

Abstract

This research dissertation originates in the researchers' personal experiences and working practice with individuals who have panic attacks. The researcher was motivated by her discovery of a lack of psychotherapeutic literature that supported an integrated understanding or approach to working with the phenomenon of panic attacks.

The study is a qualitative grounded theory analysis of five interview accounts given by self-defined integrative psychotherapists and counsellors, all working in private practice. The study aimed to explore how they 'work with' and 'understand' clients who experience panic, particularly in the therapeutic setting. A relational–developmental theoretical lens was applied as data was coded then compared and contrasted until representative meaningful descriptive categories of 'understanding' and 'working with' emerged. Categories were organised into a framework that depicts constituent elements of an integrated relational-developmental therapy approach with clients who panic.

Findings evidence inherent complexities and uncertainties in working with panic and current practices that integrate personal experience with insights from neuroscience, attachment and trauma theories. The importance of an attuned, responsive, supportive therapeutic stance and openness to new ways of working were shown. The researcher concludes a focus on affect regulation is central to working with panic but is minimally integrated in literature in the subject field.