

Personal Therapy in India

Niharika Kamlesh Rupani^{1*}

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the effectiveness of the powerful tool of personal therapy and the need to popularize it in the Indian context. The views expressed in this paper are based on the available research evidence and they emphasize on the fact that personal therapy can aid in the personal and professional lives, as well as development of mental health practitioners. The words 'psychologist' and 'therapist' are used interchangeably in this article.

Keywords: *Personal Therapy, India, Mental Health, Validity, Positive Impact*

India is a country full of colours, dreams, emotions, and diversity. It reflects the very core of psychology, that is, individual differences in its true identity as to what they call their "Mantra: Unity in Diversity". Despite despite that, the tiny black spot in this colour-filled palette is our tendency to remain stuck in our ways and not accept change easily, especially when it comes to something like accepting the existence of mental health. This problem is the root cause of innumerable episodes of unsurfaced psychological conflicts and distress among millions of people, psychologists too.

The concept of personal therapy is not an option but a compulsory aspect of many curriculums for professional psychology courses across the world including the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2002). So, then here's the question, why is personal therapy unheard of, for psychologists in India?

"But where and how is the poor wretch to acquire the ideal qualifications which he will need in his profession? The answer is in an analysis of himself" (Freud, 1937). Personal Therapy has its roots in psychoanalytic theory and continues to receive strong support from contemporary psychodynamic approaches. It is an essential and effective medium that can be used to resolve underlying psychological issues faced by mental health professionals like any other individual. It is an obvious avenue and is generally seen as a vital component of personal and professional development.

The professional life as a psychologist can be both rewarding and challenging. There are times when practitioners face moments of insecurities and frustration due to burnouts. This is where personal therapy comes into play. Yet, there are many arguments and criticisms revolving around the question at hand, trying to either prove or defy the idea's validity. One

¹Applied Psychology, Ramanujan College, University of Delhi, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: August 31, 2021; Revision Received: October 28, 2021; Accepted: November 20, 2021

© 2021, Rupani N K; licensee IJIP. This is an Open Access Research distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any Medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Personal Therapy in India

of the pioneering attempts to prove the validity of its effectiveness was done by Dr. Hans H. Strupp in 1955 through a series of experiments.

There are numerous advantages of taking up personal therapy. It helps the trainees and counselors to be aware of their feelings and aids in reducing blind spots. BACP (2003) also suggests that personal therapy is a useful tool in reducing 'blind spots' that may be present. It also gives the therapist/trainee an experience of a lifetime that they carry along with themselves throughout their professional journeys. Sitting on the other side of the table allows them to better understand the fear, insecurities, and vulnerabilities that come along with the clients. The element of relevance not only helps them understand what the patient expects but also improves their empathetic skills and gives them an insight into how transference and countertransference work. In addition, it also tends to free up defenses, the process of self-disclosure with increased self-understanding leads to more acceptance of self and less defensiveness with others (Peebles, 1980).

Therapists have their own share of strengths and weaknesses. Self-exploration provides self-awareness that can help in separating personal and professional issues (Murphy, 2005). As mentioned earlier, psychologists too face many incidents that trigger their emotional instability at times, and they must be in a healthy and sound state of mind while practicing professionally. Not only can it help them come out of those incidents mentally, but it also heals them, bringing a permanent and positive impact on their mental health.

Even though there are exceptions wherein trainees have experienced a negative impact of personal therapies during their training programs, meta-analysis and numerous long-drawn researches prove the efficaciousness of the same in most of the cases. A national survey of the personal therapy experiences of the UK Senior Registrars in Psychotherapy found that most participants reported purely positive outcomes from the therapy. Some of them mentioned the financial costs and time constraints as stressors but indicated that it was a necessary aspect of therapy and wasn't considered to be a negative effect. Only a few participants reported that the therapy bore negative effects. The most common one being psychological distress aggregating in a few cases to episodes of depression (Macaskill & Macaskill, 1992).

Given the various challenges associated with practicing as a therapist, it is inevitable to encounter setbacks. In India, psychotherapists are often devoid of self-reflection and therapeutic assistance. Findings also suggest that psychotherapists here often experience uncertainties like vulnerability to burnout, feelings of inadequacy, and personal distress. (Bhola et al., 2012).

Some barriers are catalysts in the ineffective provision of personal development opportunities among trainees and practicing psychologists. The insufficient in-house provision of personal therapy in educational institutions is one of the most common obstacles faced by the trainees. The demanding and hectic academic schedules and the additional costs of therapy often rule out the option of going for one. A strong and impactful step towards this issue can be to train the teaching faculty in counseling courses. This can provide meaningful training programs and a safe space for students to grow as constant guidance and self-disclosure practices by the faculty would normalize feelings of insecurities and discomfort, helping them learn and understand the profession intricately. The aforementioned reinforces the fact that a nurturing environment can always facilitate personal growth and development.

Personal Therapy in India

With one psychotherapist available per half a million, there is an evident scarcity of trained practitioners (Thomas & George, 2016). This simply overburdens them with copious caseloads and mental exhaustion that pull their effectiveness down alongside the constant tussle with the stigma attached to mental illnesses.

The concept of personal therapy is yet to sink in the socio-cultural background in the Indian context. There is substantial ignorance about psychotherapy and, thus it is necessary to establish mandatory personal therapy. Noting the collectivist mindset of people in India, there would be less shame associated with help-seeking, and resistance from society would reduce due to the compulsion as some people still think that personal therapy is only for those with serious issues. (Sodhi and Kakkar, 2014)

In a nutshell, we must realize the importance of self-care strategies and the provision of personal therapy as they help prevent burnouts and also come up with effective ways to address and, in turn, solve the various professional hazards faced by therapists and psychology aspirants, at every step of their professional careers.

REFERENCES

- Bhola, P., Kumaria, S., & Orlinsky, D. E. (2012). Looking within: self-perceived professional strengths and limitations of psychotherapists in India. *Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 3(2), 161-174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21507686.2012.703957>
- Corey, G. (2015). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy (10th ed)*. United Kingdom: Cengage Learning.
- Freud, S. (1937) Analysis terminable and interminable. In Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 23. London: Hogarth Press (1964).
- Macaskill, N. (1992). Psychotherapists-in-training evaluate their personal therapy: Results of a UK survey. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 9(2), 133-138. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0118.1992.tb01211.x>
- Murphy, D. (2005). A qualitative study into the experience of mandatory personal therapy during training. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 5(1), 27-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733140512331343868>
- Peebles, M. J. (1980). Personal therapy and ability to display empathy, warmth and genuineness in psychotherapy. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 17(3), 258. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0085919>
- Strupp, H. H. (1955). The effect of the psychotherapist's personal analysis upon his techniques. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 19(3), 197. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0048123>
- Thomas, E., & George, T. S. (2016). Evaluation of Personal Development Components in Counselor Education Programs in India. *Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling*, 6(1). Doi: 10.18401.2016.6.1.1

Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Rupani N K (2021). Personal Therapy in India. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(4), 695-697. DIP:18.01.068.20210904, DOI:10.25215/0904.068