

BEYOND THE COUCH: THE INFLUENCE OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY ON PRACTITIONERS' PERSONALITIES AND PERSONAL LIVES"

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Abstract

The objectives of the research were to gather systematic and extensive data on Clinical Psychologist personal lives and how it being influenced by profession. Also, to explore the professional journey as a Clinical Psychologist in Pakistan. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to a research literature for future researchers. Qualitative research methodology and thematic analysis were used for this research. Semi structured interviews were conducted by n=10 Clinical Psychologist holding a degree of masters in clinical psychology with 5 or more years of clinical experience. The findings present the subjective experience as a clinical psychologist how their personal lives being influenced by their profession and their journey as a Clinical Psychologist in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Personal lives

Mental health practitioners (e.g., counselors; psychotherapists) work in a culture of one-way caring (Guy 2000) in which they are required to demonstrate empathy, compassion and patience, without the expectation of receiving such care in return from their clients (Skovholt et al. 2001). In other words, clinical psychologists aim to diagnose and provide treatment for disorders classified in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), and to provide remedial or preventative help to individuals going through

personal issues or changes in their life. In order to be effective, clinical psychologists need to be aware of themselves and their patterns of relating to others (Hughes, 2009). Clinical psychologists tend to work with more seriously disturbed populations, and are more likely trained in a medical model of clinical assessment, pathological populations within a framework of life transitions (Lalande, 2004). To be effective in providing mental health services, practitioners must develop a professional alliance or working relationship with clients that maintains appropriate boundaries and levels of emotional or

psychological involvement, and to do so consistently from one client to another (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison 2011). Ironically, while helping clients move toward well-being, practitioners often can overlook their own needs (Barnett et al. 2007) and indeed may not have learned how to take the time to care and to nourish themselves, having been trained to believe that this would be selfish (Sapienza and Bugental 2000, p. 459). As a result, engaging in self-care can often sit at the end of a practitioner's to-do list, rather than being made a priority. As with other occupations, there is evidence that being a therapist can be stressful (Kottler & Carlson, 2005). The impact of the therapist role can be a source of a range of different stress effects, including general stress arising from work overload and poor job satisfaction (Baird & Kracen, 2006; Farber & Heifetz, 1981; Lawson, 2007), burnout arising from emotional over-commitment and lack of self-care (Farber & Heifetz, 1982; Miller, 1998), the experience of tragedy and grief when clients die (Hendin, Haas, Maltsberger, Szanto, & Rabinowicz, 2004; Hendin, Lipschitz, Maltsberger, Haas, & Wynecoop, 2000; O'Brien, 2011).

In an International study of therapist development, Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2005) found that the experience of conducting therapy could be characterized as consisting of an interplay between healing involvement (purposeful and affirming positive immersion in the work) and stressful involvement (anxiety, boredom, and struggling to deal with difficulties). These dimensions were largely independent and could co-occur in a range of patterns. The impact of the role of therapist on the personal lives of clinicians has received increasing attention in recent years (Knox, 2014). A survey of psychotherapists in the USA conducted by Stevanovic and Rupert (2004) reported "spillover" of work stress into family life on a regular basis, with the majority of respondents indicating that they had little time and energy for their family at least once each week. Stevanovic and Rupert (2009) examined the role career-sustaining behaviors in moderating the effect of work stress, and recorded significant gender and age effects, with female and older practitioners make more effective use of career-sustaining activities. In a comparison of the personal lives of research psychologists and psychotherapists,

Radeke and Mahoney (2000) found that the latter reported higher levels of satisfaction, but also higher levels of emotional depletion. The belief that, on balance, being a therapist had the effect of enhancing the quality of relationships and personal life emerged as a major theme in studies conducted by Hatcher et al. (2012), Kennedy and Black (2010), and Norcross and Guy (2007).

Interweaving of Personality and Professional life:

The study of burnout among mental health professionals began with the work of Maslach (1976), whose research found that stress was handled in a similar manner among professionals in different settings. Since this initial research was conducted, there has been tremendous interest in the field of burnout among mental health professionals. A review of literature has shown that research on the phenomenon of burnout is focused on specific areas that are either related to internal characteristics of the individual (e.g., gender, personality factors, defensive coping) or to the professional's environment (e.g., work setting, amount of work, expectations). Researchers have studied burnout in mental health professionals, finding that personality traits like neuroticism and extraversion predict burnout among staff working in residential treatment centers. The organizational structure and climate for mental health workers have been identified as a cause of job stress, including lack of funding, personnel shortages, high turnover rates, role conflict, lack of job clarity, and attitudes of other health professionals. These factors can result in stressful job experiences and lack of social support. Mixed results have been found in relation to burnout, with some studies finding higher job stress among counseling center staff and lower levels of burnout due to social support from supervisors and colleagues. The length of time spent counseling also influences the level of burnout. A qualitative research study of psychologists suggests that they are vulnerable to burnout due to heavy caseloads and crisis intervention work. Psychiatrists have been studied by Kerr, Dent-Brown, and Parry, with similar findings. Cherniss (1980) suggests that there are potential sources of burnout, including specific stressors, strain components, and defensive coping.



Clinical psychology as an early career and trainees:

Although the years psychology students spent in education can be particularly stressful and difficult for many trainees, it is also a time of exciting changes and growth. Learning the skills and techniques of therapy, while also focusing on self-awareness, growth and development can be both challenging and rewarding. For many trainees, some of the most important changes and decisions are made during the period of education, impacting the course of adult life to follow (Levison, 1978). Moreover, the training process can bring on personality changes that result in a higher level of overall functioning and greater emotional stability (Guy, 1987). Additionally, it is believed that psychologist-in-training develop more mature relationships, become more self-confident, less defensive, and more humble in their interactions with friends and family (Maurice et al., 1975). Further, studies have shown that there is a tendency for trainees to become less authoritarian and more tolerant of diversity and ambiguity (Henry, 1966). Finally, students in psychology education seem to experience greater self-ideal congruence, and the reorganization of their individual self-concept promotes more stable, healthy functioning, and good social adjustment (Guy, 1987). This emphasis brings an increased focus on early experiences, memories, emotions, and motivations as they relate to the human behavior of both clients and trainees (Guy, 1987). As a result of their academic studies, supervision, personal therapy, and early work experience, psychology students become more internally focused. This process of constantly thinking psychologically can cause the trainee to lose him- or herself in endless analysis and introspection, restricting spontaneity (Guy, 1987). This can then impact the interpersonal relationships of the student in some unfortunate ways. Guy and Liaboe (1986) reported that many counsellors experience difficulties with their ability to relate meaningfully with family and friends. This supports Guy's (1987) speculation that when it comes to being psychologically minded, learning how to "turn it off" is a major task not easily mastered concurrently with learning how to "turn it on. Personal psychopathology - the tendency for students to discover psychopathology within themselves - is a further source of stress connected to education. As

Farber notes, "beginning therapists may compare their own early development with that of patients and question their own defense mechanisms and even their own sanity" (Farber, 1983a, p. 100). Unfortunately, the stress of graduate study, compounded with the resultant life changes already discussed, may in fact produce or exacerbate already present psychopathology in trainees (Guy, 1987).

Methodology

Sample:

A purposive sampling technique employed to select a diverse group of participants for this study. The sample comprising ten psychologists (N=10) and chosen based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria and data collection stopped after achieving saturation point.

Inclusion Criteria

- Participants will hold a minimum of Master's degree (18 years) in clinical psychology.
- Clinical psychologist who will have a minimum of 5 years of practical experience in the field.
- Clinical psychologist who are currently practicing in formal clinical setting.

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals with less than 5 years of experience, including fresh postgraduates and those with 2 or 3 years of experience.
- Individual with applied psychology background.

Procedure

The study involved the generation of interview guides based on literature review and subject matter experts' approval. The guides were designed to reflect on the impacts of practicing as a clinical psychologist and their challenges. After revisions, the culturally appropriate interview guide was finalized, suggesting semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted in phases, with participants providing informed consent and demographic sheets. The interviews were conducted either in person or online, with most preferring online. The duration varied from 25 to 40 minutes. The data was then

analyzed using the six-phase technique of Braun and Clark (2019). Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns or themes within the data. The data was then analyzed using a committee approach, where the objectives and research question were revisited to

align the data with the objectives and research question. Themes were filtered out, suggestions were penned down, and the analyzed themes and data were validated.

Results:

The qualitative approach was used to collect data carefully via semi-structured interviews followed by thematic analysis. The study is based to explore the influence of practitioner professional lives on personal lives and personalities and we had few themes and and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Professional Journey a Psychologist	Discrimination as a profession.	People from more privileged profession didn't let you in in Pakistan.
	Transitioning period of career Growth in psychology	People are quite aware now comparatively last decade.
	Shifting Ideas of young generation	Field is flourishing day by day and there is major shift in ideas of young generation regarding seek psychological support.
	Lack of professional training	We are not trained enough in this way that need to absorb clinical psychology.
Transformation Of Personality As a Clinical Psychologist	Cognitive Flexibility	Recognizing the change in different aspects of life related to work and family life and switch between situations and able to adjust Re-evaluate and change Accordingly
	Logic and Problem solving	More Objective while taking decisions and use rational thinking, logic.
	Better self-Understanding	Recognize their own Thought pattern embrace Change and foster Wellbeing.

Shift from fixed to growth
Mindset.

Emotional Regulation and
Resilience

Emotionally wise enough
to deal with overwhelming
situation.

Sensitivity Shift

Influence is that it makes me
More kind and empathetic
Sensitive towards people
Emotions and I give more
Margins to them .

Impact of
Profession on
Personal
Lives of Clinical
Psychologist

Better Interpersonal
relationship

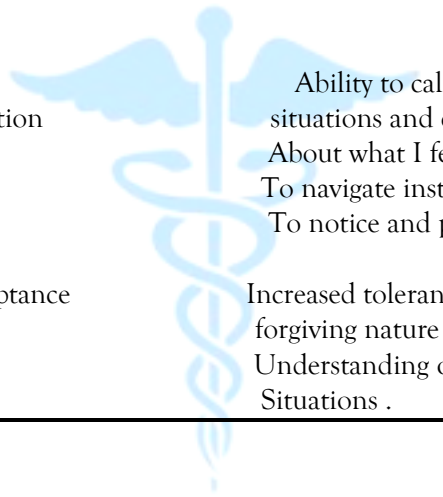
Improved relationship with
immediate family members,
friends.

Improved
Communication

Ability to calmly deal with
situations and communicate
About what I feel and use words
To navigate instead wait someone
To notice and pick my emotion

Increased acceptance
Of others

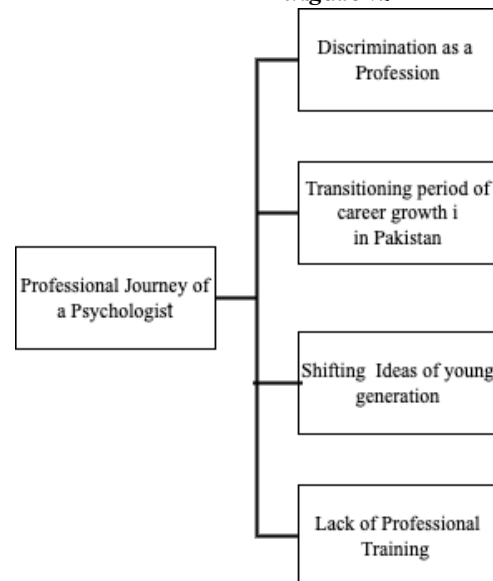
Increased tolerance , more.
forgiving nature and good
Understanding of peoples
Situations .



**Theme 1: Professional Journey of a Psychologist:
Discrimination as a Profession**

"The mental health professionals face stigma and discrimination in Pakistan... This stigma and discrimination affects their ability to provide effective services to the patients... The stigma and discrimination faced by mental health professionals in Pakistan is a significant barrier to the provision of mental health services" (Gadit & Khalid, 2017, p. 12). As mentioned by one of the psychologists that *at workplace people from more privileged professions like mbbs doctors or ummmmm..... (pause) they usually don't let you in you have to be skilled to make your place and prove yourself.* Other part that say affect effectiveness is not really align with our present data.

Figure :1



Transitioning period of career growth in Pakistan

Clinical psychology in Pakistan is transitioning from traditional to modern, evidence-based practice, marked by an increase in trained clinical psychologists, growth of professional organizations, and development of new training programs" (Haque et al., 2018, p. 234). As mentioned that *I have seen visible difference from last one decade I think people are more aware now , seek help if they not feel okay but again stigma is still there but some betterment I feel is emerged now...*

Shifting Ideas of young generation

There is a gradual shift in the mindset of the young generation in Pakistan, who are increasingly seeking psychological support and considering it a sign of strength rather than weakness... This shift is attributed to increased awareness, education, and social media influence" (Khan et al., 2020, p. 12). *I think our younger generation is really well aware and not be ashamed of seeking psychological support compared to the generation before them and I guess that's the best part and this reflects how far we become*

Lack of Professional Training

One of the major challenges facing clinical psychology in Pakistan is the lack of professional training and expertise, with many clinical psychologists lacking advanced training in evidence-based therapies and assessment techniques" (Haque et al., 2018, p. 235). As noted, *I think we lack professional training and supervision session which is(pause) I think is one of basic training because this field is itself tough and specially taking sessions back to back without being unaffected is impossible ...*

Theme 2: Transformation of Personality as a Clinical Psychologist

Cognitive Flexibility:

The emotion regulation technique of cognitive reappraisal is linked to better well-being and as such appears to be a more adaptive strategy than expressive suppression (Gross and John 2003). Specifically, practitioners who reappraise events report more positive and less negative emotions as well as better interpersonal functioning. As a therapist I noted *I am able to solve problems objectively without getting biased because of any of my*

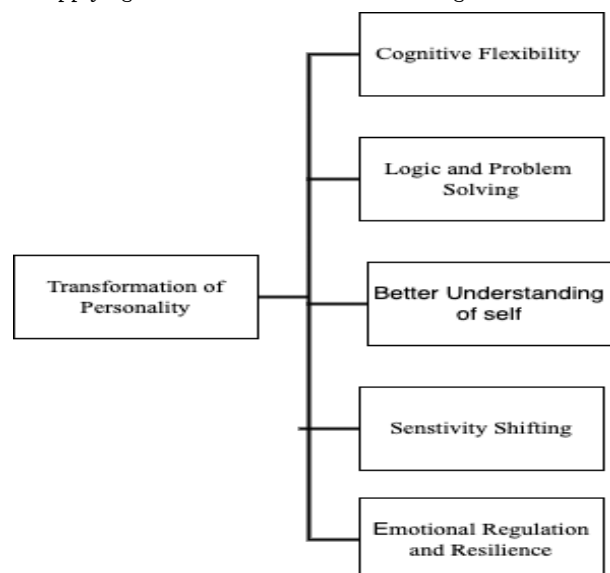
emotions and it's not like that I neglect my emotions I usually channelize my emotions and let it out for a moment and then settle it down and thin objectively while taking decisions or logically solve problems And from that point of view, I guess I am psychologically able to cope with situation and important thing I see things or try to solve them with resolved mindset and be flexible with them.

Logic and Problem Solving:

Psychologist employed more effective problem-solving strategies and demonstrating better transfer of learning to novel problems (Barnett & Ceci,2002). Psychology training has also linked to enhanced creative problem-solving skills than non-psychology students (Kahneman, 2003) as mentioned by one of the psychologists *umm I believe my ability to solve problems (pause) or day to day life tasks become increased I am more objective while looking into matter whatever problem or situation I faced I somehow know I will solve it out.*

Better Understanding of Self:

Be in a training or as a professional is associated with significant increase in self-awareness a self-acceptance. (Norcross & VandenBos, 2018, p.243). "Psychotherapy training is associated with increased authenticity and genuineness in the therapist's self-expression." (Bugental, 1987, p. 312). Psychologist also mentioned that *I guess my relationships and specially with myself becoming better I learned new things about relationships, conflicts and needs, of course I start applying what I have learned in training.*



Emotional Regulation and Resilience:

Emotion regulation strategies improved over the course of professional journey, and these improvements were associated with better relationships with oneself (e.g., greater self-acceptance, self-esteem, and emotional well-being) and with others (e.g., greater empathy, cooperation, and relationship satisfaction) (Gross & John, 2003, p. 229). As mentioned *my overall wellbeing improved but mainly the thing I noticed which improved a lot about me is my emotional regulation and I become more neutral and not taking decisions based on emotions .*

Another mentioned *I guess I changed a lot as a person I grow emotionally I think now I am able to understand my*

own emotions and how to effectively cope.....umm with situations that are emotionally charged but start of my career or training it was not that easy task I learn it with time now I m able to tackle people or situation effectively without getting overwhelmed...

Sensitivity Shift

Clinical psychology training increases empathy and sensitivity to others' emotions... Training in clinical psychology enhances emotional intelligence, which includes the ability to recognize and understand emotions in oneself and others" (Mann et al., 2011, p. 123). As noted *from the data I guess I become something who is good at picking someone's emotions.*

Theme 3: Impact of Profession on Personal Lives of Clinical Psychologist

Better Interpersonal Relationships

Clinical psychologists develop more effective interpersonal skills, including conflict resolution, emotional expression, and intimacy, leading to more satisfying and fulfilling relationships" (Lambert & Ogles, 2014, p. 243). *I realized that I have better relationship or improve ummm communication with family members I know them better, I know what they want from me or what they need right now, that thing I never realized before I was confused before getting into that fieldand now I hold good relations with them ...*

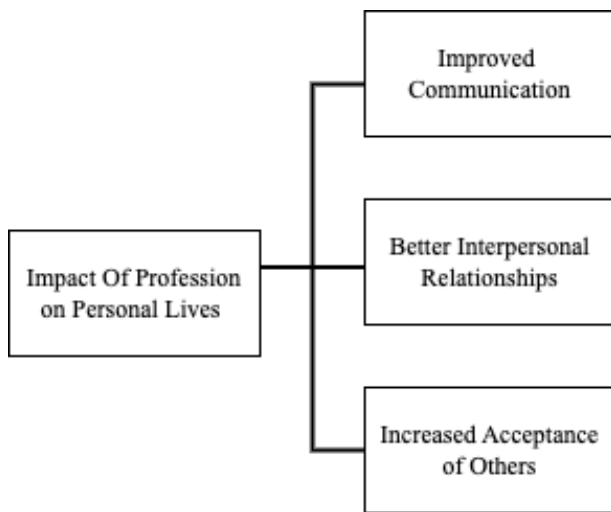
Improved Communication

Training in clinical psychology enhances communication skills, including verbal and nonverbal expression, active listening, and empathetic understanding, leading to more effective relationships with clients and others" (Hill et al., 2015, p. 259). *Psychology or my training helps me a lot about how I should communicate with people say things without offending others and I am more..... specific and select my words carefully and I really believe when you become more kind your way of saying things always changes or the way you communicate*

Increased Acceptance of Others

"Training in clinical psychology increases acceptance of others, including greater tolerance, understanding, and empathy towards individuals with diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and behaviors" (Gelso et al., 2011, p. 156). *I think I become more empathetic and kinder. see other people as a human and if I think I do have conflict with other person or not having good terms with them I try to see things from other perspective purely objectively, give people more margins and at point forgive them.*

Many of the themes that emerged from this investigation complement the findings and hypotheses discussed in previous literature. Guy (1987) had suspected that the therapist training process causes personality changes that result in a higher level of overall functioning and greater emotional stability. The fact that overall participants experienced improvements in their relationships and their lives in general supports this line of thinking. Additionally, it has been suggested that psychologist-in-training develop more mature relationships, become more self-aware, experience increase emotional stability, and more humble in their interactions with friends and family and more sensitive towards people's emotions (Maurice et al., 1975)



Discussion

The results from this study shows the influence of profession on personal lives or personality of psychologist. The researcher assumed that this would be the case, based on Mezirow “**Transformative Learning Theory** (Mezirow, 1991; 2000), which theorizes that the adult learning process can lead to self-reflection and personality re-organization, and that the lessons learned can be transferred to various aspects of the student’s life. As reported by participants, this appears to be true for the case of training and professional practice. Although empirical and/or causal associations cannot be made with the current methodology, the research increases our understanding of the subjectively reported effects of clinical psychologist training and work on the personal lives. Further, as an interesting note, it is fair to hypothesize that many of the themes pertaining to specific skills and abilities (such as improved communication or better interpersonal relationship) acted as transferable foundational skills which allowed for the other effects that emerged as themes. In addition to fitting with Mezirow’s theory, these findings also support the researcher’s personal belief that psychologist education and the practice of psychology affects one’s personal life.

We have three main themes 12 subthemes which are professional journey of psychologist, impact of professional live on personal lives and personality of clinical psychologist.

Turning to the aspects of the relationship with the family, the literature claims that therapists become

more tolerant, accepting, nurturing, understanding and patient in relation to their family members (Guy, 1987). This general claim is supported by various themes of the present study such as a better understanding of one’s core family members, a greater acceptance of other people, and improvement of interpersonal interactions.). In addition, these attributes are reported in the literature to enhance a therapist’s capacity to achieve emotional closeness and satisfaction with a husband or a wife through the work (Cray & Cray, 1977). Although this particular relationship did surface as an independent main category here, quotes towards themes relating to Song and Ilium for improved relationships, more presence, and sense of appreciation tends to echo the sentiments of Cray & Cray (1977).

Limitation

The results of this study are highly subjective as the research is qualitative, subjectivity is the mainstay of qualitative research and the subjective experiences we explored are not fully applicable to rest of the population. The next limitation is the small sample size of the population and research conclusion cannot be generalized to the whole population of selected sample. The interviews conducted online might have some communication barriers due to mode of interview. such as internet connectivity issue or the participants might have more connectedness during face to face interviews or might be they are more comfortable when taking interview at a place decided by them rather than online. Moreover, the psychologist populations we choose are clinical psychologist so the results will only be appropriate or applicable for clinical psychologist population not on counselors, child psychologist or any other field of psychologist. Additionally, although participants had all completed education between 2 and 10 years ago, all participants were in similar stages of life, in the sense that all were over the age of at least 30 or below 30 when entering their professional career, and all were at least 40 years old or less or more than 40 at the time at which the research interviews were conducted. Thus, it is difficult to account for maturation effects in the findings, as all of the participants would have been considered mature

students during their education. For this reason, replication of this research using professional psychologist who are younger in age would further contribute to the base of research on this and moreover, self-selection bias may have influenced the results found here. It is possible that those clinical psychologist who have been positively affected chose to participate in the study, while those whose personal lives have not been affected, or have been negatively affected, were not interested in participating.

Future Implications:

Future researchers can explore specific training programs for Clinical Psychologists that focus on self-care, stress management, and burnout prevention. Additionally, promoting workshops and conferences on coping strategies can help instill psychologist wellbeing and raise awareness about impact of burnout or positive changes that occur because of this profession . This investigation lays a crucial foundation for future research in an area of psychologist education and Clinical Psychology that is largely unexplored, including Developing evidence-based training models for psychologist wellbeing, Investigating the impact of secondary trauma on psychologists' mental health , Examining the role of supervision and mentorship in promoting psychologist wellbeing , Exploring the intersection of technology and psychologist wellbeing, Investigating the effects of psychologist wellbeing on treatment outcomes and client relationships. By exploring these areas, future research can contribute to the development of a more resilient and effective workforce in Clinical Psychology.

Conclusion:

Little research has been done in Pakistan on how professional practice of clinical psychologist can affect the personal lives of psychologist. As such, the current study helps to lay the foundation for future research in this area. This investigation complements the available research conducted in this area, and also helps to shed light on the largely anecdotal body of literature that exists on this topic from over two decade ago. 12 psychologist have participated in this investigation, taking part in semi-structured qualitative interviews where they have discussed their

subjective experience of how their practice has affected their personal lives in various ways.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Considerations

To protect the subjects from any unethical error, the research took into account all potential ethical concerns. The University's ethical board of committee gave clearance for the study on the current study.

Informed Consent

Every participant that was counted signed the informed permission form and completed the demographic questionnaire. Participants were told the value of their involvement and given assurances about the privacy of their information.

Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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