

Bol, B.A. (2024). Solution focused brief therapy: relationship with social work and application example. *Turkish Journal of Applied Social Work*, 7 (1), 44-65. doi:10.54467/trjasw.1462094.

REVIEW ARTICLE

Submission: 03/04/2024

Revision: 21/05/2024

Accepted: 03/06/2024

SOLUTION FOCUSED BRIEF THERAPY: RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL WORK AND APPLICATION EXAMPLE

Çözüm Odaklı Kısa Süreli Terapi: Sosyal Hizmet ile İlişkisi ve Uygulama Örneği

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ABSTRACT

Social work is a discipline and profession that intervenes with individuals who have experienced loss of functionality due to adverse life events. It aims to eliminate negative thought and behavior patterns, restore their previous functionality, empower individuals by raising awareness of their strengths and effective role in their lives, and promote overall well-being. Upon reviewing the relevant literature, it becomes evident that the foundational philosophy and assumptions of solution-focused brief therapy, which has been proven to yield effective results quickly in social work interventions, align with the core values of the social work discipline. Social workers often prefer this approach due to its methodological advantages. From this perspective, this article aims to present solution-focused brief therapy comprehensively. It will discuss its historical development, fundamental philosophy, objectives, and underlying assumptions, evaluate its integration within social work, and provide an illustrative application example using solution-focused techniques in a fictional case of exam anxiety. This study aims to enlighten professionals interested in utilizing solution-focused brief therapy and contribute to the existing literature on this topic.

Keywords: solution-focused brief therapy, solution-focused approach, social work, social worker, exam anxiety

ÖZET

Sosyal hizmet, hayatında meydana gelen olumsuz olaylar dahilinde işlevselliğini kaybetmiş bireylerin olumsuz düşünce ve davranış kalıplarından sıyrılarak eski işlevselliğini yeniden kazandıran, bireyin kendisinin güçlü yönlerini ve yaşamındaki etkin rolünün farkına varmasını sağlayarak güçlendiren, bireyin tam bir iyilik hali için çabalayarak müdahalelerde bulunan bir disiplin ve meslek dalıdır. İlgili literatür incelendiğinde, kısa sürede etkili sonuçlar elde edilmesine katkı sağladığı kanıtlanan kısa süreli çözüm odaklı yaklaşımın temel felsefesi ve varsayımlarının, sosyal hizmet disiplininin temel değerleri ile örtüştüğü; yöntem ve teknikleriyle sağladığı birtakım avantajlar bağlamında sosyal hizmet uzmanlarınca tercih edildiği anlaşılmaktadır. Buradan hareketle bu makalede kısa süreli çözüm odaklı yaklaşımın tarihsel süreci, temel felsefesi, amacı ve temel varsayımlarını açıklayarak kısa süreli çözüm odaklı terapinin bütüncül bir çerçevede sunmak, sosyal hizmet ile ilişkisini değerlendirmek ve sınav kaygısı konulu kurgusal bir vaka üzerinden çözüm odaklı yaklaşımın teknikleri kullanılarak bir uygulama örneği sunmak amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmanın çözüm odaklı kısa süreli yaklaşımı kullanarak müdahaleler gerçekleştirmek isteyen meslek elemanlarına ışık tutacağı ve ilgili literatüre katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kısa süreli çözüm odaklı terapi, çözüm odaklı yaklaşım, sosyal hizmet, sosyal hizmet uzmanı, sınav kaygısı

INTRODUCTION

Solution-focused brief therapy is a concrete outcome of the evaluations of Shazer and colleagues' therapeutic sessions. The solution-focused therapeutic approach, first used in the Mental Research Center, is based on an analysis of how to overcome the points that make the problem chronic at the point where the problem worsens by focusing on the interactions of individuals and families (Rohrbaugh & Shoham, 2015).

Unlike traditional psychotherapy approaches that focus on the past, the solution-focused approach, which attaches great importance to the present and the development here, helps to support and strengthen the individual's ability to cope with their problems and to act with hope and confidence that the future can be designed in the desired way (Kaya & Başer, 2022). In the solution-focused approach, within the framework of the belief that clients have the power to cope with most obstacles in the processes of finding and building solutions, it is necessary to evaluate the strengths and resources necessary for the solution by acting in the context of the client's situation.

Rather than focusing the individual on the problematic area and working to stop these problematic behavior patterns, it is important to help the individual to question and assimilate the idea that events do not always turn into a problematic situation (Teater, 2015). In the solution-focused approach, where it is believed that life can be reshaped, it is ensured that the client is motivated to solve their problems with the assumption that the client has the power to overcome the problem without being stuck on the problem. In this way, clients are made to realize their impact on their own lives, an environment that can reveal their potential is developed and it is facilitated to build solutions.

The main purpose of solution-focused brief therapy is to enable the therapist to produce and implement solutions with his/her own will by preparing an environment for the client's creative thinking without interfering in the solution process with his/her own thoughts and opinions. In solution-focused brief therapy, unlike traditional psychotherapy approaches that emphasize the difficulty of change, the belief that change is inevitable, that it can occur continuously and that the future can be rebuilt in the desired way is adopted (Murdock, 2013; Yağcı & Duyan, 2020; Zengin, 2021).

When the relevant literature is examined, it is possible to say that although there are many studies examining the effect of solution-focused approach on various problems such as anxiety disorders, anger problems, eating and behavioral disorders, adjustment problems, tendency to violence, substance use (Franklin et al., 2008; Newsome & Gladding, 2014), it is possible to say that the number of studies conducted on the basis of solution-focused approach for exam anxiety in our country is limited. In addition, it is seen that most of the existing studies are group studies using an experimental model (Demirci & Erden, 2016; Gençtürk, 2019; Karaburç & Tunç, 2017; Özbay, 2017; Özdağ, 2021; Sarıçam, 2014), and studies conducted for individuals in the form of psychological counseling are limited (Altıntaş & Üzbe Atalay, 2022; Kavakçı et al., 2010; Terzi & Koçak, 2023). When group studies conducted

in Turkey and abroad are examined, it is understood that the solution-focused approach is effective in reducing test anxiety (Bannick, 2007; Franklin et al., 2008; Işık et al. 2021; İşlek, 2006; 2017; Özdağ, 2021; Bulut, 2010; Sarıçam, 2014).

Considering the positive effects of solution-focused therapy on many problems thanks to its multidimensional advantages and the fact that it is an up-to-date therapy model, it is thought that the study will guide solution-focused practitioners and contribute to the relevant literature. It is known that exam anxiety is one of the most common anxieties experienced in adolescence and the effect of solution-focused approach on reducing exam anxiety has been proven in many studies. From this point of view, this study includes a fictional case in which a solution-focused method was used to intervene in exam anxiety.

SOLUTION FOCUSED BRIEF APPROACH, HISTORICAL PROCESS AND DEVELOPMENT

The solution-focused brief approach, which originated in the 1980s, was built and developed at the Center for Short-Term Family Therapies in the United States based on the idea of focusing on the solution of problems rather than the problems themselves, and on times when problems are not yet defined or are perceived as unimportant (De Shazer et al., 2021). Solution-focused brief therapy has common points with Ericson's hypnotherapy approach in terms of the importance of the client's ability to produce solutions and helping the client to be self-aware for future solutions, as well as adopting the idea that the individual should be evaluated within the system that belongs to the system theory. In addition, it is possible to say that solution-focused brief therapy includes the empowerment approach, as it is based on the acquisition of problem-solving skills by individuals (Gülbüz, 2023).

Solution-focused brief therapy, one of the contemporary psychotherapy approaches in which the strengths and flexibility of the clients are emphasized, is a psychotherapy theory that aims to reveal the points that the clients are good at doing, to help the client not to perceive the current situation as a problem and to help the client think about the preferred future (Kondrat, 2010). In this therapy, where the inductive rather than deductive method is adopted, the past is ignored in order to reach the preferred future, the focus is on the present situation and future planning and it stands out from traditional psychotherapies that focus on the deficiencies in the individual (Doğasal & Karakartal, 2021). Another important feature of solution-focused brief therapy, which adopts the view that the client has the ability to solve problems, is that the client sees the existing resources of the client as the key to the solution. This therapy assumes a role in helping clients to realize and develop the resources and possibilities they have and to use them to solve problems. Today, although the areas of use of solution-focused brief therapy vary, it is preferred by different professional groups and can be carried out individually or group-focused.

THE BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF APPROACH

Solution-focused therapists argue that dealing with clients' problems will not be beneficial in solving the problem. Miller (1997:13), while interpreting problem-focused paradigms, states that focusing on negativity worsens the worries in the client's life, and that problem-focused therapists take on the role of self-fulfilling prophecy by causing clients to see their own lives full of problems. Since focusing on the client's mistakes or problems may cause iatrogenic (side effect) effects, solution-focused therapists use a thoughtful, constructive and solution-based language in cooperation with the clients and look for the way to realize the solution in the existing resources of the client himself/herself (De Shazer, 1997).

De Shazer et al. (2021) explain solution-focused brief therapy within the framework of some general rules. These rules are listed as follows.

If it is not broken, don't fix it: If the client does not have a problem or complaint, there is no need for intervention. Even if there is a situation seen problematic by the counselor, the issue is not put on the agenda. Doğan (1999) stated that the areas where the client is functional should not be intervened. However, if the client is faced with a difficulty, he/she should produce solutions to get rid of the difficult situation he/she is in.

If it works, keep doing it: It is important to insist on using methods that have been proven to work on the way to a solution. Only by using functional methods more often can success be achieved in solving problems. Counselors focus on the strengths of the clients to discover exceptional moments. The client is encouraged to apply more to the skills or behavior patterns that work for the solution. In this way, the client is brought closer to the solution.

If it doesn't work, don't repeat it, do something different: Different solutions should be tried, not resorting to solutions that have proven to be unhelpful. Attempts at non-functional solutions should be eliminated. Retrying a non-functional method is not helpful. The important point here is that if a solution has proven to be unworkable, a different set of solutions should be put in place.

PURPOSE OF SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF APPROACH

Unlike traditional therapies, the main purpose of solution-focused brief therapy is to enable clients to recognize and analyze the problems in their lives, to direct the client to use a solution-focused language instead of a problem-focused language and to enable the client to concentrate on solutions as quickly as possible for the desired future. This can only be achieved by connecting with the person, not the problem. De Jong and Berg (2008) state that the creation of well-structured goals and the development of solutions by detailing exceptional situations are two actions that play a key role in the emergence of a solution. In addition, negotiating the goals with the client and utilizing the client's strengths and resources to achieve these goals are presented as another aspect of the solution-focused process.

Sklare (2010) classifies well-structured goals into 4 categories. These 4 goals are listed as follows.

Positive Goal: It is characterized by observable and measurable behaviors. When the client expresses desires to achieve something, using positive statements such as *"I want to be able to deal with difficult people"* or *"I want to improve my grades"* signifies a positive goal. The details of the client's stated positive goals are examined. Additionally, the measurability of positive goals allows the counselor to assess the client's progress. By asking a question like *"What can you do to improve your grades?"* to a client who says *"I want to improve my grades"*, the counselor can help the client focus on the positive goal.

Negative Goal: This type of goal, which clients resort to more than other goals, includes statements about the lack of something. Negative goals usually emerges in two different ways. The first is the desire to avoid something, and the second is the desire to quit something (Doğan, 1999). It can be seen as *"I don't want to get low grades"* or *"I don't want my family to interfere with me about my boyfriend"*. The solution-focused brief approach believes that the negativity mentioned by the client should be replaced by something else in order to prevent it from happening again. At this point, the counselor asks the client to become aware of the skills and behavioral patterns that can replace what the client wants to give up and plays a role in turning the goal into a positive one. For example, with a question such as *"What would you be doing if you didn't get low grades?"*, the counselor can help the client to produce positive goals by revising the negative statements and guiding the client in a positive way.

Harmful Goal: Although not very common, from time to time clients may develop harmful goals such as dropping out of school, running away from home, harming someone or property when they tend to violate the law, harm others or themselves. In a solution-focused brief approach, the counselor should be aware that such harmful goals are a reflection of the need to fill the gaps in the client's life that they cannot fill. The counselor should not support such destructive goals in therapy when the client develops a self-destructive goal.

Unknown Goal: Clients are often referred to therapy by the people around them. Clients who cannot understand why they are sent to therapy are reluctant. Therefore, when the counselor asks *"What brings you here?"* the client usually answers *"I don't know"*. Faced with such situations, the counselor asks the hypothetical *"If..."* question, which helps the client to develop a goal while ensuring the continuation of the therapeutic process (Doğan, 1999).

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF THE SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF APPROACH

According to Walter and Peller (1992), when the counselor moves away from the usual questions, the assumptions of solution-focused practice guide the counselor. These assumptions provide a complete picture by presenting the most accurate form of solution-focusedness (Teater, 2015: 193).

Focusing on the positive, the solution and the future: Always seeing the positive, focusing on the solution and the future accelerates the change in the desired direction. Therefore, in solution-fo-

cused therapy, solution-focused discourse is essential instead of problem-focused discourse (Walter & Peller, 1992: 10). Focusing on the client's problems, mistakes and deficiencies will perpetuate the problems in the client's life. Therefore, the counselor should avoid a language that feeds from the problem. One of the most critical components of a solution-focused approach is to focus on the desired future based on what the client has already done well by underlining his/her existing resources rather than his/her inadequacies.

Focusing on exceptional situations where the problem does not arise: In the solution-focused approach, there is a belief that no matter how full of problems the client's life is, there are always moments when problems do not occur (Walter & Peller, 1992: 11). The solution-focused counselor acts in cooperation with the client to help the client gain awareness and encourage exceptions to occur more frequently by uncovering the moments when the problem is absent or perceived as insignificant, when the miracle happens. Since the exceptional moments are often hidden behind the client's veiled expressions, the counselor should carefully analyze these moments from different dimensions.

Change is continuous: Nothing stays the same in the client's life. Everything is in a constant change. Although the client sees his/her past experiences as the same when he/she looks at them from where he/she is, they are different (Teater, 2015: 194). The solution-focused approach, which acts with the idea that every moment, every minute adds new experiences to the client's life, believes that every client has a capacity for change. At this point, the counselor plays a supporting role in the emergence of this capacity by examining the existing power of change, investigating the exceptional situations where there is no problem, and helping the client to produce solutions based on these functional times.

Small changes are harbingers of big changes: Big changes are hidden in the realization of small changes (Walter & Peller, 1992: 18). Most of the time, it is long and arduous for the client to achieve the goals he/she has produced in the process of building the desired future. Even the smallest intervention that will enable the client to take small steps that will enable him/her to see the goals that he/she finds difficult to achieve as more reasonable is very important. No matter how difficult the problem is to bear, it is solved step by step. Whether the steps are big or small, the smallest effort towards change on the way to a solution is critical on the way to big changes.

The client is the expert rather than the counselor: In solution-focused brief therapy, the client determines the subject to be worked on, the goals and what to do in line with these goals. The direction of the therapy is determined by the client, because the solution-focused approach adopts the belief that clients have the responsibility to bring about change in their lives, and the expert in this therapy is not in a directive, interventionist, dominant role. It is in a guiding position for the client to develop positive goals in the process of building a solution. Because the client is more aware of everything about himself/herself than the expert, he/she knows best what to do for what purpose (Doğan, 1999).

The client's available resources contain everything for the solution: The solution-focused approach, which has traces of the empowerment approach, has the idea that clients already have everything

they need to solve their problems (Walter & Peller, 1992: 28). The counselor assumes an auxiliary role in helping the client, who is thought to have all the necessary resources in the process of building a solution, to realize his/her potential and to build a solution by making use of his/her strengths.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF APPROACH TECHNIQUES

Clients often tend to talk about their problems, mistakes and shortcomings during the sessions. A number of specific methods and techniques have been developed in solution-focused brief therapy in order to help clients who insist on talking about the problems in their lives and the situations that have gone wrong to adopt a solution-focused language instead of a language that feeds on the problem.

Exceptions: The main thing is to make the client aware of his/her own resources by uncovering the times when the client did not have problems. On the way to the solution, the counselor uses exception finding questions to identify and discover the moments when the client exhibited desired behaviors and was successful in the past and now. It is enabled to produce solutions based on the client's strengths (Şahin, 2001).

In solution-focused brief therapy, the idea that there is always a moment when a child who resorts to lying tells the truth is advocated (Doğan, 1999). The seeds of the client's own solution are the moments of exceptions that always exist no matter how serious the problems are (Iveson, 2002). When focusing on possible solutions by drawing strength from exceptional moments when the problem is not experienced, counselors make use of exception-finding questions such as *"Are there times when you do not experience this problem?"* or *"What happens differently at such times?"*. In order for such exceptions to occur more often and to reach a solution as soon as possible, the counselor explores what can be done to make them more frequent with complementary questions such as *"What can make this happen more often?"*. In this way, by showing the client that the client's life is not only full of problems and that problems will not always exist, it helps the client to find hope and increase the desire and motivation to change in the name of solution (Uysal, 2014).

Technique for reading the future: The technique of reading the future is used to make the client think about what his/her life will be like in a future where his/her problems are solved, so that the client has an idea about what life will be like in a future where the problem is eliminated (Doğan, 1999). For this purpose, the session is focused on positive situations by asking questions such as *"If you were able to cope with your problems, how would the situation be for you and those around you?"*.

Nightmare Question: In solution-focused brief therapy one way to reach a solution can be achieved by talking about the problem. With the nightmare question, the client is helped to construct a solution by revealing the situations in which the client is ineffective and dysfunctional (Doğan, 1999). When the counselor wants to use the nightmare question, *"Imagine that you had a nightmare when you went to sleep tonight. This nightmare caused your problem to get worse. When you woke up in the*

morning, how would you know that the nightmare had happened?" However, the nightmare question technique is not preferred because it is contrary to the principle of solution-focused brief therapy "*Solution-focused talking instead of talking about the problem*".

Complimenting: In solution-focused brief therapy, the client's strengths that he/she does well and is successful are emphasized in order to provide in-depth examination, to motivate the client and to confirm his/her strengths. Indirect or direct compliments can be offered to the client, such as "*How did you manage to stay calm in the chaos*" or "*You must be very smart to think of that*". Counselors should be realistic in their praise. In addition, frequent emphasis on praise during the therapy process strengthens counselor-client relationships and accelerates progress. Praises can be used at different times to support the client's coping strategies, progress and good points that the client has developed for the solution, following the rating questions or when needed and deemed appropriate in the therapy process (Ağca & Avşaroğlu, 2020: 1027).

Rating: Rating questions help to concretize goals that the client sees as complex, difficult and distant, to make the goals more reasonable by enabling small steps to be taken, to create a situation map for both the counselor and the client to evaluate their progress in the process, to be a source of motivation by showing the progress made by the client, and to facilitate the involvement of clients in the therapy process. Generally, the state in which the problem disappears and the miracle occurs is determined as 10, and the worst state of the problem is determined as 0. Through these forms, the client is asked where he/she sees himself/herself on this scale and how he/she reached the point where he/she defines himself/herself is discussed. The counselor ensures that the solution to the problem is focused on and steps are taken with questions such as "*What can you do to move one point further from where you are on the scale?*". Thus, with measurement questions, the client is provided with the opportunity to gain self-confidence in solving problems in the solution process designed for the desired future, and to evaluate himself/herself in the solution process and to take high-level responsibility (Gülbüz, 2023; Murdock, 2013; Yağcı & Duyan, 2020; Zengin, 2021).

Miracle Question: Miracle questions are used to assist in the creation of well-formulated goals. These questions related to the goal setting of the clients enable the client to develop small and manageable goals and are a rehearsal of the desired future (Trepper et al., 2010). The miracle question technique, which is based on the client's description of a problem-free life, is "*Imagine that you have a magic wand. When you sleep at night, a miracle happened. What changes happen in your life when you wake up in the morning?*" can be directed to the clients. An appropriate time should be observed for the use of miracle questions in the solution process (Miller & Berg, 1996). If there is a hurry in using the miracle question, the problem may not serve its purpose and may cause the client to show resistance. On the other hand, the main purpose of using the miracle question is not to learn what the miracle is, but to help the client to focus on how to imagine a problem-free life that will occur after the miracle and to help clarify the goals that will serve the solution (Miller & Berg, 1996; Walter & Peller, 1992).

Homework: Homework in solution-focused brief therapy is characterized by logical and reasonable tasks that will encourage the client to apply more often the solution path that has proven to work in the process of building the solution. Homework is used to draw attention to the client's good points and to encourage solution-focused thinking and to encourage change by raising awareness of how to use the resources available to the client (Corey, 2008). Two types of homework techniques can be applied, such as applying more often to solutions that work or trying a different method instead of solutions that have proven not to work. In addition to being a task that the client can perform, homework should have a meaning for the client (Doğan, 1999).

Message (Feedback): The feedback technique in solution-focused brief therapy is the presentation of the sessions with the client in the form of a summary feedback to the client when the therapy is nearing its end. After the counselor tells the client that he/she needs 5-10 minutes to formulate a feedback during the therapy, the counselor pauses the therapy with a question such as *"Is there anything you want to ask, know or add before leaving to prepare a feedback after the evaluation of the session?"*. Feedbacks can be designed by the counselor in the form of giving compliments, building bridges and giving observation-based assignments (Corey, 2008). Feedbacks are an important technique for bridging the gap between the two sessions and for the continuation of the next session.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF APPROACH IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK

Clinical social workers of recent years have tended to use the solution-focused approach frequently in their professional practice (Al-Ma'seb, 2020). The solution-focused brief approach is a compatible approach that overlaps with the social work discipline at many points and is frequently used in social work practices. The solution-focused brief approach is an approach that respects cultural differences and values and offers a way to all practices for the protection of human dignity by directly overlapping with the principles of social work, especially the principles of observing human dignity and respect for differences (Lee, 2003).

The discipline of social work adopts the idea that the client can make their own decisions about their own life, be an active participant in the solution process, create a life of their own choices, know what they need regarding the solution process and development and what to do in the healing process. In the social work profession, which underlines the uniqueness of the client with the importance it attaches to the individual and to being an individual, professional practices are carried out based on the principle of producing solutions with the client, not producing solutions for the client, starting from where the client is located.

Based on the guiding principles of the social work profession, such as the right to self-determination, the uniqueness of the client, the ability to build the future with the client instead of for the client and in the present the belief that the solution-focused brief approach focuses on the existing resources of the client and contains the necessary resources for the solution, the idea that it is necessary to draw

attention to the strengths of the client and help in goal setting based on these aspects and to act in cooperation with the client in professional sessions, as well as the argument that the client is the competent person in all stages of the solution process, who directs the professional intervention from evaluating the problems to determining the goals, supports that the solution-focused brief approach overlaps with the social work discipline in many aspects when evaluated in the context of the value foundations of social work.

It is understood that the importance given to the reality and cooperation of the dialogues between the counselor and the client, especially in the solution-focused approach, means accepting the client with his/her differences, seeing these differences as a richness and valuing their existence (Şahin, 2001). At this point, the understanding and approval of the client with his/her differences in solution-focused therapy is directly related to the principle of respect for awareness of the social work profession. In the light of this principle, social workers accept and respect clients unconditionally. The differences of the clients are evaluated as their strengths and seen as richness. Revealing and supporting the client's strengths and building solutions based on these strengths constitute the essence of the social work profession.

Finding out how clients can cope with many difficulties in their lives, what their resources and methods are in this process and how they use them, and transferring all these powers of the client to the solution process is critical in reaching an effective solution in a short time and increasing the client's coping motivation and functionality. In fact, the understanding at the birth of techniques such as coping, miracle, exception, etc. used in solution-focused therapy reflects the basic values of social work, and the high-level importance given to human beings reveals the compatibility of solution-focused therapy with the social work profession, which places human beings at its focus (Şahin, 2001).

In addition to the traditional problem solving approach of social work, the solution-focused brief approach offers a path towards resilience that will develop solution strategies towards the desired future based on the experiences of the clients (De Jong & Berg, 2008). In the problem-focused approach of social work, the current problems in the clients life are examined in detail, the cause, why and how of the problem are examined. In the solution-focused brief approach it is discussed with the client that talking about the problem will not be beneficial in solving the problem and how to move forward in the solution by focusing on the solution. For example, asking a couple to tell about previous fights in their marriage will not bring a solution to existing or new fights. It is not important to know the traumas in order to resolve them. From another perspective, in traditional practice, professional social workers are often seen as social workers at all stages of the solution process. However, this hierarchical situation is not valid for the solution-focused approach. The solution-focused brief approach advocates the idea that it is the client who determines the direction of the therapy and that the responsibility for change in his/her own life lies entirely with the client.

CASE EXAMPLE: APPLICATION OF THE SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF APPROACH

As an example of how the solution-focused brief approach can be used in social work practices, a fictional case example focused on exam anxiety will be given below.

Ayça is a 19-year-old university preparatory student who has finished high school. She prepared for the YKS (Higher Education Institutions Examination) exam for a year in a private tutoring center and decided to prepare for the YKS exam again for a year in the same private tutoring center as a result of not getting the result she wanted even though she ranked in the top 1000 in the exam. Ayça is the only child of the house. Her mother is a specialist doctor in general surgery and her father is a specialist doctor in thoracic surgery. Her parents, who want Ayça to become a doctor like them, put a lot of pressure on her to get a degree and study medicine at a good school. Ayça generally has a healthy relationship with her parents. Ayça's relationship with her parents deteriorated when her academic success declined. Ayça is afraid of failing, gets overly excited during the mock exams she takes in the classroom, suffers from hand and foot tremors and forgetting what she knows. In addition, she experiences somatic reactions such as nausea and insomnia.

Recently, she has been having difficulty eating and getting out of bed, her communication with her friends and teachers has weakened, she frequently misses classes, she loses hope that she will succeed as a result of low results in mock exams, and she gradually loses faith in her dream of becoming a doctor. In response to these problems, the family consulted a social worker who works as a family counselor in a private family counseling center, and the specialist decided to meet with Ayça regularly to solve the problem. In the first interview, Ayça was observed to be quiet, bored, reluctant, stressed but open to cooperation.

As a result of the social worker's evaluations and analysis of many studies in the literature that have proven that therapies using a solution-focused approach to test anxiety are effective in reducing anxiety, he decided to continue the intervention process using a solution-focused approach and conducted three interviews with Ayça. These interviews were scheduled to take place in the family counseling office of the specialist on Sundays every week and lasted approximately one hour. The expert helped Ayça to develop individual goals and functional methods based on her existing resources and strengths in order to reduce her test anxiety and increase her motivation, and worked on achieving her desired future as soon as possible.

The following is an example of the program flow of the three interviews conducted with Ayça, explaining how the process was carried out under the techniques of the solution-focused approach and what the preferred techniques served.

1. Interview

- Meeting, establishing the therapeutic relationship
- Informing about the process, sharing expectations

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- Recognizing and structuring anxiety
 - Pre-session change emphasis technique
 - Discussing the client's expectations after the session, determining positive goals and methods
 - Miracle Technique and Grading Technique
 - Homework (Applying weekly study and sleep plan and practicing relaxation exercises before trial exams)
 - Evaluating and summarizing the session
 - Planning the next week

2. Interview

- Summarizing the previous session
- Evaluation of homework
- Exception question
- Rating technique and setting new appropriate and achievable goals for the solution Focusing on coping moments and identifying strategies
- Homework (Spending time with family and friends, sharing, making time for hobbies)
- Evaluating and summarizing the session
- Planning the next week

3. Interview

- Summarizing the whole interview process
- Evaluating the homework given in the previous session
- Evaluating individual goals and methods
- Learning feelings and thoughts about the interview process and its end
- Rating question technique
- Leader giving feedback to the member (Praise technique)
- Safe place exercise
- Conclusion

Initiating the First Meeting

This stage plays a key role in establishing a safe therapeutic relationship between the expert and Ayça. For this reason, in the first encounter, the expert prepared the appropriate environment with a sincere language and sincerity in order to make the client feel comfortable and safe, learned whether the client had any questions about the process, conveyed information about the counseling process, and started the session by obtaining the clients consent.

In order to realize the 'define the problem' stage (Teater, 2015), which is known as the first stage of De Jong and Berg's solution-focused intervention, the expert started the session with a goal-focused question such as *"What are you trying to overcome by coming here?"* Ayça told the expert that she came to the session to reduce her exam anxiety. She stated that the university exam was very important for her, that she had no choice but to pass, that she was very afraid of failing, that she had unsuccessful results in trial exams due to this anxiety, that her relations with her environment had weakened, that her hope of becoming a doctor was gradually diminishing, that she had started not attending classes and argued with her family. The expert asked Ayça what she would like to see happen in her life at the end of the session and ensured that the session continued positively by focusing on the solution rather than the problem, as required by the main criterion of the solution-focused approach (Danış & Büber, 2018).

Ayça stated that if she could control her excitement during the exams, she would get good results, she would not feel nauseous and suffer from insomnia, she would be more eager for the lessons and more hopeful for the essays as she saw that she could get good results, and her relations with her family and friends would be better. It is understood that Ayça's responses contain positive goals. One of the goals of solution-focused social workers is to transform positive goals into more specific goals (Danış & Büber, 2018). Based on this, the social worker asked Ayça the question *"What would you be doing if you controlled your excitement during the trials and did not disrupt the lessons?"* Ayça responded as follows: *"I would get good results from the trials, I would regain hope that I would succeed, I would regain my sleep pattern"*. In the session, a healthy therapeutic relationship was ensured and it was observed that Ayça had a strong desire for change and was open to cooperation.

Miracle Question

Helping the client to develop well-defined goals, appreciating their existing strengths and multiplying their successes, using positive language for solutions, recognizing the times when the problem does not exist or is perceived as insignificant, and helping the client to see their role in the formation of these exceptions are among the issues that the solution-focused social worker should work on meticulously. From this point of view, Ayça was asked the question *"If a miracle could be performed with a magic wand to make your problems disappear tonight, how would you understand this?"*. This question also serves De Jong and Berg's second stage of the solution-focused process known as *"Develop*

well-formulated goals" (Teater, 2015). In response to this question, Ayça stated that *"She was able to control her excitement that made her forget what she knew and caused her to tremble, she got better results from her essays, she went to classes eagerly, she had hope that she would succeed in the YKS exam, her relationship with her environment strengthened, her sleep became regular and she was able to manage her time"*.

Homework

In the session, the main purpose of the counseling process was determined as *"Coping with exam anxiety"*. The sub-objectives to serve this main purpose were determined as acquiring hobbies to help relax during exams, and implementing a weekly sleep and study program.

In this direction, Ayça was given relaxation exercises that she could apply before the exam, as well as the implementation of a sleep and study program, and homework assignments in the form of spending time with family and friends and spending time for her hobbies in the next session. In this way, it was aimed to improve family and friend relations, increase social support and reduce stress by spending time for hobbies that she thought would help reduce anxiety. In the last interview, the *"Safe place exercise"*, which is more effective to support the relaxation exercise, was practiced to make her feel good and relax before the exam so that she could better control her test anxiety (Terzi & Koçak, 2023). At this point, the social worker applied the homework technique by determining sub-goals based on the principles of the solution-focused approach. With the homework technique, it is ensured that the client realizes the resources he/she has, focuses on positive moments, and focuses on the solution, not the problem (Corey, 2008).

First sign

Problems are often complex. The client may see the goal as difficult and distant. Therefore, the creation of more small steps is useful in addressing problems. Small changes are the harbingers of big changes. Every step taken for a solution is extremely important. The social worker asked Ayça *"Who do you think will be the first to notice the change after the miracle happens?"* at the end of the session in order for the clients to think about small steps on the way to their goals and to take action with follow-up and complementary questions. To this question, Ayça stated that her parents, teachers and classmates would be the first to notice the change in her, and that they would see that she had become a person who felt better, relaxed, more disciplined, continued her lessons with confidence and hope, was more successful, and had better relationships with her family and friends.

Exceptions

Investigating the times when the problem is not a problem and uncovering these exceptions will help to identify the clients existing resources, to determine strategies for the solution, to achieve the goal

and to support the formation of awareness in the client. With exception questions such as *"Can you tell us about the moments when you feel like a miracle has happened?"* *"What happens differently at such times?"*, the social worker invites the client to work on solutions in cooperation by making use of these exceptional situations. In this way, it is aimed to empower the client by talking directly about solutions without getting stuck on the problems. Exception questions are also a requirement of De Jong and Berg's third stage of the solution-focused process known as the *"Discover exceptions"* stage (Teater, 2015). In response to the questions asked to her, Ayça said, *"When I motivate myself and relax, when I look at the essays that I got high grades, when I remember that I was among the top 1000 students last year, when I am busy with the people I love and my hobbies, when I think about the times when I could work as disciplined as I used to, I am different from this situation."* In response, the social worker said, *"Everything seems to be fine at these times. Can you tell me how you feel in these moments?"* as a question to support the positive aspects. Ayça responded to this question as *"I feel stress-free, confident, hopeful and happy"*. It was understood that Ayça was normally a successful, determined and sociable student, and efforts were made to ensure that these exceptions were more frequent by drawing attention to her strengths on her perception towards the exam.

Rating from 0 to 10

In solution-focused practice, rating questions can be used to help the client evaluate the current situation, progress in finding a solution, and measure aspects such as motivation in the solution process (De Jong & Miller, 1995: 732). In this framework, the social worker asked Ayça the question *"On a scale where 0 represents the worst problem that brought you here and 10 represents the miracle that happened and the problem disappeared, where do you find yourself right now?"*. Ayça answered 4 to this question. Thereupon, the social worker aims to make the client think more about the solution with the question *"What did you do to get you to 4?"* and aims to increase the strengths of the client by asking another question about how she would see her life if she moves one point on this scale. In the last interview, Ayça gave a score of 8 in response to this question, stating that she was now able to control her anxiety, that her somatic symptoms had disappeared and that she was more motivated.

Message (Feedback)

In solution-focused practice, when it is desired to give some feedback towards the end of the session, the expert asks the client for 5 or 10 minutes (Corey, 2008). In this time period, the feedback to be given to the client is planned. The expert leaves the room to prepare some feedback about Ayça's process. This is the equivalent of De Jong and Berg's *"Feedback"* stage, known as the fourth stage of the solution-focused process (Teater, 2015). In this process, the expert evaluated the sessions and returned to the room with a feedback. When the expert returns, he points this out to Ayça:

"You understand the importance of the YKS exam and you pay a lot of attention to this exam. You want to achieve successful results without succumbing to your excitement, to have an effective and efficient

study organization, and to have better relationships with your family and friends. I've also heard from you in our conversations about the times when this has already happened. It is quite impressive that you are such an intelligent, determined and successful student and that you know what you do well and what you want to do. The fact that you think that family and friend relationships are important and that you realize the positive results that will occur in your life when you manage your anxiety well is also something that should be appreciated. I can see that you already have the strength to keep your excitement under control by studying regularly, showing sufficient effort and determination as you did last year. Until our next meeting, I want you to pay attention to the moments of exception you mentioned and try more thought and behavior exercises that will increase or create these moments. I also want you to think about the issues that will take you to higher levels, because you know best what and how to do in this process."

The three sessions, which were carried out based on the solution-focused brief approach, were carried out at times when needed and deemed appropriate, with discourses oriented towards a positive solution, based on the "cheerleading effect" (Terzi & Koçak, 2023), and the client's coping strategies that serve the purposes in the process of building solutions, their current potential and development were supported with compliments. In this way, she was encouraged to focus on realizing the positive situations in her own life and to take more functional actions in this direction.

Considering the fifth stage of De Jong and Berg's solution-focused practice, known as 'Assess the progress of the client' (Teater, 2015), actions were formulated and carried out to eliminate the problems that would require Ayça to apply for professional intervention as a result of the brief professional intervention carried out based on the solution-focused approach. A positive transformation has occurred in Ayça's thought structure and perception definitions, and it has been observed that the consciousness that can overcome the problems based on her own strengths in the face of problems has been established, the somatic symptoms that the moments when she lost control from excitement during the exam were replaced by moments when the questions were solved calmly, the desired high results were obtained from the exams, the act of attending classes and studying regularly could be realized, and her relations with her family and friends improved. It was determined that the goal of "Coping with exam anxiety" set in the first session was achieved and Ayça made progress in coping with her problem. Thus, the solution-focused brief therapy was successfully completed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Solution-focused brief therapy is a goal-focused, future-focused approach (Akyol & Bacanlı, 2019: 4), rooted in various theoretical orientations, the solution-focused approach is designed as a model that includes simple rules, concrete techniques, an inductive and optimistic view, assumptions about change, interaction and goal design (Waller & Peller, 1992; Iveson, 2002).

Solution-focused brief therapy, in which a counselor profile that accepts the client as the expert of his/her own life and authorizes him/her rather than an expert profile that gathers all the authority in professional interviews, is a method of designing positive goals for the desired future by taking action with a here-and-now approach, preventing the client from being stuck in past mistakes, deficiencies or problems, and focusing on how to achieve the solution. The essence of this approach, which seeks solutions by utilizing the good aspects of the client, is to identify the goals developed by the client in the solution building process and to ensure that all negative goals are shaped in a positive/affirmative direction with a number of methods and techniques.

Solution-focused therapy can be used for issues such as abandonment, lack of trust, hurt (Kiser et al., 1993: 241), alcohol addiction (De Shazer & Isebaert, 2004: 51), peer bullying (Kvarme et al., 2013: 122), exam anxiety and general anxiety, depression, post-traumatic disorder, psychological disorders (OCD, etc.) (Alguzo & Jaradat, 2021: 7), as well as trauma survivors (Kim et al., 2021: 563) and immigrants (Alguzo & Jaradat, 2021: 7) who are characterized by shock, pain, grief and denial. (Alguzo & Jaradat, 2021: 7), as well as trauma victims (Kim et al., 2021: 563), immigrants characterized by shock, pain, grief and denial (Aambo, 1997: 68), students with behavioral problems in the classroom environment (Franklin et al., 2008), individuals with communication barriers (Northcott et al., 2021: 12).

The solution-focused brief approach in the field of social work plays an important role in the individual's reaching a solution, as it focuses on the solution of the problems rather than the problems and aims to realize the goals developed by the individuals in the solution building process as soon as possible. In this respect, solution-focused brief therapy offers a fast and effective way to eliminate problems in micro-level social service practices to be carried out with individuals and families, as well as being a method that is considered functional and frequently used by social workers with its easy applicability at the point of eliminating the problems of the clients, as well as providing an effective treatment in obtaining a positive result in behavioral problems as well as psychological problems, and being a brief method that corresponds to a more affordable cost (Danış & Büber, 2018; Gingerich & Peterson, 2013).

According to the social worker who acts with a solution-focused approach, the main actor in the evaluation of problems and intervention processes is the client. The main task of solution-focused social workers is to restore the former functionality of the client who have lost their functionality due to various disruptions in their lives, and to ensure that the client is purified from all negative thoughts that will cause the client to develop negative thought and behavior patterns.

The fact that the focus in Solution-Focused Therapy is on the client's skills, achievements and strengths allows this therapy model to provide effective results in reducing anxiety (Ateş & Gençdoğan, 2017). As a matter of fact, in the case example designed within the scope of the study, reducing the exam anxiety experienced by the client and increasing his/her motivation was achieved by recognizing and transferring the client's existing resources, strengths and rare moments when he/she could cope with

the problem to the present, helping him/her to create positive applicable goals and coping strategies, supporting his/her good qualities, and increasing their frequency. With solution-focused techniques, the client is made to realize that the problem does not always exist, that anxiety is natural and manageable, and that the coping skills to manage test anxiety are hidden in their existing resources. Thus, it was possible for the client to reach the desired future as soon as possible.

As a result, the strengths of the solution-focused brief approach are that it is comprehensive with its applicability to a large number of client profiles and situations, it has been confirmed to be effective in solving problems in a short time in many professional studies, it can be applied easily and at low cost, and its methods and techniques can be combined with different methods such as motivational or crisis interventions. With all these aspects, it is thought to help social workers to realize an effective professional intervention by providing some advantages such as a systematic functioning, ease of implementation, and efficiency in a short time.

Considering the content of the study and the relevant literature, the advantages, effective and fast methods and wide scope of the solution-focused brief therapy model reveal its applicability to many client groups and situations. Taking into account the breadth of the scope of the solution-focused approach and the working areas and groups of the social work profession, the case presentation can be diversified in terms of content, target group, technique, interview duration, etc. However, it can be said that the fact that the current study includes a fictional case intervention is a limitation. Considering that it is very important to carry out and disseminate such studies in the context of clinical social work, it may be recommended to repeat the program applied in the study in individual or group studies and to increase the number of sessions in the light of the preferred subject and audience.

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