

## **Abstract**

This study is an inquiry into the integrative psychotherapist's experience of being in relationship with a survivor of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). A paucity of research on the impact of CSA on the intimate relationship from the partner's perspective, alongside an understanding that integrative psychotherapists could reflect on the experience through a relational-developmental lens, indicated the value of the study.

The qualitative research uses heuristic inquiry, as this was a method which aimed to get to the essence of the experience and implicit themes, through the therapist-researcher's reflective capacity and openness to unconscious themes emerging. Research culminated in a creative synthesis, taking the form of a spoken word piece.

Six themes were identified in the research findings; partner's difficulties resulting from CSA trauma; impact on the relationship; participant's emotional experience of the relationship; secondary trauma/counter-dissociation; co-creation of relational dynamics; and areas of growth/meaning made. Findings aligned with previous research on the systemic impact of CSA but uncovered the essence of the experience as an interplay of avoidant processes. Critique of the study is included, as well as implications for integrative practice, and suggestions for further research.