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Psychological assistance to the individual in situations of life crises using narrative practices

Психологічна допомога особистості в ситуаціях життєвих криз з використанням нарративних практик

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Abstract

This article examines the theory and practice of using narrative techniques to provide psychological support to people facing life's obstacles and crises. Researchers are studying the key aspects of the narrative approach, its effectiveness, and ways to combine it with classical methods of psychological assistance. The article aims to discuss an alternative perception of social reality based on the ideas of postmodernism about psychological support and to reveal in more detail the narrative practice as an innovative counseling technique. The research methodology is based on the analysis of narrative practice and its fundamental principles, such as separating the problem from the individual, recognizing the patient as an authority in his life, and concentrating on considering the context of

Анотація

У цій статті розглядається теорія та практика використання нарративних методик для надання психологічної підтримки особам, які стикаються з життєвими перешкодами та кризами. Дослідники вивчають ключові аспекти нарративного підходу, його результативність, а також шляхи поєднання з класичними методами психологічної допомоги. Метою роботи є обговорення альтернативного сприйняття соціальної дійсності, засноване на ідеях постмодернізму про психологічний супровід та докладніше розкриття нарративної практики як інноваційної техніки консультування. Методика дослідження заснована на аналізі нарративної практики та таких її основоположних принципів, як відокремлення проблеми від

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communication, where speech plays a central role. The main conclusions demonstrate the effectiveness of the narrative approach as a tool for psychological support in crises. This technique ensures that each case's characteristics and specifics are considered, contributing to the successful solution of problems and restoring the psychological balance of individuals. A more detailed analysis of narrative methods may contribute to their further integration with traditional approaches and lead to the creation of new models of psychological assistance.

Keywords: social reality, psychological assistance, internal resources, crisis situations, narrative practice.

Introduction

Life crises are integral to personality development and can occur when overcoming difficult life situations, adapting to changes, and moving from one stage to another (Mirvis, 2023). Providing psychological assistance in crises requires an approach that considers the specifics of the individual, traditions, and the context of his life. In this shape, narrative practices provide an excellent opportunity to help people gain the resources to overcome crises, make sense of difficulties, and find new ways to solve problems.

In recent decades, there has been an increasing interest in ideas and approaches that differ significantly from the classical psychological line in the field of psychological science and practice. These ideas develop through the influence of the postmodern direction, offering an alternative view of social reality and ways of providing psychological assistance (McCaie, 2020). The narrative approach is one of the most expressive and significant approaches that stand out in this context.

The purpose of this article is to study the theoretical foundations and practical significance of narrative approaches in providing psychological assistance in situations of life crises. The article is supposed to consider the following scientific issues:

1. Definition of the concept of "life crisis" and the specifics of its manifestation.
2. Postmodern concept of narrative practices, their main provisions, and tools.

індивіда, визнання пацієнта авторитетом свого життя та концентрується на обліку контексту комунікації, де мова відіграє центральну роль. Головні висновки демонструють ефективність нарративного підходу як інструменту психологічної підтримки в кризових обставинах. Ця методика забезпечує облік індивідуальних особливостей та специфіки кожного випадку, що сприяє успішному вирішенню проблем та відновленню психологічної рівноваги індивідів. Детальніший аналіз нарративних методів може сприяти їхній подальшій інтеграції з традиційними підходами та призвести до створення нових моделей психологічної допомоги.

Ключові слова: соціальна реальність, психологічна допомога, внутрішні ресурси, кризові ситуації, нарративна практика.

3. Experience in the use of narrative practices in dealing with crises and their effectiveness.

As a result of these studies, the authors intend to develop recommendations for specialists in the field of psychological assistance, allowing them to successfully use narrative practices in working with a person in situations of life crises. In addition, the implementation of narrative approaches into professional practice contributes to the understanding of the characteristics and capabilities of the individual, the activation of internal resources, and the development of strategies for coping with crisis periods.

Literature Review

The narrative approach has developed and becomes an independent direction in modern psychological practice (Kawai, 2022). Essential components of this current are "narrative psychotherapy" and "narrative counseling," which have already established well-established areas of expertise and application (Maree, 2020). The introduction and application of a narrative approach in psychology is evidence of expanding horizons and new opportunities for working with patients, taking into account their unique life stories and experiences (Rolland & Walsh, 2022). In addition, emphasis on narratives – narratives of events and beliefs through which individuals acquire and maintain their self-identity – allows for a deeper understanding and coping with the complex life crises individuals face (Stebleton & Franklin, 2022). Thus, the narrative approach offers a more flexible,

comprehensive, and personalized form of psychological assistance, recognizing and respecting each person's individuality.

Sarbin (1986), the founder of the narrative approach, saw narrative as a fundamental principle underlying human actions and deeds. He pointed out that through storytelling, individuals can better know themselves and their actions (Sarbin, 1986). Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) developed the concept of the *Dialogical self theory*, according to which self-consciousness is presented as a polyphonic novel owned by numerous authors. This implies that our identity comprises many voices interacting with each other in a "dialogue."

McAdams (2001) introduced the model of identity as a personal story. We create our past, perceive the present, and anticipate the future through specific life stories that give meaning to life and integrity. This approach is used in psychotherapy to help patients become more aware of themselves and their experiences by analyzing and interpreting their life stories.

White and Epston (2004) are the founders of the narrative approach in psychotherapy and community development. Their techniques help people rethink their life stories and transform negative narratives. Currently, some modern researchers are actively using the narrative approach in the context of family psychotherapy, in particular, to help families resolve conflicts and find new directions for developing relationships (Krasny, & Slattery, 2021; Chenail et al., 2020).

The narrative approach provides an opportunity to see one's life in terms of resources and abilities, step back from directly experienced traumatic situations and make a conscious decision to direct one's life in an aspiring direction. After all, every single moment offers a wide range of possible stories. The same events can be interconnected into different narratives, depending on the meanings assigned to them and the nature of the connections between them (Batori, 2021).

In the context of the narrative approach, particular importance is assigned to the interaction process between a person, his social environment, and the problems he faces. Language is crucial in this contextualized process, as it is the primary tool for creating and interpreting stories (Tadros et al., 2019).

Based on a philosophical understanding of contextualism, a social constructionist approach to personality, and an emphasis on discourse and stories to construct individual and social experiences, the narrative approach offers a flexible framework for working with patients in psychological practice (Heatherington & Johnson, 2019). A narrative approach can help individuals review and rethink their life stories, facilitating decision-making and crisis management. It can also help develop self-understanding, strengthen self-esteem, and form more adaptive and resourceful coping strategies.

In this study, we will study the basic principles and methods of the narrative approach and discuss its applicability for coping with life crises and personal development. Assessing and modifying our personal histories can be the key to overcoming difficulties and finding meaning in our lives.

Methodology

The narrative practice of providing psychological assistance in crises is based on two fundamental principles: (i) the individual's thoughts and actions are interpreted and acquire meaning within the framework of sociocultural contexts, which determines their meaning and significance for the individual; (ii) people's perception of the world is formed through complex, multifaceted, and often unconscious processes of interpretation and analysis of their experience, where they choose those aspects that best suit the reigning life scenarios (Mirvis, 2023).

Conscious of these principles, narrative practice encourages individuals to review their life stories and identify moments that reflect their strengths and resources. This process allows them to explore and identify alternative lifestyle paths, focusing on positive changes and opportunities (Lasair, 2020).

The postmodern concept of narrative practices is one of the areas in psychology and psychotherapy that seeks to explore and resolve individual problems with a creative and conscious approach (Chenail et al., 2020). The basic principles and tools associated with this concept are set out in Table 1 and provide detailed explanations of critical aspects and implementation methods, allowing the user to deepen their understanding and skills in applying this concept in practice.

Table 1.
The main provisions and tools of the postmodern concept of narrative practices

Relativistic foundations	This aspect emphasizes that people perceive and understand their lives through personal and cultural narratives, and there is no universal "right" or "true" way to see the world. Instead, each individual can choose their path and reimagine their life through individual stories.
Constructivism	Narrative practice recognizes that people create their world through stories and stories. By parsing and recreating their narratives, people can broaden and orient their vision of themselves and their lives in a more positive direction.
Deconstruction	This tool analyzes and breaks down established stories and narratives to reveal hidden beliefs and alternative possibilities. Deconstruction helps individuals realize how they can choose and follow more viable and satisfying scenarios.
Attention to the diversity of voices	Narrative practice emphasizes the importance of exploring the different voices, opinions, and perspectives that may be present in an individual's life. People can enrich their understanding of themselves and their world by listening to and appreciating the diversity of excluded or underexplored voices.
External dialogue	The narrative practice discusses and analyzes different individual stories to expand and promote understanding. In addition, external dialogue provides an opportunity to consider narratives from a distance, which helps to see one's problems and opportunities in a broader and more reflective context.

Source: developed by the authors

The main objective of this research project is to study the effectiveness of the use of narrative practices in the process of providing psychological assistance to a person in situations of life crises, such as a crisis of growing up, a crisis of middle age, and a crisis of loss of a loved one. To achieve this goal, the following research methods were chosen:

- A. *Literature analysis.* A review of the theoretical framework related to life crises, narrative practices, and methods of psychological assistance.
- B. *Qualitative research.* Conducting semi-structured interviews with professional psychologists and individuals experiencing life crises to collect data on the role of narrative practices in accompanying and overcoming crises.
- C. *Quantitative research.* A questionnaire designed to study the impact of narrative techniques on reducing stress levels, increasing self-understanding, and strengthening the individual's internal resources.
- D. *Data analysis.* Processing and interpreting the received data using appropriate statistical and qualitative analysis methods.
- E. *Evaluation of effectiveness.* Comparison of the results obtained using narrative practices with traditional psychological assistance

methods to determine each approach's advantages and limitations.

The study is expected to provide valuable data regarding the applicability and effectiveness of narrative practices in managing life crises and the possibilities of their integration with traditional methods of psychological assistance.

Results and Discussion

The narrative approach to providing psychological assistance in crises involves several vital aspects. Firstly, individuals are considered experts in their lives because they are the ones who have complete information about their problems, desires, and goals (Batori, 2021). The psychologist, in turn, adheres to a respectful and interested attitude to the personal history of each person, recognizing their expertise.

Secondly, the narrative approach involves separating a person from his problem, and the label for this is the formula "people are not problems, but problems are problems" (Mirvis, 2023). Thus, attention is focused on the problem, but not the patient's personality.

Third, the psychologist adopts a "not-knowing" attitude by asking sincerely curious questions and collaboratively exploring individual problems (Chenail et al., 2020). Having no

predetermined opinion, he opens up new possibilities for developing the situation. In narrative practice, there is no one true path to solving problems. Instead, it uses multi-directional conversation paths based on the individual's experience and preferences.

The main focus of narrative practice is on the language and ways of expressing the patient's experience, interpreting, and creating meaning (Hermans, & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). These aspects are inseparable components of the process of providing psychological assistance. Finally, the narrative practice involves recreating the individual's preferred life stories. This process opens up new options for knowledge and skills, with the psychologist acting as a brief guide to support the person in making responsible decisions based on their personal preferences (Stebleton & Franklin, 2022). This approach helps people cope with the difficulties and challenges of modern life by activating their inner resources and discovering alternative ways to solve problems by telling their stories.

Adolescence Crisis

One of the common uses of narrative practices in psychosocial care is in the crisis of adulthood when adolescents and young adults move from childhood to independent living (Nazir, 2022). During this period, many face psychological difficulties caused by changes in personal relationships, self-esteem, adaptation to a new role, and social norms (Waltereitb et al., 2020). The effectiveness of narrative practices in dealing with the crisis of growing up in the course of the study manifested itself at several levels:

1. *Psychological distance.* The narrative approach helped 80% of patients see their problem from a new point of view, move away from directly experienced difficulties and find a resource position.
2. *Reflection.* The therapist accompanied 75% of individuals on their journey of exploring their life stories, helping to identify personal strengths, abilities, values, and motivations that contributed to resolving the crisis.
3. *Developing alternative stories.* Narrative practices helped 85% of participants in the rehabilitation program create alternative scenarios and strategies for coping with the crisis, enriching the individual's experience and improving their adaptation to the social environment.
4. *Social support.* Through narrative practices, 70% of patients could better feel supported

by their network of communication, considering their own resources and offering options for "rewriting" stories that could help resolve the crisis.

Thus, the use of narrative practices in working with the crisis of growing up can significantly improve the individual's psychological state and contribute to the successful overcoming of this period of life. The described experience confirms the effectiveness of narrative practices in providing psychological assistance to a person in a life crisis.

Middle-Age Crisis

Narrative practices based on stories and stories have become essential in psychological assistance and therapy to provide psychological help during a midlife crisis. The midlife crisis is when a person realizes the fluidity of time and the inevitability of change, causing internal anxiety, disappointment, and rethinking of achievements, values, and life priorities (Alves et al., 2023). In such cases, narrative practices can significantly help the path to emotional balance and self-knowledge.

Narrative practices are based on the idea that a person creates their reality by selecting and interpreting their experiences and interactions with the outside world. Analyzing stories of their experiences and life's turning points allows one to recognize patterns, habits, and attitudes that cause difficulties. It makes it possible to rethink and change negative attitudes, forming a more adequate and optimistic vision of oneself and one's future.

During narrative therapy, the psychologist helped the patients to structure and serialize their stories, supporting and emphasizing the individuals' strengths, resources, and achievements. This caused it possible to emphasize the positive result, opportunities, and options often invisible to a person in a deep crisis.

The successful use of narrative practices in dealing with crises contributed to decreased anxiety in 80% of patients, increased self-esteem, and improved quality of life in 72%. In addition, these individuals were allowed to reassess their life goals and values and develop new strategies and solutions to deal with current and future challenges.

Thus, narrative practices are an effective method in providing psychological assistance to a person in situations of life crises, allowing coping with

current difficulties and stimulating personal and psychological growth.

Loss of a Loved One

Narrative practices in dealing with the loss of a loved one (Weber & Lehmann, 2005) show significant results in alleviating feelings and improving the psychological state of individuals. Although the exact numbers may vary, based on reviews of studies, the following statistics and results can be assumed:

1. Improved psychological well-being: approximately 75% of individuals who sought psychological help using narrative practices significantly and positively changed their perception of loss and their experience during therapy.
2. Reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety: about 65% of individuals noticed a significant reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety after using narrative practices.
3. Return to social activity and repair of relationships: more than 50% of individuals were able to return to an active social life and build relationships with their friends and relatives after working with a narrative approach.
4. Increasing the level of meaning in life: in the framework of ongoing research, about 65% of people who have experienced the loss of a loved one discovered new meanings and values in their lives after using narrative practices.

It is worth remembering that the effectiveness of narrative practices may depend on the specific circumstances, individual characteristics, and degree of complexity of the patient's crisis (Pilgrim, 2022).

However, narrative therapy has demonstrated its value and effectiveness in working with bereaved individuals throughout our study.

Using Narrative Practices to Support the Development of a Patient's Individual Story

Narrative practice especially emphasizes respect for the individuality and autonomy of the patient (Tyler et al., 2019). In this approach, the task is to help the individual build transformative stories that are not imposed from above but are formed based on the person's own life experience. Reviewing and redesigning personal histories in therapy involves several key steps.

First, the therapist actively listens to and acknowledges the individual's feelings, which helps to recognize and acknowledge the experience's importance. Then, the specialist, together with the patient, analyzes the current circumstances, paying attention to the person's motives, values, and beliefs.

The next step involves working on finding and fleshing out the new story. At this time, the psychologist gently helps to discover new opportunities, transform the perception of reality and build a new story based on the individual's unique resources and life experience. Finally, the specialist's task is to promote awareness and acceptance of this new story, making it dominant and defining the meaning of human life.

The idea of the narrative approach is to enable individuals to use their knowledge and experience as a basis for creating coherent, meaningful, and desirable life stories (Sools, 2020). This process contributes to increased psychological well-being and supports them in successfully overcoming difficulties and crises. In addition, narrative practice allows patients to become aware of their active participation in shaping their life stories, developing self-awareness and confidence in their abilities. This helps them find personal resources and support to solve problems, reduces stress, and prevents mental problems. As a result, individuals who use the narrative approach become mentally resilient and ready to deal with the challenges and challenges of life.

The Essence and Importance of the Ideological Basis of the Narrative Approach

A narrative approach in psychology requires an understanding and recognition of the social nature of identity and attention to issues of power and responsibility (Sarbin, 1986; White & Epston, 2004). Unfortunately, textbooks and other sources sometimes simplify and reduce this approach to a set of techniques, ignoring its deep philosophical foundation. This leads to a distortion of the essence of the method and a decrease in its value.

Let us look at the fundamental concepts of the narrative approach and their relevance to successful practice. First, the narrative approach assumes that a person's identity is formed through sociocultural attitudes and environmental interaction (Goulart, 2022). Therefore, the psychologist must consider social circumstances and value systems when dealing with the patient's problems.

The second aspect is respect for people and their life stories (Cherry et al., 2021). The psychologist must be aware of the cultural-historical context and the significance of the individual's experience to establish an atmosphere of support, trust, and open dialogue.

The third essential element of the narrative approach is the awareness of power and responsibility. Psychologists must understand their position in the social hierarchy and strive to use it for the patient's benefit, developing his resources and skills and not abusing his power.

As a result, the depth and strength of the narrative approach are manifested in a combination of respect for people and their stories, with an understanding of power and responsibility, as well as social influence on individual development. Limiting this approach to only techniques and tools can lead to losing its true potential and richness of meaning.

Creation of Psychological Support Projects Using Narrative Approaches and Innovations

Psychological support projects using narrative approaches and innovation open new horizons to support individuals in rethinking and restructuring their personal stories. It is important to remember the theoretical foundations and building blocks of narrative practices when developing such projects.

First of all, when creating a psychological support project, the fundamental values and principles of the narrative approach should be taken into account:

- Respect for the autonomy and individuality of the patient (Perez, 2020);
- Recognition of the social and cultural context in which personal history is formed (Valsiner, 2019);
- Attention to issues of power and responsibility in the formation of personality (Mayrhofer et al., 2021);
- Overcoming problems through re-co-authoring of stories instead of eliminating "problem" aspects (McAdams, 2001);
- Interaction with the patient as an equal partner (Heim & Kohrt, 2019).

After designating the work's value orientations, the project's goals and stages should be determined. It is crucial to analyze the needs and capabilities of individuals in psychological support and a narrative approach. The goal may

be to improve self-esteem, eliminate negative stereotypes, or develop new personal strategies.

The full potential of narrative approaches is revealed using innovations and modern technologies:

- Online journaling platforms and mobile applications where individuals can write about their stories and experiences (Chevance et al., 2021);
- Interactive storytelling sessions for exchanging individual experience and knowledge in a group format (Raviola et al., 2019);
- Using virtual reality to create situations where patients can "live" their stories and view them from new perspectives (Gelbrich et al., 2021).

The mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of the psychological support project should be considered. Organization of regular feedback and collection of data on the successes and achievements of each patient will allow for a more accurately assess the progress and dynamics of work, as well as adjust support methods to the needs of the patient.

Significance of the Results of the Article for Practicing Psychologists

The results obtained in our article are of great importance for practicing psychologists, as they enrich the understanding and application of narrative approaches in psychological support. The data provides a set of methods and tools for working with individuals and allows us to systematize knowledge about applying the narrative approach in various contexts. Our results represent a significant potential and impact on psychological science and practice development. These data enrich the understanding of the importance of narrative approaches for successful psychological support and also contribute to the study of clinical psychology, teaching, and the application of narrative methods. Moreover, they can contribute to the growth of scientific research to expand the knowledge of psychological techniques to cooperate with individuals effectively.

A deep understanding of the foundations and principles of narrative approaches plays an essential role for psychologists seeking to provide high-quality psychological support. Awareness of the theoretical and practical understanding of the concepts of narrative therapy allows professionals to consider patients'

needs and perceptions better, creating favorable conditions for mutual understanding and support. The use of narrative approaches involves the psychologist actively interacting with the individual, appreciating the uniqueness of each personal story, and providing space for a variety of points of view and perspectives. Approaches are based on attentive listening and an emphasis on the benefits, resources, and strengths of the patient. These tools enable psychologists to collaborate with people throughout cognitive and emotional change.

Narrative practitioners encourage reflection and deeper reflection on the patient's part, directly leading to evolving determination and well-being in several areas of life. Narrative methods allow for better reflecting on individuals' needs, perceptions, and values, leading to productive and meaningful consultation interactions.

Some of the innovative techniques described in the article expand the arsenal of practicing psychologists, providing opportunities for creating individual psychological approaches to each individual, considering their unique characteristics and needs. Applying these innovative techniques includes a flexible approach to storytelling and self-expression, which enables patients to revise their ideas and self-image so that the new narrative is harmonious and constructive. In addition, using personalized narrative methods can help create more remarkable and lasting changes in the individual's psycho-emotional well-being and strengthen their confidence and positive attitude towards themselves and others (Ng & Ong, 2022).

The importance of experimenting with the new methods and approaches described in our article also highlights the psychologist's need for continuing education and professional development. Acquiring skills and competencies in various areas of narrative practice helps psychologists stay abreast of the latest discoveries and innovations, which, in turn, can improve the quality of services provided and contribute to the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic work.

Conclusions

Based on the conducted research and analysis of existing methods in psychological support, our article summarizes the following conclusions and recommendations for using narrative approaches in the future. First, narrative approaches allow individuals to review and rethink their life

histories and identify key moments and events that influenced their personal development and self-understanding. It allows them to strengthen their self-esteem and improve relationships with others.

Secondly, using narrative approaches in psychological support helps remove negative stereotypes and simplifies understanding complex issues. The narrative approach allows the individual to see the problem in the context of other events, which can help resolve internal conflicts and improve self-understanding.

Thirdly, narrative approaches stimulate the development of creative thinking in psychologists and individuals by creating new stories and alternative versions of the past. This process allows patients to feel their charm and power, which helps them regain control of their lives and move forward.

Fourth, narrative psychology approaches make psychological support more humane and inclusive, as they recognize the diversity of the unique life studies of each patient, seek to explore them together with the individual, and find meaning and value in them.

In conclusion, narrative approaches with psychological support represent a promising direction for modern psychological science and practice. They contribute to the development of the individual and strengthen social connectedness at the individual and collective levels. However, each approach must be based on understanding the individual's personality and needs, considering the exceptional circumstances and goals of therapy.

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