function in a person and a lever to success in life. Self-control causes short-term impairments act (ego depletion) in subsequent self-control, even on unrelated tasks in an exhausting situation or experience. Based on the above justification, this study focuses on the relation between self-control and defense mechanisms among recovery person with substance abuse problem.

Hassan (2018) in the article stated that Malaysia still declared drugs as the number one enemy. This statement emphasized by the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA), (2017) which explained that every day the problem of drug abuse is getting alarming. This problem has been detected since the 1970s until now the drug is still in the state as no one enemy in Malaysia. National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA) (2018), reported that statistic registered drugs addict for all category was around 22, 922 cases along 2017. 18 440 is a recurring addict and 7482 is a new addict reported until now. NADA is a key player in various aspects of drug abuse (Hassan, 2018). The most common point in talking about the role of NADA is the treatment and rehabilitation of the client itself. Sort of module, strategies, program approaches were implemented by NADA as an effort which is rehabilitation as the main agenda (Zamani et al., 2014).

METHODS AND MATERIALS
Sampel Selection
A set of instruments was prepared which consisted of three-part A, B and C. Part A is a sociodemographic section, part B is the Defense Style Questionnaire-40 and part C consisted of self-control scale (SCS-M). The socio-demographic including the respondent's history of drug used, and their history of treatment for drugs abuse.

The population of this study was drug addicts who currently receiving treatment at the treatment centre in peninsular Malaysia. The selection of participants was based on predetermined selection criteria. The inclusion criteria were aged 22 above. Exclusion criteria a) Addicts who were diagnosed with dual-diagnosis characterized with psychotic symptoms b) Illiteracy. The calculation of the sample size for factor analysis was performed in accordance with Krejcie & Morgan, (1970), Table for Determining Sample Size from A Given Population. 153 respondents were recruited after considering the dropout rate of 25%.

The Defense Style Questionnaire
The Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ) was designed to assess behavior indicative of conscious derivatives of defensive styles (Hyphantis, 2010). The previous study indicated that the overall Cronbach alpha value of the DSQ-40 Malay language version was .793 (Mohd Hussin & Farhana, 2012). The DSQ-40 consists of 40 items that was used to derive score on 20 defense mechanisms with two items for each defense mechanism. The questionnaire is in a 9-point Likert format.

Self-Control Scale – Malay

The SCS-M contains 18 items that seek to measure the self-control level of respondents. This psychometric instrument consists of six dimensions: impulsivity, simple tasks, risk-taking, physical activities, self-centeredness, and temper as stated in Table 2. These 18 items are measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (completely like me) (Rahim et al., 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Information

Table 1.0 provides a summary of respondents' demographic information. Analysis of the data showed that the most recovering person of substances abuse ages ranges from 30-38 years old (44.2%) ($f = 61$). Of the 138 respondents who responded to the questions, the majority race is Malay which represents 127 respondents (92.0%). In regards to marital status, more than half of the respondents are single (57.2%). Majority of the level of education for the respondents is the lower secondary school (Form 1-3) and upper secondary (4-5) which is 52 persons (37.7%) each.

Relation between Defense Mechanisms and Self-Control

Data indicated that neurotic defense mechanisms used most by respondents, which scored highest on undoing style (M=14.29, SD= 3.93). This is followed by maturity defense mechanisms, which sublimation style scored the highest (M=13.34, SD= 4.31). Moreover, the most used defense mechanism style of immaturity is rationalization (M=13.25, SD= 4.03). In regards to self-control level, most of the respondent's self-control is at the average level which is 68.8% (n=95), while 17.4% (n=24) having a high level in self-control while 13.8% (n=19) of the respondents at the low level of self-control.

Table 1.0: Distribution of respondents by demographic characteristic amongst recovering substance abuse clients

Demographics information	Respondents (n=138)	
	f	Percent (%)
Ages		
22-29	22	15.9
30-38	61	44.2
39-47	36	26.1
48-56	19	13.8
Race		
Malay	127	92.0
Chinese	4	2.9
Indian	5	3.6
Others	2	1.4
Marital Status		
Single	79	57.2
Married	35	25.4
Divorce/Widow	24	17.4
Highest education level		
Never been to school	5	3.6
Primary	11	8.0
Lower secondary (Form 1-3)	52	37.7
Upper secondary (Form 4-5)	52	37.7
Pre-university/matriculation	1	.7
Vocational certificate (SKM)	15	10.9
Diploma above	2	1.4
Occupation		
Unemployed	8	5.8
Self Employed	77	55.8
Semiskilled-unskilled	22	15.9
Clerical/ skilled	21	15.2
Professional/Managers	10	7.2

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to access the relationship between three subscales of defense mechanism (maturity, immaturity, and neurotic) and self-control. Based on the result analysis, there is no significant correlation between maturity defense mechanisms and self-control (r = -0.16, n = 138, p = 0.063).

For immaturity defense mechanisms, there was a positive correlation between immaturity defense style and self-control, r = 0.36, n = 138, p = 0.0. This correlation indicated a strong positive correlation between these two variables, which increase in immaturity defense style is correlated with an increase in self-control. However, this correlation does not represent causation relationship, which means an increased immaturity defense style would not cause an increased in self-control level. These findings are aligned with past studies (Costa & Brody, 2013) that indicated immaturity defense mechanisms, such as rationalization, projection, and regression is psychological process that is responsible for suppressing emotional awareness and eventually contribute to psychopathology. Engaging in substance abuse and alcohol addiction is perceived as means to escape self-awareness. This lack of self-awareness is correlated with low self-control. Self-control uses the same skill as empathy, which one's ability to appreciate someone else's perspective and step into their shoes (Ed Yong, 2016). Those recovering substance abuse clients with immature defense mechanisms have higher chances for relapse when this psychological process is associated with high impulsivity and low empathy of self-react.

Furthermore, the data revealed a significant negative correlation between self-control and neurotic defense mechanism, r = -0.26, n = 138, p = 0.02. This indicates that an increased on neurotic defense mechanisms is correlated with decreased level of self-control. However, this correlation does not mean causation relationship – an increased use of neurotic defense mechanisms would not cause decrease level of self-control. This finding is relevant due to neurotic defense mechanisms' function is to reduce one's mentality by excessively avoiding feeling guilty and anxiety to protect his or her esteem (Ciocca, Tuziak, Limoncin, Mollaioli, Capuano, and Martini, et al., 2015) In drug addict case, the excessive use of neurotic defense mechanisms is correlated with low level of empathy, which increase the recovering substance abuse client to do impulsive action and less of self-compassion. This eventually leads to relapse.

Roles of Addiction Counselors
The findings of this study have some significant implications for addiction counselors. Addiction counselors may explore more substance abuse clients' defense mechanisms in their counseling sessions and understand how their defense mechanisms may affect impulsive their decision making that contribute to relapse.

Particularly, in developing the recovering substance abuse clients' treatment plan, it's worth to focus more on coping strategies that uses empathy and self-compassion as a way to manage relapse.

The concept of empathy and self-compassion as ways to increase substance abuse clients' level of self-control is strengthened as these two elements are central to Islamic teaching. Compassion is the best quality one can have towards selves and other human beings and animals (Ahmed, 2013).

CONCLUSION

After analysis of data, it can be concluded that unconscious mind would have relation with substance abuse clients' level of self-control. Thus, it is important for addiction counselors to pay proper attention to these elements in their treatment plan. Through proper guidance and treatment, recovering substance abuse clients would have improved self-control when they face with life stressors. Furthermore, addiction counselors need to emphasize the right weaknesses to be improved among recovery person of substance abuse. This study will be helping in recovering counselling in a district as also preparation for respondent going back to the society.

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