

Small Scale Research Project Report

Abstract

This research project aimed to investigate how Person-centred and experiential (PCE) trainee psychotherapists understand their depressive process (DP) and how they feel their DP impacts their ability to offer empathy to their clients. DP has been used as a term rather than 'depression' in order to stay within the person-centre approach (PCA) taking a less diagnostic and 'disease' model (Read & Sanders, 2010) and terming them as more 'difficult processes' (Warner, 2006), to allow for participants to self-select without needing a formal diagnosis. Mental health professionals including PCE psychotherapists are often at greater risk of burn-out, vicarious trauma and other forms of mental distress due to the nature of their work (Sodeke-Gregson, Holttum, & Billing, 2013). This is an important topic as competency (UKCP, 2019:26) and non-maleficence (ibid:6) are significant ethical factors in ensure efficacy in psychotherapy. Empathy is one of the common factors found to contribute to effective psychotherapy (Greenburg, 2017) and one of the core conditions for PC psychotherapy (Rogers, 1957). Therefore it was important to understand the impact of a depressive process on their ability to offer empathy to clients. There has been little research in this area thus far from the PC tradition. Interpretative Phenomenological analysis was used as a method of inquiry through semi-structured interviews to understand the individual subject experiences of the participants. Initial findings show DP was helpful in creating greater empathy for their clients; it required managing in order to competently practice, and that at times negatively impacted their ability to be present and offer empathy to clients. Self-care was highlighted as significant as well as inter and intrapersonal connection. Data analysis remains incomplete due to researcher self-care.