

Abstract

In the area of working with chronic pain, the use of psychotherapeutic techniques is gaining popularity. This study describes research into the question of how gestalt therapists might work with clients who present with chronic physical pain. The aim was to examine the individual experience of a gestalt psychotherapist working with such clients. The research consisted of semi-structured interviews with 5 gestalt psychotherapists who have experience of working with clients with chronic pain. A phenomenological analysis was applied, in order to draw out the essence of each therapist's experience. Significant statements were extracted and sorted into clusters of meaning and common themes. The findings demonstrated that therapists were applying three main areas of gestalt theory in the treatment of clients with chronic pain. These were developing awareness, aiming to offer a dialogic relationship, and offering and strengthening support. Developing awareness seemed to consist of working phenomenologically, offering experiments, and taking the stance of the paradoxical theory of change. Aiming to offer a dialogic relationship seemed to focus on offering presence, confirmation and inclusion. Strengthening support included the therapist offering the client their support, developing the client's self support and developing environmental support. A theme that ran through all the interviews was that these ways of working would not be used as a set of techniques but would emerge naturally through relationship. It was deemed from this study that despite their being no definitive gestalt theory written about working with chronic pain, Gestalt therapists are equipped to work with such clients.