
Investigating the Role of Meaning Therapy in People with Suicidal Thoughts and Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study was to review the role of meaning therapy in suicidal people from various domestic and foreign sources in the past few years.

Research method: The present research method was review-library. Thus, the keywords of semantic therapy, suicide and mental disorders in the search engines of Persian article banks including scientific information database (SID), Noormags, Magiran and Civilica and foreign article banks including Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect and Scopus in the period 2000-2021 was searched and selected articles were selected for this research.

Results: The research findings indicate the numerous studies of domestic and foreign researchers on the subject of meaning therapy. The results showed that different types of psychotherapy approaches, especially meaning therapy, which is more culturally close to our country, can play an effective role in helping suicidal people.

Conclusion: Existential approaches such as meaning therapy can play a useful role in reducing suicidal thoughts and behavior in clients that should be considered in psychotherapy sessions.

1. Introduction

Suicide is one of the most important health problems worldwide and one of the psychiatric emergencies that is associated with disturbances in thoughts, feelings, mood and behavioral differences (Turecki et al., 2019). On average, there is a suicide attempt every 3 seconds, which is about 10 to 20 million annually, of which 1 million leads to complete suicide. About 60% of it occurs in Asia. According to statistics, Iran is the 58th country in the world in terms of suicide. Mentally ill people have the highest suicide rates worldwide (Hedegaard, Curtin, & Warner, 2020). Investigation of related risk factors in preventive measures is very important. The World Health Organization defines suicide as a conscious and voluntary act in which a person ends his or her life by taking deadly action. Suicide or unsuccessful suicide is when suicide is attempted but does not lead to death, and usually people seek to attract the attention of others to themselves (McIntyre & Lee, 2020).

The World Health Organization ranks suicide as the thirteenth leading cause of death in the world, the third leading cause of death in the 15-34 age group, and one of the top 10 leading causes of death in most countries. According to WHO findings, hanging is the most common method of suicide in most countries and its use rate is 90% in men and 80% in women in Eastern European countries. The most common methods of suicide attempt in Iran are 42.5% hanging, 30% through self-immolation, and 13% poisoning by taking pills and poisons. According to studies, the most important predisposing factors for self-harm can be predisposed to physical illness such as Cushing, Huntington's disease, epilepsy, dementia, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), cancers, psychiatric disorders including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, despair, depression, religion, mental stress. He mentioned immigration, age over 45, living environment, marital status and etc (Oswalt & Lederer, 2017).

Suicide has been analyzed in the fields of religion, ethics and social psychology, but the effects and consequences of its occurrence affect the health system, and the increase in this phenomenon also reduces the life expectancy. Movahedi et al. showed that suicide is a phenomenon that can be explained by a set of interacting and intertwined factors, and any one-causal explanation of it will not be a true indication of its multifaceted nature (Ibrahim et al., 2019).

Suicide is seen in all age groups, but in young people it causes the loss of more potential years, which is very important. Also, unfamiliarity with the problems that young people face is not only a problem for the mental health of young people, but also for their family and society, which will be very heavy emotionally (Liu, Stevens, Wong, Yasui, & Chen, 2019).

Issues related to students' psyche are numerous and very challenging and can affect the university environment. The need to identify danger signs in students when entering the university seems necessary. The transition period from the family environment to the university and relative or complete independence are among the most important stressors in young people. During this period, students are under a lot of stress. This in itself can lead to depression and suicidal thoughts. In such situations, they must overcome academic difficulties and determine their future decisions and life goals (Gerada, 2018).

Suicide is a very important issue and it is doubly important for students because they are an active force in society. There are several factors involved; by identifying these factors, students' suicide can be prevented as much as possible. Suicide attempts in students ranged from 1.8% to 3.5% and suicidal ideation ranged from 6.2% to 42.7%. In most studies, suicide was associated with mental disorders, depression. Thoughts and suicide attempts were more common in single students than in married students and higher in boys than girls. Distance from the family has increased suicidal thoughts (Oswalt & Lederer, 2017).

Post-traumatic stress disorder is one of the mental disorders that can follow a severe stressor, with symptoms such as re-experiencing the traumatic event, reduced contact with the outside world and responding to it and a variety of cognitive, mood and voluntary symptoms (Walby, Myhre, & Kildahl, 2018). One of the factors that may change in people with post-traumatic stress disorder is the meaning of life. The meaning of life refers to a kind of feeling of connection with the Creator of the universe, having a purpose in life, pursuing and achieving valuable goals, and achieving

evolution. The meaning of life is essentially cognitive in nature because it includes the beliefs of individuals about the existence of an ultimate goal in life, the belief in spirituality, and the afterlife (Stene-Larsen & Reneflot, 2019).

Lack of meaning in life, or its low levels, is directly related to some psychological stressors such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and guilt. The concept of life is closely related to health and psychological well-being. In fact, having a meaningful life lowers the level of negative emotions such as anxiety and depression and ultimately reduces the risk of mental illness. Young people who had more meaning in their lives had fewer depressive symptoms (Oexle, Feigelman, & Sheehan, 2020).

One of the risk factors that may be associated with post-traumatic stress disorder is suicidal ideation. Suicidal ideation Thoughts related to the desire to die, planning for the time and place and manner of suicide and its effect on others. People with post-traumatic stress disorder are at risk for suicide. Treating the symptoms of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is effective in reducing suicidal ideation (Isumi, Doi, Yamaoka, Takahashi, & Fujiwara, 2020).

Cognitive distortion can also be associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. Cognitive therapists believe that people's misinterpretation of these external events causes them to have negative emotions. This misinterpretation comes to our minds automatically and under the heading of distortions or cognitive errors. To treat the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, they rebuild the cognitions and negative self-concept of the patients. But another variable that can play a role in suicidal thoughts and behavior is existential variables. The most important of which is the meaning of life. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the role of meaning of life in suicidal people (Teismann, Brailovskaia, & Margraf, 2019).

Research method

The present research method was review-library. Thus, the keywords of semantic therapy, suicide and mental disorders in the search engines of Persian article banks including scientific information database (SID), Noormags, Magiran and Civilica and foreign article banks including Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect and Scopus in the period 2000-2021 was searched and selected articles were selected for this research.

Discussion and conclusion

The most serious issue of philosophy is "suicide" and the value of life is in fact the main issue of this philosophy. Camus writes at the beginning of *The Legend of Sisyphus*; there is only one really serious philosophical issue, and that is "suicide." Recognizing that life is worthwhile or not worth living is a major issue in philosophy (Jobes, 2009).

One of the responsibilities of philosophy is "improvisation of everyday affairs" and it is precisely by distancing oneself from improvisation that the philosophical problem is born. Probably for each of us at some point in our lives the question arises, "What do we live for?". The question of the meaning of life occurs when life is improvised. Of course, this is a claim that must be made in several ways; under what circumstances does this question arise? And what is the answer to philosophy to this question? And what is the reason for suicide? Does life have a meaning in itself, or are we the ones who give it meaning with our goals and aspirations? (O'Dea, 1882)

In philosophy, there are three types of answers to the question "Does life have meaning?" given; the first answer is yes, life has a meaning, and we must "discover" that meaning. In this view, life and existence themselves are assumed to have meaning, and we must find this meaning objectively. The second answer is that life has no meaning in itself, and it is we who must subjectively give meaning to it. In other words, in this view, contrary to the first view, man is not the discoverer of the meaning of life, he is its forger (Lane, 2006).

The third answer is that not only does life have no meaning, but we probably cannot give it any meaning. We can only "live" life and ask "the value of life" instead of the "meaning of life." According to this view, which has similarities with the second view, the world is absurd and meaningless, and because it is, life is also absurd and meaningless. All that remains is for one to constantly ask oneself, "Is life worth living?"

How valid is each of these three approaches among philosophers?

If I want to make a basic history for each of these views, and possibly introduce a representative or representatives for each of these views, I have to say that "having meaning in life" or "discovering meaning" begins with Plato, "giving meaning to Life" or "falsification of meaning" by Nietzsche and "Life is absurd" or "Life is empty of meaning" by Camus.

According to Plato, there is a truth in existence, and the search for the truth of existence, which includes the search for the meaning of life, is one of the things that philosophers must do. But Nietzsche says that philosophy has tried to discover the meaning of life throughout its long history, and that is why life itself has been ignored (Fitzpatrick, 2009).

He traces the roots of not taking life seriously and taking the ideas behind life seriously to Plato, calling the whole view - the view of discovering the meaning of life - "Platonism".

What does Nietzsche mean by Platonism, and what are the characteristics of this character?

Nietzsche believes that Platonism has three main ups and downs:

The First Ascent, Platonism of the Platonic Age; In the sense that in Plato what is taken seriously is "ideas"; That is, the ideas behind life are taken seriously, but what is left behind is life itself. We do not pay attention to life itself as it really is, we engage in the idea or perception that we attribute to life without seeing life itself at all or unraveling its elements and components (Heisel, Neufeld, & Flett, 2016).

The second ascent of Platonism, which Nietzsche calls "Platonism for the masses," occurs in the Christian era. According to Nietzsche, Platonism in this period extends from the level of the elite to the level of the masses and becomes general. In this period, too, "life" is abandoned, and it is the "hereafter" that is taken seriously and placed in the center of attention. In the sense that man thinks that if he suffers in this world, there is an afterlife in which he will be rewarded for his suffering (Sinclair, Bryan, & Bryan, 2016).

Third, Nietzsche seeks Platonism in the modern age and in modern rationality. With the establishment of modern rationality, the rationality that sought a way in which my awareness of the world equals the world itself, life is again abandoned and rational ideas about life are taken seriously. The culmination of such a subjectivist approach, not only to life but to the whole universe, can be traced back to, for example, Hegel's encyclopedia. In this encyclopedia, Hegel seeks to become so aware of the trinity of "nature", "truth" and "soul" that that rational consciousness is equal to the reality of that trinity, and that is why he says that "what is rational is real and what is real is rational." (Marco, Pérez, & García-Alandete, 2016)

According to Nietzsche, such an approach is the third type of Platonism and is more dangerous than the previous two types of Platonism, especially where it relates to life; because the previous two types could be saved with the help of "critical intellect", but how can one be saved from the third, which is based on "intellect" itself?

Is not such an approach born of Nihilism?

Nietzsche considers such an approach to life to be nihilistic. Nihilism, according to Nietzsche; That is, giving up life and taking seriously the ideas behind life. In this sense, contrary to popular belief, Nietzsche's philosophy is not merely nihilistic, but seems to be a "revealer of nihilism." In the sense that what Nietzsche calls nihilism is Platonism itself.

At the same time, as has been said, Nietzsche does not believe that life has meaning, and that we can live a meaningful life by finding that meaning! Rather, in his view, man has been left to himself in the modern era. This man, who, in Sartre's words, is "doomed to freedom," is also doomed to give meaning to life, and this, of course, is a very difficult responsibility. (Miklin, Mueller, Abrutyn, & Ordonez, 2019)

Basically, the death of God and the consequent loss of the meaning of existence have been held by philosophers as the bitterest event. That is, no one is happy that God is dead; everyone is worried about irony, because the responsibilities that used to be on God are now on man.

What do the proponents of the third view, Camus's view, think of life?

Camus considered death to be the most absurd death by accident, and unfortunately his life ended by accident. The best source that can show his understanding of the meaning of life is the "myth of

Sisyphus." In his works, Camus does not speak of the meaning of life, but of the purpose of life. In the final part of the book, Camus describes the legend of Sisyphus and writes that the gods had condemned Sisyphus for constantly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, from where the stone fell with all its weight. The gods rightly thought that there was no punishment more terrible and futile than revenge (García-Alandete, Marco Salvador, & Pérez Rodríguez, 2014).

According to Camus, Sisyphus, although condemned to emptiness, finds happiness in this emptiness. He is an absurd hero, living with his whims as much as with his torture and torment. Sisyphus always says yes to nonsense and to the nonsense he does, and mocks it. In fact, Sisyphus not only does not despair of what he is doing, but by his constant action he promotes a kind of rebellion against it. Therefore, not only existence and life have no meaning, but the search for such a meaning is not known to lead anywhere.

What does the meaning of life have to do with the "passion of life?"

In the final part of the book, Camus describes the legend of Sisyphus and writes that the gods had condemned Sisyphus for constantly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, from where the stone fell with all its weight. The gods rightly thought that there was no punishment more terrible and futile than revenge (Narveson, 1986).

In philosophy, when we talk professionally about the meaning of life, we usually start with the "meaning of life." Because sometimes people associate the "meaning of life" with the "value of life" or the "purpose of life", while there are serious differences between "meaning", "value" and "purpose".

In philosophy, when we talk professionally about the meaning of life, we usually start with the "meaning of life." Because sometimes people associate the "meaning of life" with the "value of life" or the "purpose of life", while there are serious differences between "meaning", "value" and "purpose".

For example, when you advise someone who is in a crisis of the meaning of life, if life is worthless, it is worthwhile for you to sit in a corner and recite Rumi. You have set a "value for life" and connect the person to life through that supposed value. For example, when you buy from someone who has been affected by the crisis of the meaning of life, who lives, if nothing comes to this vibrancy that you sit in a corner and read Rumi, in this purchase, you did not make a meaning, that is, to Life is not given, you just want to set a "value for life" and assume the person through its value and connect to life (Griffin, 1986).

Or when you advise someone in a crisis of the meaning of life to think about your children who need you and your attention, your advice is still not about the meaning of life, it is about the "purpose of life." If we accept such an encounter with the meaning of life, I must say that one speaks of the "passion of life" for which either the crisis of the meaning of life has not occurred or the meaning of life has not been designed for him at all. However, from another perspective, the perspective of someone like Camus, for example, the passion of life itself is a consequence of the emptiness of life. Some experts, especially psychologists, believe that when we think of the "meaning of life", it means that we have a "problem" and a "crisis" in this case. How philosophically accepted is such a view?

This is a general and well-known view in the discussion of the philosophy of life or at least one of the proposed views, that is, the existentialist approach to the meaning of life. According to this view, the meaning of life is questioned when a person has faced a "life crisis". According to Kierkegaard, our lives have three areas; the "spiritual realm" in which we choose ourselves, the "moral realm" in which we prefer the other to ourselves, and the "faith realm" in which we choose God. When and under what conditions do these areas experience a crisis of meaning? (Michelsen, 2015)

The short answer to this question is that when a person, according to Jaspers, is in a borderline position in any of the areas I have mentioned. That is, when a person's relationship with himself, with others, and with another being (God) is in an intermediate position; A situation that is neither alive nor dead is wandering. Wandering between two worlds, one dead and the other unable to be born.

This view applies not only to life but also too many elements of life, such as individual and cultural identity. For this reason, the importance of the issue of identity has been further explored by

researchers in the twin of identity, ie its crisis, and they have said that identity becomes a problem only when it is in crisis, when something is supposed to be corrected, doubt and ambiguity replace coherence and stability and new necessity becoming is highlighted. For example, when the issue of "Iranian identity" is highlighted in our society, it means that identity in our society is in a critical situation. Therefore, it is in this space that the question of identity finds meaning(Sacharoff, 1972). The same is true of life. A large number of people are living without thinking about the meaning of life, but when a person's relationship with himself, with society, with nature, with the Creator, etc. is disrupted, "life" itself is gradually questioned. Accordingly, I believe that the meaning of life is questioned when "how to live" gives way to "why to live." Thus, the meaning of life basically emerges in the midst of a life crisis. The question of the meaning of life in what historical and social conditions is most raised for the thinkers and intellectuals of a society? The fact is that the question of the meaning of life is an individual question. In the sense that it has not happened that in a dark historical period, a nation or a stratum of a nation has experienced a crisis of meaning in life. For example, one of the darkest historical periods in Germany is the period after the Weimar Republic, when Hitler came to power and we do not seem to have a more terrible period in our contemporary history(Warren, 2001).

In this period, intellectuals are divided into different categories; some join Hitler's criminals, some become isolated, and some, like the first-generation thinkers of Frankfurt, such as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, immigrate to America. This does not mean, however, that black historical and social conditions do not exacerbate the crisis of meaning in life. The darker the situation and the weaker the social relations, the more naturally the question of the meaning of life becomes more important to those who are probably more sensitive to the soul.

From another angle, however, a thinker may be found who sees a historical period or era as meaningless. For example, when Camus speaks of the meaninglessness of life, this meaninglessness does not naturally refer to his own personal life, nor does it refer to the meaninglessness of human life throughout history. He wants to say that life in the West in the modern era has become meaningless and absurd(Zilboorg, 1937).

The question of the meaning of life is an individual question. Accordingly, what is the connection between "meaning of life" and "suicide"? Close communication! At the beginning of *The Legend of Sisyphus*, Camus writes that there is only one really serious philosophical issue, and that is "suicide." Recognizing that life is worth living or not worth living is a major issue in philosophy. Other things, such as the fact that the world has 3 dimensions and the intellect has 9 or 12 categories, are secondary and secondary issues. Close communication! At the beginning of *The Legend of Sisyphus*, Camus writes that there is only one really serious philosophical issue, and that is "suicide." Recognizing that life is worth living or not worth living is a major issue in philosophy. Other things, such as the fact that the world has 3 dimensions and the intellect has 9 or 12 categories, are secondary and secondary issues(D'oronzio, 2002).

These are games. The previous answer must be given first. Of course, this question is not for everyone on the same level. It has been said that there are three categories of people; First, ordinary people. Second, the unusual people and third, the people who fall between the two; in the sense that they are neither unconventional nor conventional. An example of this third category is Theo van Gogh, who is not as unusual as his brother Vincent, whose painting history is not spent without his name, nor so ordinary that he is alien to his brother's world.

We are all normal people, and each of us practices different forms of life, but there are some people who are unconventional; Unconventional in the sense that they are asynchronous and asynchronous with their time and history. It is as if human beings are from another place and time. These people include Beethoven in music, Van Gogh in painting, Nietzsche in philosophy, and so on. These people are more likely to have a crisis of meaning in life and sometimes to think about suicide(Wheeler, 1993).

The difference between them and ordinary people is that while they practice life, they can distance themselves from it and think about it. For example, in daily life we "practice" friendship, but the unconventional person usually "thinks" of friendship and puts the truth of friendship in front of its reality, and this causes these people's expectations of the elements and components of life to rise

and gradually. "Being" or "not being" becomes a problem for a person. They usually distance themselves from the social sphere, and if this distance is seriously increased, the idea of suicide arises there; the idea of suicide is naturally different from suicide.

"Suicide" is the most serious issue of philosophy. Because it deals with the most serious human issue, which is life, and when you do not answer suicide, you cannot answer the meaning of life. Because the philosopher will confront you with the question, "Why are you alive?" The answers you give have very little to do with the meaning of life. Thus, there is no doubt that there is a close connection between the "crisis of the meaning of life" and the rise of the "suicidal ideation". (Miklin et al., 2019)

In which category do you place philosophers?

Philosophers are in both categories. Because one part of being unconventional is "intellectual" and the other part is "existential". Intellectually, it may be said that all philosophers were against the custom of their time, and in this sense they are unconventional. An example is Kant, who is intellectually unconventionally philosophical, but conventionally human. He is not someone who suffers from internal and mental earthquakes, someone who has never left his city. But intellectually, it is completely opposed to the intellectual custom of its time and is one of the most prominent preachers of the Enlightenment. In contrast, Nietzsche argues that although he is "intellectually" so deep as to say that Heidegger is necessary to interpret Nietzsche, his "existence" is also the center of the earthquake.

The most important issue in defining the meaning of life is determining the task with the same approaches that we said in response to the first question. Either life has meaning and we have to discover it, or life has no meaning and we have to give it meaning ourselves, or it has no meaning at all and we do not have to look for its meaning. What happens after Nietzsche is that what was previously the responsibility of God is placed on man. One of these tasks is to give meaning to life, and this task is very difficult, and even atheistic existentialists believe that human tragedy is that there is no God. In this case, man must be a forger of meaning (Hill, 2004).

Thus, based on one's own philosophical worldview, one can begin with an idea of the meaning of life; one like Camus might say find yourself today that the rest is all story; Because human beings are left to their own devices and must make a plan for themselves.

One of these measures could be that when Camus is asked what his 10 favorite words are, he writes: "world, pain, soil, mother, man, desert, honor, poverty, summer and sea.

“Words that smell like life and lead one to conclude that life is worth living”

On the path to meaning in life, the best way is the "phenomenological method". In the sense that we do not stop at the phenomenon of life, as it manifests itself, but try to find its way back and forth. Phenomenology can help us know what "life is not". Through the negative definition of life, we may be able to get an idea of its positive meaning.

Each of us practices different forms of life, but there are a number of people who are "unconventional"; Unconventional in the sense that they are asynchronous and asynchronous with their time and history. It is as if human beings are from another place and time.

These include Beethoven in music, Van Gogh in painting, and Nietzsche in philosophy. These people are more likely to experience "crisis of meaning in life" and sometimes "suicidal ideation" as a result.

These include Beethoven in music, Van Gogh in painting, and Nietzsche in philosophy. These people are more likely to experience "crisis of meaning in life" and sometimes "suicidal ideation" as a result. The difference between them and ordinary people is that while they practice life, they can distance themselves from it and "think" about it. (Sisti & Joffe, 2018)

Conclusion

Many psychological, social and environmental variables affect suicide. One of the psychological variables is the meaning of life. Many psychological, social and environmental variables affect suicide. One of the psychological variables is the meaning of life. One of the psychological variables is the meaning of life. It seems that the meaning of life can play an important role in the treatment of suicidal people. Therefore, in the treatment of suicidal people, mental health professionals are advised to pay special attention to this variable.

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