

Abstract

How do Gestalt therapists make sense of what happens when the impact of alcohol misuse becomes a point of interest between them and a client when both have been affected by alcohol dependence in their families of origin? This study seeks to address this question in order to increase our understanding of the subjective beliefs, experiences and approaches of these Gestalt therapists'.

Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), data from three semi-structured interviews, yielded three major themes: 'managing potential risk', 'abrupt shifts in boundary experiences and getting support. These themes and accompanying subthemes illustrate specific tensions and paradoxes which are expressed through commonalities and divergences in viewpoint.

The study found that therapists paid more attention to possible challenges than to the potentially substantial benefits their lived experiences with alcohol misuse brought into the therapeutic situation. The challenges that emerge strongly are transference processes whilst the potential benefits include using more of the environmental support available in the wider field.

Implications and recommendations for practice are considered and avenues for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Interpretative phenomenological analysis, thematic analysis, therapist experience, alcohol dependence, alcoholism