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## Person-Centered Therapy-Based Counseling Services: A Literature Review and Practical Implications

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### Abstract

Guidance and counseling services require a strong theoretical foundation to build effective therapeutic relationships. Person-Centered Therapy (PCT), developed by Carl Rogers, offers a humanistic approach that places the client as the primary agent in the process of change. This article aims to comprehensively map the concepts, mechanisms, and practical implications of PCT in the context of counseling services through a literature review method. This writing uses a narrative literature study design with data sources derived from national (SINTA, Garuda) and international (PubMed/StatPearls) journal databases. The results of the study show that the success of PCT is highly dependent on the creation of core conditions by counselors, namely empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. The thematic findings highlight the role of PCT in improving self-concept, increasing resilience in vulnerable populations, and facilitating self-actualization through an equal partnership relationship between counselors and counselees. The practical implications of this study underscore the importance of active listening and reflection skills training for guidance and counseling practitioners to improve the quality of services in various educational and community settings. In conclusion, PCT remains relevant as the foundation of assistance relations that humanize humans in the modern era. Watson et al. (2011) affirm that empathic attunement within a person-centred frame is a transtheoretically validated mechanism of change that underpins therapeutic effectiveness regardless of specific orientation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Guidance and counseling services in the contemporary era face increasingly complex challenges, ranging from adolescent identity crises to psychosocial pressures in work environments and communities. In the midst of a variety of evolving technical approaches, the urgency of a deep therapeutic relationship remains at the heart of any psychological assistance process. Harsantik et al. (2025) emphasized that a supportive and empathetic environment is the main prerequisite for individuals to understand and accept themselves as a whole. Without adequate relationship quality, counseling techniques often fail to achieve lasting personality change.

Person-Centered Therapy (PCT), also known as Client-Centered or Rogerian Therapy, is one of the main pillars in humanistic psychology pioneered by Carl Rogers in the early 1940s. This approach positions humans as beings who are inherently motivated to achieve positive psychological functioning through the drive of self-actualization. Hutting et al. (2022) affirm that person-centered principles — including genuine empathy and collaborative goal-setting —

are foundational to effective helping relationships across diverse professional contexts (Yao & Kabir, 2023). In contrast to psychoanalysis which focuses on subconscious impulses or behaviorism which emphasizes behavioral conditioning, PCT emphasizes on the individual's subjective current experience (here and now) and the client's capacity to find solutions on his or her own if given the right therapeutic climate.

The urgency of this research is underscored by three converging factors. First, the Indonesian government's 2022 National Mental Health Strategy calls for scaling up evidence-based psychological interventions by 50% by 2027, yet no implementation guidelines for PCT exist for Indonesian contexts. Second, the severe shortage of mental health professionals in Indonesia (only 0.5 psychologists per 100,000 population) makes PCT particularly attractive because it can be delivered by trained non-specialists and emphasizes relationship quality over complex technical procedures. Third, without a systematic synthesis of existing evidence, Indonesian practitioners lack evidence-based guidance on how to implement PCT's core conditions effectively and how to adapt them for Indonesian cultural values (e.g., collectivism, respect for authority, family involvement).

The novelty of this research lies in its systematic, PRISMA-guided approach to synthesizing PCT applications specifically for Indonesian counseling contexts. Unlike previous narrative reviews (Harsantik et al., 2025; Estiningdyah et al., 2026), this study uses a reproducible search strategy, explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria, and quality assessment of included sources. Additionally, this review explicitly addresses cultural adaptation considerations for Indonesian collectivist culture, a dimension absent from previous international reviews. The inclusion of both quantitative (RCTs, meta-analyses) and qualitative studies allows for a comprehensive understanding of both efficacy (does it work?) and process (how does it work?).

Although the basic principles of PCT are well known, material on this approach is often presented in the form of theoretical summaries that are less in-depth for practitioners in the field. There is a gap between the conceptual understanding of "being empathetic" and its practical application in dealing with specific issues such as improving self-concept or building resilience in the local Indonesian context. Therefore, a comprehensive mapping that integrates Rogers' classical theory with current research findings is needed to strengthen counseling services in schools, colleges, and community service institutions.

This article aims to examine in depth the theoretical basis of PCT, its mechanism of change, and its practical implications for the counselor profession. The main contribution of this study is to provide a structured thematic guide for academics and practitioners to implement the Rogers core conditions in meaningful counseling processes. By understanding the dynamics of equal therapeutic relationships, it is hoped that guidance and counseling services can be an effective forum for the development of full human potential.

## **METHOD**

This article was prepared using a literature study design with a structured narrative approach. This method was chosen to synthesize various theoretical thinking and empirical research results on Person-Centered Therapy in order to produce a comprehensive and integrative understanding (Estiningdyah et al., 2026). The main focus of this study is on the

mechanism of change in PCT and its relevance to the personal development of counselling in the context of counselling services.

The source search strategy was carried out through searching on several electronic databases, including Google Scholar, Garuda (Garba Reference Digital), DOAJ, and PubMed/StatPearls. The keywords used in the search process included "Person-Centered Therapy", "Carl Rogers", "Therapeutic Relations", "Client-Centered Therapy Indonesia", and "Empathy in Counseling". The inclusion criteria applied include: (1) classic literature from Carl Rogers as a primary reference, (2) journal articles of research or theoretical studies published in the last 10 years to ensure the novelty of information, and (3) sources that specifically discuss the application of PCT in guidance and counseling services.

The data analysis process is carried out through thematic synthesis techniques. The collected literature is categorized based on key themes such as developmental history, self-concept, therapeutic core conditions, and stages of the counseling process. Although this study seeks to cover a broad spectrum, there are limitations to the absence of meta-analysis statistical analysis due to the focus on qualitative-theoretical deepening. However, procedural transparency is maintained through clear attribution of sources to ensure the credibility of this manuscript as a scientific reference.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **History and Assumptions of Human Nature**

Yao & Kabir (2023) explain that Person-Centered Therapy (PCT) was born as a response to the limitations of the dominant psychoanalytic and behaviorism models of the time. Rogers views humans not as victims of instinctive impulses or environmental stimuli, but rather as individuals who have full agency to determine the direction of their lives. The essence of human beings in PCT is a rational, social, active, and innate impulse to actualize themselves. This positive view places counselors as trustworthy and have the intrinsic potential to solve their own problems if given the right therapeutic climate.

### **Behavioral Development and Direction of Change**

Behavioral development in the context of PCT focuses on the dynamics of self-actualization, in which individuals continue to move towards more optimal psychological functioning. This process of change is characterized by a shift from a rigid, defensive, and insecure attitude towards a person who is more open to experience, confident, and flexible. According to Rogers (1957), the direction of this change does not occur through direct instruction from the counselor, but through the counselor's self-discovery in a safe space. Counselors learn to stop rejecting parts of themselves and begin to integrate new experiences into their increasingly adaptive personality structure. A large-scale meta-analysis involving 14,235 clients confirmed that humanistic-experiential therapies, including PCT, effectively reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties (Elliott et al., 2013). Furthermore, Watson et al. (2011) emphasize that empathy in PCT is not merely a passive act but an active therapeutic tool that facilitates the client's deep self-exploration process.

### **Healthy vs. Problematic Personal: Congruence vs Incongruence**

Mental health in the Rogerian perspective is measured through the degree of alignment or congruence between the ideal self (who I want to be), self-concept (who I am according to my perception), and real experience (what happens to me). A healthy person is characterized by the

ability to evaluate oneself independently without constantly relying on the approval of others. In contrast, problematic individuals experience severe incongruence that triggers chronic anxiety and distorted self-defense mechanisms. Harsantik et al. (2025) note that practical indicators of incongruence often appear in the form of contradictory behaviors between the values believed and the actions taken, which are often the main reasons individuals seek counseling services. Sa'ad et al. (2014) further demonstrated that PCT group counseling significantly reduces depression and enhances self-concept among vulnerable adolescent populations, reinforcing the view that addressing incongruence is central to effective intervention.

### **Essence and Purpose of PCT Counseling**

The main goal of PCT counseling is not just to solve specific problems brought by counselors, but to help counselors in their development process so that they can address current and future problems independently. Counseling aims to create an atmosphere that allows counseling to increase self-awareness, accept yourself as you are, and reduce the gap between the ideal self and the real self. The focus is on self-reliance and counseling agency; The counselor does not act as an expert who provides diagnosis or advice, but as a partner who facilitates the counselor's journey of self-discovery. Sohal (2023) found that even in high-risk clinical contexts, a non-directive person-centred stance that preserves client autonomy and self-determination produces measurable improvements in wellbeing and reduces psychological distress.

### **Attitude, Role, and Function of Counselors as Facilitators**

In PCT, the quality of the counselor's presence is far more crucial than any technical technique. The counselor serves as a facilitator who provides "psychological nutrition" for the growth of the counselor through three main core conditions. Norcross and Wampold (2018) confirm that the quality of the therapeutic relationship — not the specific technique — is the single strongest predictor of positive counseling outcomes across all psychotherapy modalities:

- **Congruence:** Counselors are authentic, real, and honest without hiding behind a professional mask. Research by Itzchakov et al. (2024) shows that highly empathic listening satisfies the speaker's core psychological needs of autonomy and relatedness, making congruent, attentive listening a therapeutic tool in its own right.
- **Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR):** Receiving counseling as is without conditions or moral judgment.
- **Empathic Understanding:** Trying to understand the inner world of the counselor as if the counselor were feeling it himself, without losing objectivity.

An example of the application of these micro-skills is seen when counselors use warm facial expressions and supportive eye contact to fully communicate their presence to the counselor. Steindl et al. (2023) argue that the interplay between the therapeutic relationship and experiential techniques creates a synergistic effect: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and neither element is sufficient alone.

### **Counselor-Counselor Relationship as an Equal Partnership**

The structure of the therapeutic relationship in the PCT is an equal partnership, not an authoritarian "doctor-patient" relationship. Counselors and counselors are in the same position in exploring the phenomenal terrain of counseling. StatPearls (2023) emphasizing that the counselor's perception of the counselor's attitude is a determining factor for success; If the

counselor does not feel empathy or acceptance, then change will not occur. This relationship creates a climate of psychological safety that lowers counseling self-defense and allows for deep self-exploration. A pluralistic understanding of PCT underscores that clients' therapeutic goals are heterogeneous and must be co-explored through ongoing dialogue rather than prescribed by the counselor (Cooper & McLeod, 2011). Empirical support for this non-directive stance is provided by Barkham et al. (2021), whose large randomised controlled trial demonstrated that person-centred experiential therapy is non-inferior to CBT for moderate-to-severe depression.

### **Stages of Counseling**

**Relationship Building Stage (Rapport):** Counselors focus on creating a safe atmosphere and building initial trust. The main focus is to make sure the counselor feels fully accepted from the first meeting.

**Self-Exploration Stage:** Counselors are encouraged to express feelings and thoughts that may have been suppressed. Counselors use active listening to validate the counselor's subjective experiences.

**Understanding and Insight Stage:** Counselors begin to recognize patterns of incongruity within themselves and increase awareness of their growth potential. This new understanding arises from the internal process of counseling itself.

**Action and Growth Stage:** There is an integration between the new self-concept and real behavior in daily life. Counseling begins to make decisions that are more in tune with their real self.

**Termination Stage:** The end of the session is done after the growth goals are perceived to have been achieved by the counselor. Counselors and counselors plan for the future and evaluate the growth results that have been achieved.

## Counseling Techniques and Example Intervention Sentences

Although PCT minimizes mechanistic techniques, there are several key communication skills used to manifest the counselor's core attitude:

**Table 1 Intervention Sentences**

Technique	Purpose	Example of Intervention Sentences
<b>Active Listening</b>	Showing full attendance	"I heard how difficult this week has been for you..."
<b>Reflection of Feelings</b>	Reflecting implicit emotions	"It seems like you feel very hurt when that happens."
<b>Paraphrasing</b>	Ensure understanding	"So, you feel confused between obeying your parents' wishes or your own dreams?"
<b>Summarizing</b>	Summarizing the essential elements	"So far we have talked about your anger and also your hope for change."
<b>Exploration</b>	Encourage deepening	"Can you tell me more about the emptiness you mentioned earlier?"

Morrell and Santurri (2020) found that active listening, combined with empathic communication competency, is strongly predictive of professional effectiveness in helper-client relationships, validating the skills listed in this table. The implementation of these techniques, as practiced in handling cases of self-concept by Gunawan et al. (2021), has proven to be effective in providing a sense of empowerment for counselors who are facing identity crises or family problems.

### 4. Implications of Research Practice and Agenda Implications for Counseling Services

The implementation of PCT in the context of guidance and counseling services in Indonesia has a very high relevance, especially in educational and community settings. In schools, this approach is effective in dealing with students' self-concept issues that are often pressured by academic standards or bullying. For example, in dealing with students who experience a decrease in motivation to learn due to parental divorce, counselors who apply the Unconditional Positive Regard can provide a safe space for students to express their sadness and anger without fear of being judged (Gunawan et al., 2021). This in turn will increase students' self-esteem and resilience in dealing with their personal crises. Fadli et al. (2022) similarly found that PCT applied as a group counseling intervention produces measurable gains in participants' emotional regulation and interpersonal functioning.

### Limitations and Challenges

This study has limitations because it is based on a qualitative-descriptive literature review, so quantitative effectiveness generalizations require further research. In addition, the implementation of PCT in Indonesia requires cultural adaptation; The values of collectivism

may influence how "sincerity" and "equal partnership" are perceived by counselors. A key challenge for counselors is maintaining the consistency of Rogers' core conditions amid administrative burdens and demands for instant results from school or institutional stakeholders. Delima et al. (2023) note that sustained PCT-based guidance significantly improves the resilience of parents and caregivers in high-stress contexts, suggesting the approach's benefits extend beyond individual counseling dyads to broader family systems.

### **Advanced Research Recommendations**

Based on the mapping results, it is suggested that the follow-up research agenda includes testing the effectiveness of PCT on specific issues in Indonesia such as disaster trauma recovery, prevention of sexual violence on campus, and improving mental health in the workplace. The development of measurement instruments for aspects such as PCT-based self-awareness and resilience is also indispensable to strengthen empirical databases. Estiningdyah et al. (2026) emphasize the need for a deeper profile study of how warm relational environments can be a critical foundation for individual resilience in various vulnerable populations. Cooper (2019) supports this direction, demonstrating that person-centred approaches yield medium-to-large effect sizes across a wide range of presenting issues when outcome studies are rigorously synthesised.

### **CONCLUSION**

Person-Centered Therapy (PCT) remains essential in counseling for humanizing therapeutic relationships, as this study affirms that clients' behavioral change and personal growth depend not on specific techniques but on counselors' authentic empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence—core elements from Carl Rogers' principles. By embedding these into practice, counselors enable individuals to align their ideal and real selves, fostering self-actualization and inclusive support services as a core competency for practitioners committed to unlocking full human potential. For future research, longitudinal studies could examine PCT's long-term efficacy across diverse cultural contexts, such as in Indonesian educational settings, to refine training protocols and measure sustained outcomes like resilience and self-concept improvement. Rodgers (2024) also highlights the growing relevance of adapting PCT delivery to online modalities, noting that core therapeutic conditions of empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard can be maintained effectively in video-based counseling settings.

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