

# GROUP COUNSELING FOR ADOLESCENT

*Tina Afiatin & Budi Andayani*

## INTRODUCTION

Recently there are some phenomenon about adolescent maladjustment, for instances: juvenile delinquency, student riots, drug abuse, and even killing cases (Republika, December 13, 1993). Maladjustment of adolescent happens when adolescents or teenagers fail to satisfy their needs and thus feel frustrated. They behave inappropriately to eliminate their frustration.

Many efforts have been done to cope with problems of adolescent maladjustment. Extra-curricular courses, physical punishment and imprisonment are such efforts to name a few. Most of these efforts attempt to teach the adolescents lessons, but leave the problems unsolved. What the adolescents need are guidance and solutions for their problems. It is important to understand adolescent life in order to understand their problems and to provide them solutions they need.

This paper discusses one type of guidance for adolescent. Group counselling, especially with problem-solving approach, is one alternative to be presented below.

## THE PERIOD OF ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a period of transition when an individual changes from childhood to adulthood (Morgan, 1989). Whether a child likes it or not, he or she cannot remain a child forever. The transition from childhood to adulthood is normally a difficult process. It is difficult for the individual and for his or her social group because such a process involves adjustments to new situations, and such adjustments should be solved in a relatively shorter time (Hurlock, 1973). Some difficulties stem from the adolescents physical appearances which are similar to adults. Such appearances cause expectations to the adolescents to behave as adults do. Naturally, these adolescents do not have the knowledge to behave as they are expected. However, they cannot depend on their parents and teachers any more. They have to learn to stand on their own feet to overcome their difficulties.

The problems which occupy the adolescents' time and attention are myriad. They can be divided roughly into two major categories: personal problems and problems characteristics of adolescence. The first category of problems consists of problems involving home (relationship with family members, discipline); schools (grades, relationship with teachers,

extracurricular activities); physical conditions (health, exercise); appearance (weight, attractiveness, sex appropriateness); emotions (temper outburst, moodiness), and social adjustment (acceptance of drug usage, sexual relationship). The second category comes from the adolescents themselves. They demand to be entrusted with a greater autonomy and fewer responsibilities imposed by parents. However, to some extent they cannot take the responsibility of their own behaviours. Such a conflict results in misunderstanding and stereotype which in turn create social problems to the adolescents.

A pilot study revealed that a great deal of adolescent psychological problems stems from lack of self-confidence (Afiatin et al., 1994). The lack of self-confidence, in turn, inhibits the development and actualisation of the adolescent's potentialities.

Solving adolescent problems is not an easy thing to do. It is difficult especially for adolescents who as children had been excessively dependent on their parents and teachers (Hurlock, 1973). Furthermore, many adolescents hesitate to go to their parents because they expect they will not get sympathetic hearing. They also reject the idea of asking their parents for help because it may create the impression of incapability in exercising the autonomy they have achieved. Many others regard their parents and teachers as symbols of childhood, so they want to leave them behind.

After abandoning their parents, many adolescents feel adrift and need new resources of help. Some adolescents turn to their teachers, older siblings, adult relatives and families' friends. Some others, on the other hand, regard all adults as authority figures and these adolescents do not want to be in the position which is submissive to them. They prefer the members of their peer groups instead.

Wierson (1993) explains that planning interventions to adolescent problems needs the understanding of developmental theory. Holmes (1991) suggests that adolescence is characterised by the search for self-identity. Adolescents instinctively turn to their peer groups in the process of searching for self-identity. Therefore, peer groups are natural social-support resources for the adolescents. They provide peer-group counselling, become resources of solutions for their members' problems, and places where adolescents can get the environment for personal growth.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Group counselling is an area of study appeared to be moving from individual counselling (Dixon and Glover, 1984). A counselling group is a rich source of potential strategies. It is because a group of people has somewhat similar problems and this enables them to discuss the problems together. The group members also have the opportunity to speak their ideas of solution during the alternative-brainstorming stage. Each member can get feedbacks from the others regarding his or her progress in solving the problems. Thus, solutions may come from the discussion, and members do not have to be dependent to their counsellor. This becomes a strength of group counselling when being compared with the individual type of counselling.

It can be concluded that group counselling has the potentialities for therapeutic change which are not found in individual counselling (Kemp, 1970). Some of these potentialities are as follows: (1) group counseling provides a community in which an individual can test his or her evolving attitudes and ideas, (2) acceptance of the group members and experiences about one's changing attitudes may improve one's motivations, (3) group counseling provide the opportunity to learn to communicate with others, and thus, improve his or her ability in developing genuine interpersonal relationships, (4) acceptance and understanding provide by peers may result in the growing senses of safety and belonging, senses which support the process of introspection and revelation of deep feelings.

Adolescent group counseling is organised by a counsellor to help the adolescents achieve their goals and solve their problems. Groups are generally consisted of individuals who have somewhat similar problems (e.g. personal problems, career decision-making problems, communication deficits, lack of self-confidence, delinquency). The leader of a group counselling is called the counsellor. He or she has a role as a facilitator or a moderator in the group.

Adolescent group counselling with problem-solving approach proceeds in some steps. These are the stages of general orientation, problem definition and formulation, alternative generation, and verification and evaluation (Heppner, 1978).

The first stage involves a general orientation or building the clients mental set. A set is an inferred predisposition that influences a client to behave in a certain manner, which can be either facilitative or disruptive, depending on whether the set moves the client toward or away from effective procedure and solution.

The second stage involves defining the problem. Defining a problem adequately can be done by: (a) assessing oneself, one's behaviour, knowledge, emotions, and feelings relevant to the problematic situation, as well as the consequences of these aspects, (b) assessing one's environment relevant to the problematic situation, (c) describing the problematic situation, including events such as goals, expectations, and conflicts.

The third stage involves generating a list of possible responses that may solve the problem. Brainstorming to produce alternative responses is a common way used in group counselling.

The fourth stage involves decision-making process, which can be defined as the process of selecting one action from a number of alternatives. The goal of the decision making process is to help the clients engage in a series of behaviours that will increase the probability of being satisfied by their decisions.

The fifth stage involves testing the plan of action and comparing the outcome with some standards. Miller, Galanter, and Pribram (Heppner, 1978) describe the process of evaluation, which they label as "test-operate-test-exit" (TOTE) unit. If an individual's action matches or is congruent with a given standard then the individual stops or exits from the activity. On the other hand, if the individual's action is incongruent with the standard, he or she continues to "operate" or to perform the appropriate problem-solving behaviours.

There are some considerations in conducting a group counselling. Afiatin (1993) concludes that one should consider (a) the leader, (b) the characteristics of the group members (the clients), and (c) the process of the group counselling.

To be an effective leader in a group counselling, as Johnson and Johnson (1991) state, a person needs to understand: (a) the unique power of group experiences, (b) events within the group, the events that promote the participants change and growth, (c) the goals of group counselling, and (d) competent performance of a certain set of skills needed to lead a group counselling. In addition, Jacobs et al. (1988) states that a group leader working with adolescents should like and respect teenagers, be open to learn more about their immediate world, and understand the kinds of struggle adolescent are going through while they grow up.

High motivation to solve one's problem is the expected characteristic of the members of a group (Dixon and Glover, 1984; Rose, 1989; Johnson and Johnson, 1991). A person who is highly motivated usually is actively involved in the counselling process. A difficult client, on the contrary, has the characteristics of being a barrier, an adviser, over dependent, over self-control, extremely worried; and placing the blame on other people (Ohlsen, see Sukiat, 1981).

The process of group counselling can be effective if it has therapeutic functions. As Prawitasari (1991) states it, this curative or therapeutic functions involve: (a) the maintenance of hope, (b) the development of the sense of universality, (c) the disclosure of information, (d) the development of altruism between group members, (e) the corrective re-experience of relationships with the family of origin; (f) the learning of techniques of socialisation, (g) the possibility to imitate the counsellor's and other members behaviours, (h) the learning of interpersonal relationship, and (i) the development of the sense of belongingness.

An example of a group counselling is the one developed by Afiatin (1996) which is based on behavioural problem-solving approach. This model is proved effective in improving adolescents' self-confidence and decreasing their aggression.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

Group counselling for adolescent is one alternative to solve adolescents' problems. It provides natural social support by which the participation of the adolescents to share their emotions, expectations, and to speak up their ideas of solution increase.

The effectiveness of a group counselling is influenced by the ability of the leader, the characteristic of the group members, and the process occurred in the group counselling. The interaction of these factors makes it possible for the group to create a peaceful milieu for its members. Therefore the adolescents can experience a climate which is not threatening and able to improve their ability to solve their problems. As a result, their self-confidence will also improve.

Apparently group counselling also has advantages. Among these are that group counselling provides climates which are not threatening which are conducive for behaviour changes, the changes of behaviour are observable, and that adolescents can rely on themselves to solve their problems instead of depending on their parents or other people. Besides these advantages, however, group counselling also has some disadvantages. This counselling requires the subjects to be involved in all or at least two third of the six to eight meetings scheduled. So this becomes a source of disadvantage because this counselling requires high motivation and high commitment in the part of the subjects. Another source to be put forward is the group leader, that is, the counsellor. This model needs counsellors who are familiar with group counselling models so that they can be at ease and highly involved in the process.

As a conclusion, it is possible to organise a group counselling for adolescent in school environment (especially of junior and senior high school). Teachers or guidance counsellors can use this method to help their students who have somewhat similar problems such as social skill deficits, or lack of self-confidence. However, concerning the requirement of highly professional counsellors who are able to understand the dynamic of a group process, sensitive to members psychological needs and their behavioural changes, it is suggested that school counsellors improve their ability in and familiarity with group counselling.

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