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Practicing what we preach

Psychotherapist experience of taking care of themselves

Mary Pierce

MSc in Pluralistic Counselling and Psychotherapy

Structure of Presentation

Why this research subject?

Literature review

Aims of the study

Method

Preliminary findings/results

Discussion

Conclusion



Why this research subject?

Self-care is not a luxury but a necessity (Mills 2021)

Opportunity to explore the experience of the Psychotherapist in the practice of taking care of themselves

My own personal experience

Self-care can help lessen the prevalence of stress, burnout, and professional incompetence (Bamonti, et al., 2014; Killian, 2008; Posluns & Gall, 2019).

The wellbeing of Psychotherapists has developed as a critical part of psychotherapy and is regarded by many theorists as the foundation of their profession (Theriault et al., 2015).

*“The evidence tells us that successful psychotherapy is a product of many components, all of which revolve around, and depend upon, the individual psychotherapist – That’s good science and good relationships”
Norcross & VandenBos
Leaving it at the Office
(2018)*



Literature Review

Drinking from an empty cup – lack of training in self-care

Lack of teaching on specific self-care practices (Theriuall et al., 2015)

Using the tools of the trade

A stronger connection to nature, increased clarity and improved health and wellbeing.

The encouragement of self-care within the supervision session, including conversations around the overall wellbeing of the therapist.

Barriers

Financial burden of supervision, personal therapy and other self-care activities and lack of time to practice self-care.

Aims of the study

The aim of the study was to discover the experiences of the Psychotherapist in practice of taking care of themselves.

To examine the self-care practices of Psychotherapists and share ideas with the possibility to improve the experience for Psychotherapists in practice.



Method

- **Qualitative Research**
- **Semi-structured interviews with five participants who were all practicing psychotherapists**
- **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**
Emphasis on convergence and divergence in lived experiences and their detailed nuances analysed on a small number of participants (Tuffour, 2017).
- Awareness of ethical considerations and Data protection standards were adhered to.



Findings

Support in caring for yourself as a Psychotherapist.

(Superordinate theme 1)

Utilisation of Supervision in support of self-care

(Subordinate theme 1.1)

*“feeling good in the Supervisors
company”, “enjoyable” (P4) and
“reassuring” (P1)*

Minding your physical and mental well- being

(Subordinate theme 1.2)

*“get to walk by the sea just away from
everything ...breeze blows the cobwebs
away” (P3)*

***“It’s about balancing the work and your own personal life trying to not be all or
one ... whose needs am I really serving?” (P5)***

Findings

Using Metaphors to describe aspects of self-care (Superordinate theme 2)

Using metaphorical meaning to express how to stay separate from work life and describing your own personal wellbeing
(Subordinate theme 2.1)

[Self-care is] “filling yourself up in ways so that you don’t feel the tank is empty and you’ve nothing to give ... can’t do this work without practicing self-care ... wouldn’t be a pretty picture” (P4)

“I have another identity ... I’m not putting myself in a box with a certain label ... there’d be people that wouldn’t know that I work in counselling” (P2)

The State of Equilibrium (Superordinate theme 3)

Wisdom from experience (Subordinate theme 3.1)

“now I’m very aware like how to keep myself pretty good because I didn’t have that awareness ... that’s from experience of burnout ... giving until you have nothing left you know, I’m very aware”. (P1)

Learning to prioritise your own life (Subordinate theme 3.2)

“trying to get the right balance with your personal life, family life ... depending on what’s going on at different stages of your life ... different demands and different needs”. (P3)

“You can be in oblivion ... you’re not aware that you’re not making time for self-care, you’re just not even, it’s not obvious to you”. (P3)

Experience of creating a professional environment supportive of self-care
(Superordinate theme 4)

Are Psychotherapists prepared for the
harm of lack of self-care?
(Subordinate theme 4.1)

*“it’s even just to make the students aware
of ... self-care is just as important ...
having that brainstorming idea of what is
self-care, it’s not the luxurious life!” (P5)*

Support from peers, groups and personal
therapy
(Subordinate theme 4.2)

*“... even the first day I was lucky to
meet someone that, you know, and we’re,
like she’s one of my best friends now
...”(P1)*

*“There was a kind of touching on things, but it wasn’t really followed through, and
people would say that you want self-care, but we weren’t really doing anything” (P2) “it’s
kind of crazy, isn’t it?”(P4)*

Discussion

- Supervision as a self-care practice
- Importance placed on being in nature and exercise as a way of supporting mental wellbeing
- Use of Metaphors by participants being a way to make the implicit explicit
- Creating boundaries around work and personal life
- The consensus that there was a lack of self-care awareness and training



Conclusion

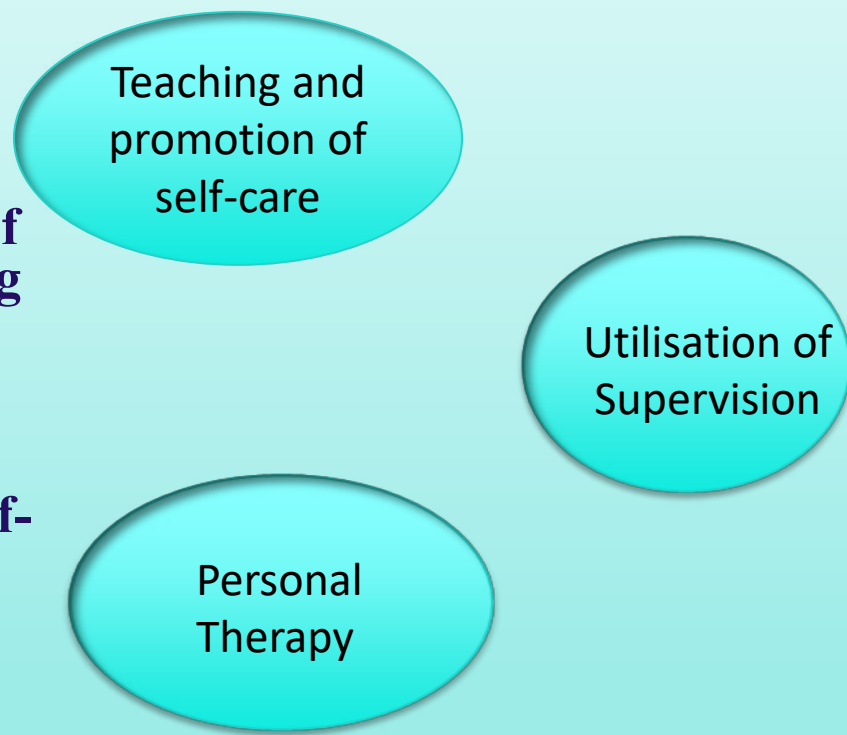
Self-care is not a luxury

The promotion of Supervision as a self-care practice

Evidence points to the need to support Psychotherapists to have awareness of their own self-care from the beginning of their study.

- **It is only with experience and time that the full nature of the need for self-care is evident to Psychotherapists**
- **Importance placed on whole therapeutic structure as holistic in nature.**

Further research



Teaching and promotion of self-care

Utilisation of Supervision

Personal Therapy

“More important than the words or silence is my inner stance of making room for what is stirring within him, becoming alertly still enough inside that his inner world senses safety, the precursor to him opening into vulnerability”

Bonnie Badenoch

The Heart of Trauma (2017)

Thank you all for listening

also

Heartfelt thank you

To all who supported me through this process, with a special thanks to my family for their patience.

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IICP College

Killinarden Enterprise Park
Killinarden, Dublin 24
D24 TKC7, Ireland

E info@iicp.ie
T 01 466 4205
M 087 905 5330



iicp.ie

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