

Abstract

Emergency service front line workers are constantly exposed to traumatic, life changing incidents, with little time to reflect and process the impact on self. As awareness around the effects on mental health in society increase, and with seemingly less stigma attached to seeking professional help, there appears to be little research or acknowledgement of the difficulties this client group faces when attempting to speak of their experiences, specifically within the therapeutic relationship. This study aims to explore the experience of first responders to trauma who have been unable to speak about this during personal therapy.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants, one qualified and three trainee psychotherapists. Three participants were trained in an Integrative, developmental relational modality and one from a Person-Centred background, which added to the richness of the gathered data.

A heuristic method was applied, with the researcher taking part in the study, to fully experience and engage with the other participants, which facilitated immersion in the process and data. The framework of Moustakas (1990) stages was followed as closely as practicable.

Analysis of the data identified a number of common themes, including physical descriptions of experience, specifically around the use of metaphor, the impacts on self, the lack of words, detachment experiences, avoidance and unwillingness to speak in therapy and the therapeutic relationship, particularly in relation to the issues