

## Abstract

An abundance of literature confirms early traumatic experiences are held viscerally and energetically in the body, and many psychotherapy modalities agree that 'reaching the root of somatic primitive experiences is essential', and without, the traumatic complex is not able to be worked through (West, 2016). Moreover, working with the body is seen as a central component of therapy to reach preverbal traumas that have origins from infancy (West, 2016; Winnicott, 1962; Ogden, 2016). Yet very little is focused on the prenatal and birth experience of the client and the relevance within integrative psychotherapy. This study aimed to explore this experience from the client's perspective, with a focus on how primitive states and somatic disturbances that have the earliest origins are held in the body and are worked through in relational developmental psychotherapy.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight psychotherapists who identified as working within a developmental-relational approach. The heuristic method was chosen for its capacity to capture authentic experiences from the client's perspective. Seven themes and subthemes emerged within a framework which mirrored the dynamic process of working with primitive states, and preverbal trauma: origins of trauma; primitive defences; regression; therapeutic relationship; long process; repair and change; other body-oriented approaches. These illustrated the long and arduous journey required within the therapeutic relationship to thaw the frozen baby within the adult. The client's defensive position illustrated the complexities of reaching the fortress and dissolving the armoured walls that exist to keep the body from experiencing something agonising and terrifying. The research showed a holding