



## Helpful aspects of counselling for young people who have experienced bullying: a thematic analysis

CREST Seminar  
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### Aims of the Talk

- To understand what is client perspective research
- To highlight helpful aspects in counselling for young people with general issues
- To define school-related bullying, types and impact.
- To highlight helpful aspects in counselling for young people, with a specific issue; i.e. school-related bullying
- Implications for clinical and research practice

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### Client Perspective Research

- Client perspective research is not new to field of counselling and psychotherapy with adults.
- The client perspective is the **most direct source of information** about the meaning and value of therapy.
- The client who contributes to the **change process** and therefore, it is highly relevant to inquire about what occurs in counselling from their perspective (Rodgers, 2002).
- Limitations: 1) not recall events in therapy, or limit or distort information. 2) External influences or pre-existing beliefs may bias client reports, 3) lack of vocabulary or unable to articulate themselves.
- Cooper (2008) state that clients are **active participants** in therapy.

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## Existing Client Perspective Research

### Adults

- Bereavement (Simonsen & Cooper, 2015)
- Breast cancer (Morgan & Cooper, 2015; Omylinska-Thurston & Cooper, 2014)

### Young People

- School-based counselling (Griffiths, 2013; Lynass, et al., 2012, McArthur, et al., 2015; Rupani, et al., 2012)
- Volunteer and community sector counselling (Bondi, et al., 2006)

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### Meta-categories of Helpful Factors in School-Based counselling

Griffiths (2013)



#### Counsellor Helpful Factors

- Counsellor's strategies and guidance.
- Counsellor's personal qualities
- Confidentiality
- Problem solving
- Independence of counsellor
- Non-directive



#### Client Helpful Factors

- Having an opportunity to talk openly and be listened to.
- Getting things off one's chest and releasing tension.
- Feeling accepted and not judged.
- Feeling understood.
- Insight and awareness

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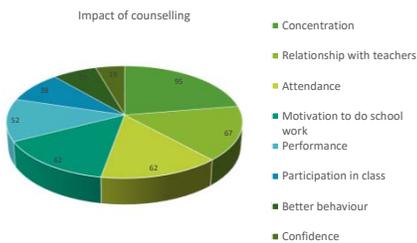
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### Impact of School-Based Counselling to Study and Learn

Rupani et al (2012)




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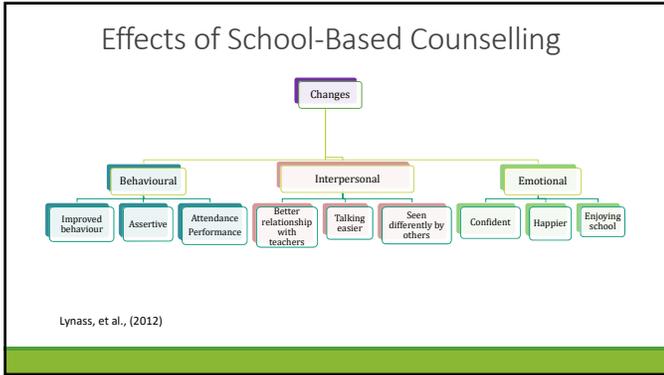
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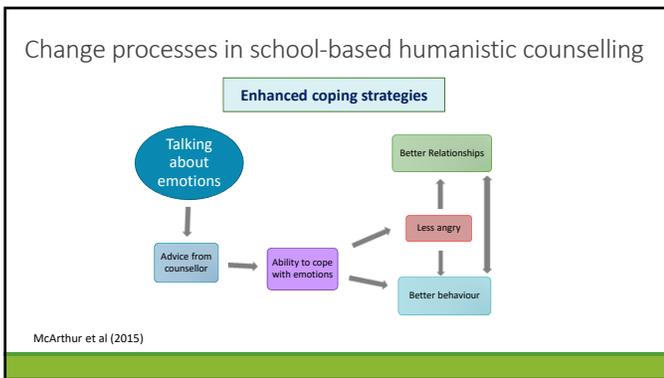
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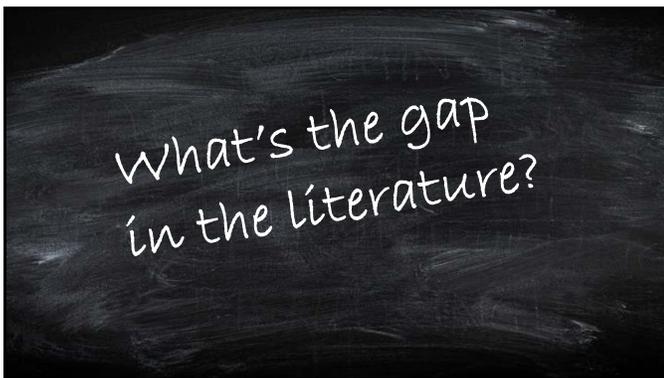
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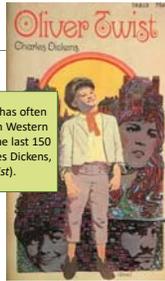
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## School-related Bullying

**Bullying:** Aggressive behaviour or intentional harm-doing carried out repeatedly and over time in an interpersonal relationship, characterized by an imbalance of power (Olweus, 1994).

**School-related bullying:** the intentional, unprovoked abuse of power by one or more young person to inflict pain or cause distress to another young person on repeated occasions, within a school setting (Scott et al., 2001).

School bullying has often been featured in Western literature over the last 150 years (e.g. Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*).




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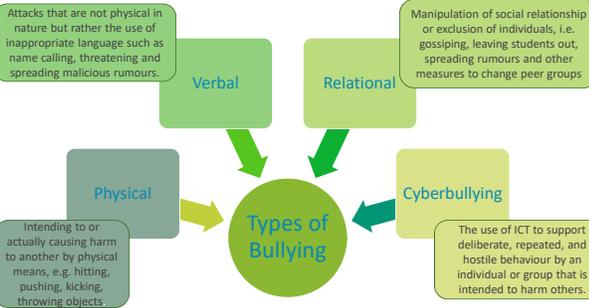
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### Types of Bullying




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## Impact of school-related bullying

**Emotional states:** anger, frustration, sadness, guilt, fear, shame, feeling unsafe, panic, irritability.

**Psychological:** loneliness, withdrawal, isolation, hopelessness, helplessness, low self-esteem, low self-worth, low confidence

**Behavioural:** poor school adjustment, dropping out of school, truancy, absenteeism, poor concentration, low academic performance

**Mental health issues:** depression, anxiety, panic, acute stress disorder, adjustment disorders, self-injury, PTSD, suicide ideation and behaviours

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### Counselling as an intervention

#### School-Based Counselling (SBC)

- A range of school-based helping activities usually delivered by a variety of professionals, paraprofessionals and peers (Cooper, 2013).
- A professional activity delivered by qualified practitioners in schools. School Counsellors offer troubled and distressed children and young people an opportunity to talk about their difficulties within a relationship of agreed confidentiality (BACP).

#### Dissemination of school-based counselling in UK secondary schools

Approximately, 10% of young people who access SBC present with bullying issues (Cooper, 2013)

Source: BACP (2013) estimated data for England and Scotland

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### Counselling as an intervention

#### Volunteer and community sector (VCS) counselling

- Counselling services provided to young people with mental health and psychological wellbeing needs provided by the statutory, voluntary and/or private sector, in a context other than a school (Street, 2013).
- Provided outside of the school environment, typically in youth information and advisory sites.

Approximately, 30% of young people present with bullying concerns (Youth Access, 2008)

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### Counselling as an intervention for bullying

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Six studies have explored counselling as an intervention for bullying:

- Pupil-peer counselling service (Boulton et al., 2007)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS; Dyer & Teggart, 2007)
- Telephone-based counselling (Danby et al., 2012; Oliver & Candappa, 2003)
- School-based counselling service in Ireland (McElearnay et al., 2013).
- Retrospective study with adults who were bullied (Jones, 2020)

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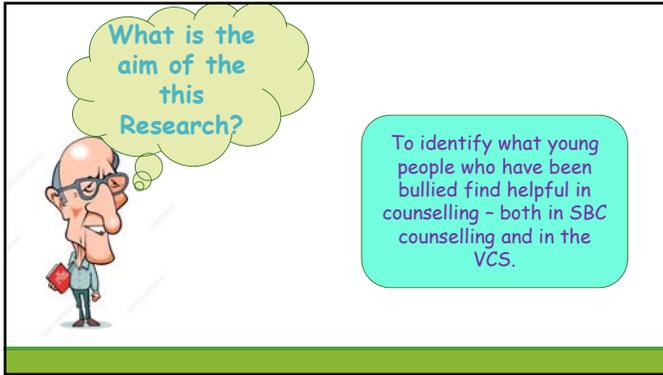
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What is the aim of the this Research?

To identify what young people who have been bullied find helpful in counselling - both in SBC counselling and in the VCS.

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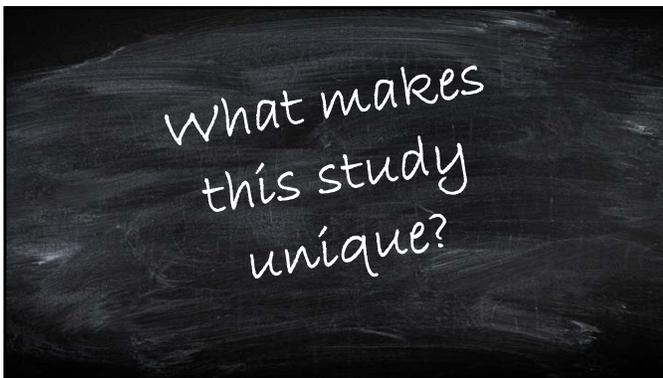
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What makes this Helpful Aspects Study Unique?

1. It is the first helpful factor study to focus specifically and in detail on this client group, rather than looking at helpful factors more generally across young people.
2. It is the first study to look at helpful factors in the VCS as well as in school-based counselling; currently, research in the former sector is very limited (Bondi et al., 2006).
3. Looks at face-to-face, individual counselling delivered by professionals—as is common in the field—rather than peer- or telephone-based counselling.
4. The study is qualitative rather than quantitative (McElearney, et al., 2013), and in this way able to identify mechanisms of change.
5. Focuses specifically on the impact of the intervention, which contrasts with Jones's (2020) principal focus on the impact of bullying.

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# Method

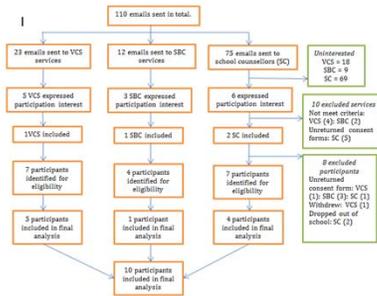
## Design

- Adopted an inductive approach (i.e. data-driven, opposed to theory-driven).
- Consistent with procedures for client helpfulness interview studies (Cooper & McLeod, 2015) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).

## Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Currently in counselling or had counselling for bullying, aged 11-17 years, a minimum of four sessions, competent to give consent, and parental consent.
- Exclusion criteria were significant risk of harm to self or others, and currently being in receipt of another therapeutic intervention.

Recruitment Process flow chart



Participant demographic

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Disability	School Year	Sessions	Type of counselling
Samwell	15	M	White/British	Yes	10	16	Psychodynamic
Sally	16	F	White/British	No	11	24	Integrative
Genie	14	F	Mixed/British	No	9	20	Integrative
Meera	15	F	Pakistan/British	No	10	12	CBT
Arya	14	F	White/British	No	9	40	Integrative
Dario	14	M	Black/American	No	10	35	Solution-focused
Shae	15	F	Mixed/British	No	10	15	Solution-focused
Avril	14	F	White/British	Yes	9	8	Psychodynamic
Grily	14	F	White/British	Yes	9	20	Integrative
Victoria	14	F	White/British	No	9	20	Integrative

Demographics	Numbers
Sample	10
VCS	5
SBC	5
Age	14-16
Gender	8(F), 2 (M)(E)
Ethnicity	5(WB), 2(MB), 1(PB), 1(ME)
Sessions	8-50, avg =24

\*All participants had experienced either verbal, physical, relational and/or cyberbullying—as identified by both the counsellors and the clients—and had received counselling specifically for school-related bullying.

**Instruments**

- A socio-demographic form
- Semi-structured interview schedule

**Main questions**

- How was your overall experience of counselling for bullying?
- What did you like about it and can you give an example?
- What did your counsellor do in therapy that helped you specifically with bullying?
- How was that aspect or technique helpful?
- What changes have you noticed since having counselling for bullying?
- Was there anything that you did in counselling that was helpful?
- How was this helpful for you?

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**Results – Main Themes**

Five (5) helpful counsellor and four (4) helpful client activities were identified

Helpful aspects in counselling for school-related bullying

Helpful Counsellor Activities	Number	Helpful Client Activities	Number
Ways of relating	10	Trusting	9
Incorporating creative media	8	Talking	7
Teaching strategies	7	Remembering and applying techniques	6
Offering advice	7	Expressing emotions	5
Creating safety	5		

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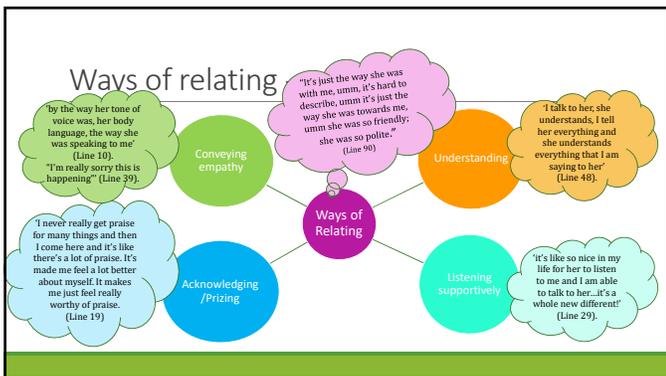
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### Creating Safety - Subthemes

I just feel safe, how they [the counsellor] work with me, I know I am safe like that, everything is confidential here, it's just safe and no one is out to get you here' (Line 24).



Confidentiality



Counselling Contract

'him [the counsellor] saying what his job was, and what he was there to do, and saying everything I had said will stay in the room' (Line 75).

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### Incorporating Creative Media - Subthemes

Incorporating creative media

Drawings

Card games

Flip charts

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### Incorporating Creative Media - Drawings

'doing things, like drawing things, I found that a really helpful way to express how I felt'



'He got to see something that I drew on the way that I was feeling, which kind of gave him going on, and how he would approach me' (Line 41)



'she took out some paper and drew out the situation and then she explained it step-by-step as it was happening' (Line 53).

'...there was something to look at while she was doing [drawing the situation] it, um made it quite helpful - it just meant that I could see what was happening more clearly instead of this jumbled up version in my head. She took the jumbled up and made it clear on a piece of paper. (Line 59)

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## Incorporating Creative Media – cards, flip charts



Michelle JK Blurr




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## Teaching Strategies - Subthemes

- Stopping and thinking
- Assertiveness techniques
- Mindfulness
- Distraction techniques

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## Offering advice

- Direct suggestions or guidance.
- The advice was either tell someone, speak to the bully or distract one self.
- Young people did not describe the content of the advice as helpful, per se, but that it gave them a sense of having choices.
- This then led to a feeling of autonomy and control over their bullying.
- Young people trusted the advice as it was given by an adult.

'she's a lot older than me and like she's more mature, and I know it's going to be good advice, I wouldn't be here [counselling service] if it was bad advice (Line 23).

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## Helpful Client Activities - Trusting

- Trust had to be built before bullying could be disclosed.
- Trust was fundamental so that young people can 'take on board' their counsellors' strategies and advice.
- Getting to know the counsellor

'I got to know him, and he got to know me, I just sort of learnt, after a period of time how to trust him ... just by getting to know him, trust builds up' (Line 37).

- Testing the counsellor

'I would tell her little things, to test her, to see if it will get out [i.e., to the wider school], and then after a month, nothing got out, so I started telling her bigger things, like about the bullies, and I realised I could trust her.' (Line 42)

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## Helpful Client Activities - Talking

### EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

'I was upset that the bullying was happening, and I, uh, just got to say how I felt really, my emotions' (Line 67).

### FINDING THEMSELVES AND IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

'When I talk it's like feelings that I didn't know were there just come up... it's like finding myself in a way, I guess, and it's aided me with speaking' (Line 77).

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## Helpful Client Activities – Remembering and Applying Techniques

- Creative media helped clients to remember more, as opposed to only talking
- Feeling cards helped clients to remember the activity
- Drawing bullying facilitated clarity and perspective



'Whenever we used the feeling cards, I memorise the activity. It'll be there in my head; ... it [cards] allows my brain to keep it there and remember the activity' (Line 60).



'It just meant that I could see what was happening more clearly, instead of this jumbled up vision in my head' (Line 59).

'When you're talking it's just words being thrown about, but with the drawing I can see it, and I can apply it... just being able to see something and place my attention in one place' (Line 65).

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## Helpful Client Activities – Expressing Emotions

- Freedom to express emotions
- Facilitated by counsellor's non-judgmental attitude



'I have the key, but then it's like she [the counsellor] persuades me to unlock them, cause I feel like, so restricted, like I can't let them out' (Line 129).

'basically you can put out all your feelings that you want and no one is going to judge you' (Line 83).

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## Summary of Findings

- The findings from this study indicate that young people who have experienced school-related bullying found it helpful to have a range of interventions—both more, and less, directive—in their counselling.
- This suggests that with other specific client groups (e.g., people with cancer, Omylinska-Thurston & Cooper, 2013), techniques and practices associated with a range of therapeutic orientations can be of value.
- This is consistent with a pluralistic perspective on therapy (Cooper & Dryden, 2016; McLeod, 2018), which holds that there are multiple ways of helping clients, and that no one single orientation holds the 'truth' on how best to facilitate positive change.

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## Limitations

- Small sample size
- Self report data
- Reduced validity
- Gender ratio
- Varied counselling sessions
- Over-emphasis of benefits
- Research allegiances effect

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**Counsellors working with young people experiencing bullying may find it useful to use principles and methods from a variety of therapeutic orientations: as and where appropriately trained and desired by clients.**



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### 'Take home' Point 1

• A trusting relationship and the counsellor's understanding, listening, and empathy are important for young people experiencing bullying.

• There is also preliminary evidence to suggest that acknowledgment, prizing, and valuing clients may increase their self-worth—particularly important for clients who have been bullied.



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### 'Take home" Point 2



- Counsellors may usefully adopt more directive approaches, such as offering coping strategies such as distraction techniques, mindfulness and assertiveness skills.
- Giving advice offers the young person a sense of autonomy and control, as they have options.
- Creative media facilitates the expression of emotions, especially when young persons may not have the emotional vocabulary to express how they feel.

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### 'Take home" point 3

There seems to be lots that counsellors and psychotherapists can do to help clients who have been bullied, and finding the right style and intervention for each individual client may be at the heart of effective practice.




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### Thank You



Any Questions?




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