

Psychotherapy and First-Year University Psychology Student Perspectives on Personal Therapy: An Analytical Interpretation

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Psychotherapy plays a pivotal role in addressing the multifaceted challenges of mental health by offering diverse approaches to understanding and managing psychological disturbances. This research programme seeks to explore the perspectives, insights, and experiences of first-year psychology students regarding personal therapy. By focusing on this specific group, the study aims to investigate their understanding of psychotherapy and its critical contribution to fostering the psychological well-being of university students. Through qualitative analysis, the research identifies themes related to the importance of personal therapy in supporting the professional development of mental health practitioners in training. The findings not only illuminate the psychotherapeutic culture among university students but also carry significant implications for enhancing supportive frameworks and psychotherapeutic interventions within university settings, thereby improving student welfare and academic performance.

Keywords: Psychotherapy, First-Year University Students, Personal Therapy, Mental Health

Introduction

Psychotherapy, encompassing a comprehensive range of therapeutic techniques and approaches, represents a cornerstone of mental healthcare. Grounded in diverse theoretical frameworks, including psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural, humanistic, and existential perspectives, psychotherapy

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offers varied methodologies for understanding and mitigating psychological distress (Kok et al., 2024). Globally, the sustainability of psychotherapy as a vital instrument in mental health promotion is increasingly acknowledged. This is exemplified by the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) highlighting its significance during discussions on workplace mental health at the World Economic Forum's meeting on Mental Health in the Workplace (WHO, 2023). Such recognition underscores the pivotal role of psychotherapeutic services in fostering resilience and enhancing well-being across diverse socio-cultural contexts. (Gupta et al., 2023). Defined as a collaborative process between a trained therapist and an individual or group, psychotherapy aims to alleviate psychological distress, enhance well-being, and foster personal development (Association, 2010).

In China, the growing recognition of the significance of psychotherapy is evidenced in the China Mental Health Report (2021–2022), published by the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences (Institute of Science and Technology, 2023). This comprehensive report underscores the critical role of psychotherapy in addressing the complex mental health challenges faced by contemporary Chinese society. Amid the realities of a dynamic social landscape characterised by a diverse population and intricate societal patterns, the demand for psychotherapeutic services continues to increase (Sarkar et al., 2024). This rising demand highlights the importance of public awareness regarding psychotherapy, particularly for mental health professionals who will lead the field in the future. Within the domain of psychotherapy education, the foundational training provided to first-year psychology students holds particular importance. For these students, the academic journey begins with the inculcation of fundamental principles that serve as the cornerstone of their professional development in psychotherapy. Their beliefs and perceptions about psychotherapy play a pivotal role in shaping their approach to the field, ultimately influencing the evolution of the next generation of mental health professionals.

The scope of this research is to examine the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of psychology students already enrolled in university regarding their engagement with personal therapy. By presenting the students' perspectives on psychotherapy, this study aims to explore the perceived role of personal therapy in promoting the mental health and well-being of university students. Furthermore, the findings are anticipated to inform the development of specialised therapeutic techniques and support systems designed to enhance

students' emotional well-being and academic performance.

Literature Review

Concept of Psychotherapy

Psychodynamic psychotherapy

Psychodynamic psychotherapy, originally developed by Sigmund Freud, is grounded in the principle of the unconscious and offers a nuanced understanding of human behaviour through the lens of unconscious processes (S, 1915). Freud posited that conflicts stemming from childhood experiences manifest in symptoms such as anxiety and depression (S, 1901-1905). A central tenet of his theory is psychosexual development, which suggests that unresolved challenges during developmental stages can lead to enduring psychological issues in later life (S, 1901-1905). Additionally, Freud's structural model of the psyche, comprising the id, ego, and superego, along with defence mechanisms, provides a framework for understanding and managing internal conflicts (Freud, 1962; Freud & Bunker, 1936).

Building on Freudian foundations, contemporary psychodynamic psychotherapy integrates object relations theory, which focuses on the development of internal representations of self and others through early relational experiences (Kernberg, 1995; Winnicott, 1965). This theory underscores the significance of early attachment in shaping personality and interpersonal relationships, offering a comprehensive perspective on human behaviour that incorporates both psychological and social dimensions. The primary objective of psychoanalytic therapy is to bring unconscious conflicts and motives into conscious awareness, enabling individuals to gain insight into the underlying causes of psychological distress (Gabbard, 2014).

Psychotherapy based on behavioural theory

Behaviour therapy, rooted in behaviourism, focuses on how individuals learn and adapt to their environment. It prioritizes observable behaviours over inner thoughts and feelings, equipping individuals with coping skills to address mental health issues. Therapists analyse behavioural patterns, triggers, and reactions to develop interventions that replace problematic behaviours with healthier ones. Techniques include positive reinforcement, rewarding desired behaviours, and negative reinforcement, reducing triggers for undesirable behaviours. Behaviour therapy also employs strategies like systematic desensitization and exposure to address anxiety and fear. These techniques help

individuals understand and modify behaviour in a structured manner (Skinner, 2019).

Behaviour therapy asserts that behaviour is learned and can be altered through conditioning principles, focusing on observable behaviours and their antecedents and outcomes (Guercio, 2020). Classical conditioning pairs neutral and native stimuli to elicit desired responses (Newman et al., 2017). Operant conditioning highlights how rewards and punishments shape behaviour (Skinner, 2019). Techniques emphasise reinforcing positive behaviours and eliminating maladaptive ones, fostering pro-social behaviour. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) combines cognitive and behavioural principles, emerging as a leading evidence-based psychotherapy (Beck, 1979). It addresses the interplay of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, targeting maladaptive patterns causing distress. Common techniques include cognitive restructuring, behavioural trials, and problem-solving training, tailored to individual needs (Beck, 1979). CBT has evolved, integrating cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and technology. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a third-wave CBT approach, promotes psychological flexibility and value-based actions (Fang & Ding, 2023). Neuroscience advances reveal behavioural processes in psychological disorders, aiding treatment (Vlaeyen & Linton, 2012). Technology-assisted interventions, such as online CBT, further enhance accessibility and efficacy (Parsons & Rizzo, 2008).

Psychotherapy based on cognitive theory

Cognitive therapy, which helps clients address disorders by changing thoughts, beliefs, and interpretations (Beck, 1963), forms the foundation of cognitive-based psychotherapy. CBT, an effective treatment for psychological issues, involves identifying and replacing inaccurate, harmful thoughts and behaviours with constructive ones (Beck, 1979). Key techniques include cognitive restructuring, which challenges irrational beliefs, and behavioural activation, which combats depression by increasing engagement in rewarding activities (Jacobson et al., 2000). Research consistently supports CBT's effectiveness for conditions like depression, anxiety, PTSD, OCD, and eating disorders (Butler et al., 2006; Hofmann et al., 2012) with meta-analyses showing its superiority in achieving lasting symptom relief (Cuijpers et al., 2013; Hofmann et al., 2012).

A recent development in cognitive therapy is the emergence of third-wave therapies, which include ACT and DBT. These therapies utilise mindfulness-based and acceptance-based interventions to enhance emotional regulation

and psychological flexibility in patients (Whiting et al., 2017). Advances in neuroscience have provided valuable insights into the neurobiological mechanisms of the brain, and this knowledge is increasingly applied in the development of targeted mental health interventions for specific mental disorders (Siegle et al., 2007). Brain imaging studies have revealed neural correlates of cognitive biases and dysfunctions in emotion regulation, with these findings being considered as potential biomarkers for treatment response (Disner et al., 2011).

Humanistic Psychotherapy

Humanistic psychotherapy recognises the inherent capacity of individuals for self-awareness, self-actualisation, and personal growth (Rogers & Koch, 1959). In contrast to some psychotherapeutic approaches that focus on pathology or symptom alleviation, humanistic therapy prioritises the therapist's role in fostering a supportive, non-judgemental environment where clients can openly explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. A central concept within humanistic psychotherapy is unconditional positive regard, as introduced by (Rogers & Koch, 1959). Therapists aim to offer clients genuine acceptance, empathy, and understanding, creating a safe space for self-exploration and expression. Through this process, therapists help clients become more attuned to their present thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations, promoting greater self-awareness and insight. By emphasising the 'here and now,' humanistic therapy encourages clients to connect with their authentic selves and to live more fully in the present moment (Perls, 1969). Additionally, humanistic psychotherapy underscores personal responsibility and autonomy, empowering clients with agency over their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (Morrill, 2021). In summary, humanistic psychotherapy provides a comprehensive, person-centred approach to fostering personal growth and well-being.

Personal Therapy in Psychotherapy

Individual therapy is a fundamental aspect of psychotherapy, providing personalised strategies to assist clients in overcoming psychological challenges. Following an initial assessment, therapists develop customised treatment plans based on each patient's diagnosis, life circumstances, and therapeutic objectives (Association, 2010). This tailored approach allows therapists to monitor progress and modify interventions to ensure continued effectiveness. A critical element of individual therapy is the establishment of a strong therapeutic

alliance within a safe environment, enabling patients to explore emotions, address issues, and cultivate coping skills (Geller, 2023). Through guided reflection and communication, clients gain valuable insights and emotional resilience, which are essential for their overall well-being.

For psychology students, understanding individual therapy is essential for grasping its theoretical and practical aspects in promoting mental health. First-year students often view psychotherapy as tailored counselling for addressing psychological issues (Keefe et al., 2020). The therapeutic relationship between therapist and client is crucial for fostering personal growth and emotional development (Association, 2010). In conclusion, individual therapy is key to promoting mental health, offering a safe, effective space for self-exploration and healing, benefiting both clients and aspiring psychologists.

Application of Psychotherapy

The contemporary student population faces psychological challenges due to intellectual demands, pressure from final exams, and unclear learning objectives (Hofmann et al., 2012). These stressors can lead to anxiety, manifesting as concerns about grades, fear of failure, and concentration issues (Lister et al., 2021). If unaddressed, anxiety can worsen academic performance, creating a vicious cycle. Interpersonal conflicts, often arising from differences in lifestyles, living conditions, values, and academic collaboration, are common in college settings. These conflicts can lead to emotional instability, low self-esteem, and loneliness, negatively impacting students' psychological health. In conclusion, mentalisation therapy offers an important resource for addressing these psychological challenges.

Personal Therapy in Psychotherapy

Individual therapy is a cornerstone of psychotherapy, providing personalized tools to help clients address psychological challenges. After an initial assessment, therapists develop tailored treatment plans based on the patient's diagnosis, life circumstances, and goals (Association, 2010). This approach allows therapists to monitor progress and adjust interventions for continued effectiveness. A strong therapeutic alliance in a safe environment is key, enabling patients to explore emotions, resolve issues, and develop coping skills (Kornhaber et al., 2016). Through guided reflection and communication, clients gain insight and emotional resilience, essential for their well-being.

For psychology students, understanding individual therapy is crucial. As they explore its theoretical and practical dimensions, they gain insight into how

this approach supports mental health. First-year students often perceive psychotherapy as a form of tailored counselling designed to address psychological challenges (Woof et al., 2019). The therapeutic relationship between therapist and client is fundamental in fostering personal growth and emotional development (Association, 2010). In conclusion, individual therapy plays a pivotal role in enhancing mental health by offering a personalised, safe, and effective environment for self-exploration and healing.

Research Methodology

The methodology employed in this research is depicted in Figure 1, which illustrates that the study adopts a qualitative research approach. Interviews were conducted using a structured interview guide containing general questions aimed at gaining insights into the experiences of psychology students. Seven students were purposively selected for the study, and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This process involved generating codes, conducting the interviews, and identifying patterns to capture the full range of students' perceptions of individual therapy.

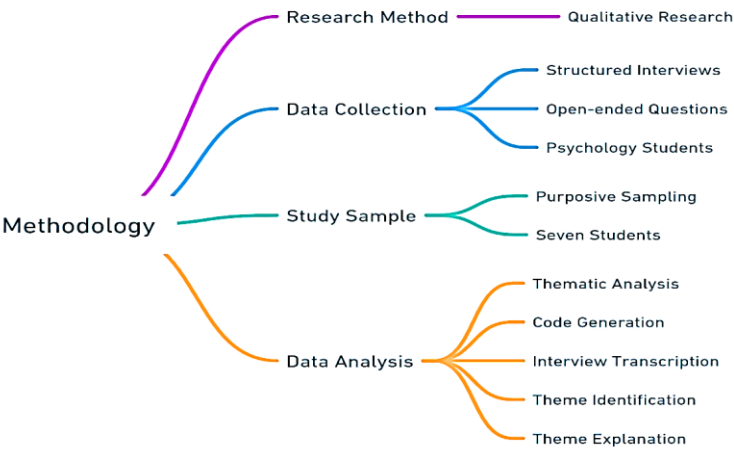


Figure 1: Overview of Research Method. (Source: Author)

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the attitudes of first-year psychology students towards individual therapy. The qualitative method is appropriate for capturing the unique perceptions of students and understanding how therapy influences their campus life and emotional growth.

Through this approach, the research aims to examine how students perceive individual therapy, its effectiveness, and the personal changes they undergo during treatment. This study aligns with the qualitative research paradigm, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of themes and patterns in psychological experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Given the exploratory nature of the study, semi-structured interviews were considered the most suitable method for data collection. This interview format is advantageous as it allows participants to elaborate on their views while ensuring that the key research questions are addressed. The study aims to explore specific aspects such as perceived barriers to therapy, the emotions experienced during therapy, and the role of therapy in the transformation of both personal and academic development. Additionally, the choice of a qualitative method enables the research to gather detailed insights from each participant, thereby enriching the understanding of how individual therapy influences the lives of psychology students.

Interview Questions

As evidenced by the interview questions, these were designed to elicit detailed responses from the students regarding their individual therapy experiences. The questions were organised into several categories to ensure that all relevant aspects of therapy were addressed. The following key areas that were explored:

Initial Perceptions of Therapy

1. "What were your thoughts on individual therapy before beginning your university studies?"
2. "Did your expectations change after experiencing therapy? If so, how?"

Personal Experience and Insights

1. "Can you describe any particular experiences in therapy that helped you gain insight into your emotions or behaviours?"
2. "How has therapy influenced your academic performance or motivation?"

Challenges and Obstacles

1. "What challenges did you face during therapy, and how were these challenges addressed?"
2. "Were there any moments when therapy felt difficult or unhelpful?"

Therapeutic Goals and Future Expectations

1. "What goals did you set for yourself in therapy, and were they achieved?"
2. "What do you hope to achieve from future therapy sessions?"

These questions are designed to gather information not only on the emotional and psychological impact of therapy but also on its role in the students' academic and personal development. Open-ended questions were intentionally used to provide students with the opportunity to fully articulate their views, without restricting their responses to predefined categories.

Keywords for Coding

To facilitate a systematic analysis, a list of keywords was developed to guide the coding process. These keywords were derived from the perspectives used for the subsequent thematic analysis and assisted in identifying recurring themes across the interviews. Some of the key terms utilised in the coding process include:

Emotional Growth

This refers to participants' enhanced ability to understand and manage their emotions through therapy.

Academic Performance

This captures how therapy may have contributed to improvements or changes in academic outcomes by enhancing emotional regulation, reducing stress, and fostering better coping strategies.

Perceived Obstacles

This identifies the challenges participants faced, such as stigma, time constraints, and difficulty building trust with therapists.

Transformational Impact:

This focuses on how therapy led to significant changes in participants' self-perception, coping skills, and relationships, fostering personal growth and emotional resilience.

Therapeutic Relationship

This encompasses participants' views on the importance of the client-therapist relationship in the success of therapy, highlighting trust, rapport, and mutual understanding as key factors in achieving positive outcomes.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven first-year psychology students to gather emotional and verbal accounts of their therapy experiences, ensuring anonymity and privacy. The interview guide focused on exploring students' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of therapy, while the flexible approach allowed for the exploration of unplanned topics. This method enabled the collection of qualitative data through participants' life stories and detailed therapy accounts.

Study Sample

The participants in this study consisted of seven first-year undergraduate psychology students, aged between 18 and 20 years, with an equal gender distribution. These students were purposively selected to ensure that all participants had experience with individual therapy, making them well-suited for the study's focus. While this purposive sampling method limited the generalisability of the findings, it was intentionally employed to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions, in line with the principles of qualitative research (Patton, 2014). The diversity in academic qualifications and individual experiences within the sample enhances the potential for generalising the findings to other students within the university. Although the sample size may be considered small, the in-depth exploration of the participants' life stories provides valuable insights into the impact of individual therapy on the lives of psychology students. This approach allows for a richer understanding of the subject matter, aligning with the qualitative research objective of capturing nuanced personal experiences.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, following several key stages: familiarisation with the data, development of initial codes, and identification of recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were examined iteratively to ensure the accuracy of coding and to identify any additional patterns that may have been overlooked during the initial review. Key aspects addressed in the analysis included participants' perceptions of the efficacy of therapy, their emotional concerns, and the changes induced by therapy in both personal and academic domains. Thematic analysis provided a structured framework for analysing and categorising the responses, ensuring that the results accurately reflected the

participants' experiences within the context of the study. Moreover, the use of previously identified coding keywords facilitated the extraction of core themes, ensuring that the analysis remained focused on the research goals and objectives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations played a crucial role in the development and implementation of the research strategies. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed of the study's purpose, and their consent to participate was obtained. They were made aware that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. To uphold confidentiality, all personal details were anonymised, and participants were assigned anonymous numbers to distinguish their responses. Ethical measures were also taken to ensure that all data collected was securely stored and protected. These practices were not only in alignment with institutional ethical standards but also fostered a sense of trust and openness among participants, encouraging their honest and voluntary involvement in the study.

Results

Interview Records

A total of fifty first-year psychology students enrolled in the course were selected as the target group. By using a semi-structured interview that concentrated on their knowledge, experiences, and expectations of the customised treatment, the goal was to gather their viewpoints. Fourteen specifically designed questions about participants' views and perceptions of individual treatment made up the interview survey. The following includes several questions and statements:

Question 1: Can you provide examples or describe your understanding of individual treatments to illustrate your knowledge?

Answer A: Psychotherapy is an individualized form of treatment designed to address the specific psychological needs of each person. For instance, it may involve helping individuals with anxiety by teaching them specific relaxation techniques that they can use independently to effectively manage their symptoms.

Answer B: Individual therapy, involving one-on-one sessions with a psychotherapist, is a core treatment for individuals facing psychological challenges. For example, individuals experiencing depression may engage in

therapeutic sessions aimed at fostering a positive outlook and developing coping strategies.

Answer C: In individual counselling, tailored psychotherapeutic interventions are chosen based on the specific psycho-social issues of the individual. For example, individuals experiencing social anxiety may engage in therapy sessions designed to enhance their social skills and build social confidence.

Answer D: One psychological treatment approach is individual therapy, which provides personalized solutions to a wide range of psychological issues. For instance, a patient experiencing insomnia may participate in therapy sessions that focus on techniques, using behavioural and cognitive methods, to improve sleep quality.

Answer E: Individual therapy allows individuals to address and overcome both chronic and temporary psychological issues. For instance, a person experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder may engage in counselling sessions aimed at managing stress symptoms, fostering resilience, and promoting psychological well-being.

Question 3: Can you share personal experiences or observations that have influenced your approach to individual therapy?

Answer A: My personal recovery experience through independent psychotherapy has had a profound impact on my approach, demonstrating how effective and essential individual therapy can be for genuine problem-solving and personal growth.

Answer B: My journey through individual therapy, though challenging, helped me develop emotional resilience and cognitive skills, underscoring its importance in fostering personal growth.

Answer C: Witnessing significant mental health improvements in friends who underwent individual therapy has deepened my appreciation for its role in fostering personal development and psychological strength.

Answer D: My active engagement with clients during therapy reinforced the need for personalized interventions in supporting psychological recovery, confirming the effectiveness of individual therapy in restoring wellness.

Answer E: Attending academic seminars and studying research on individual therapy has reinforced my belief in its effectiveness, sparking a deeper interest in studying and applying this therapeutic approach.

Question 5: What specific goals or outcomes do you hope to achieve with individual treatment? How can therapy help you achieve these goals?

Answer A: My aim is to reduce anxiety and depression while improving mental health. Therapy helps recognize negative thought patterns, promotes a positive outlook, and encourages adaptive behaviours for better well-being.

Answer B: My objective is to assist individuals in developing self-awareness and emotional regulation, thereby fostering resilience. Through active listening and professional guidance, therapy promotes self-discovery and enhances problem-solving abilities.

Answer C: The aim is to enhance clients' social and communication skills, thereby improving personal and romantic relationships through effective conflict resolution and collaboration.

Answer D: I aim to assist individuals in defining their goals and discovering their sense of purpose. Therapy fosters self-discovery, creativity, and motivation, encouraging the pursuit of personal aspirations.

Answer E: The primary goal is to facilitate deep emotional healing and spiritual growth. Therapy offers a safe space for clients to process past traumas and gain a renewed perspective on life.

Question 7: Can you provide examples or describe the qualities and skills you believe a therapist must have?

Answer A: A therapist must possess a solid understanding of psychological theory to comprehend the complexities of an individual's condition. For instance, when treating a depressed patient, therapists apply psychological principles to assess symptoms and create personalised treatment plans.

Answer B: Communication skills, such as active listening and clear articulation, are essential for a therapist. Therapists effectively summarise issues and offer precise feedback. For example, they explore childhood experiences, listen with empathy, and guide the client's thought process.

Answer C: Practitioners must possess acute perceptiveness to interpret verbal and non-verbal signals, enabling them to modify therapy as required. Therapists alleviate anxiety during discussions, fostering a more tranquil and pleasant atmosphere.

Answer D: A multitude of exemplary therapists engage in self-reflection and ongoing education. Through the analysis of past experiences and the assimilation of criticism, they refine their skills and enhance their efficacy with customers.

Answer E: Ethics and compassion are essential for any competent therapist. Upholding client dignity, privacy, and autonomy is essential. Therapists facilitate client empowerment by honouring their choices and abstaining from

imposing personal biases, so fostering the client's growth and self-determination.

Question 9: Before discussing, can you briefly explain your understanding of different individual treatment methods, such as cognitive behavioural therapy or humanistic therapy?

Answer A: The objective of CBT is to alter maladaptive thoughts and behaviours. It assists both individuals and organisations in identifying and rectifying errors, so strengthening emotional well-being and improving the adaptive process. CBT, frequently employed for depression and anxiety, is seen as beneficial for enhancing an individual's cognitive structure, hence serving as an effective mechanism for managing life's fluctuations.

Answer B: The humanistic approach to therapy encompasses personal development and various psychological experiences. It is the origin of the inherent potential for flourishing, where self-awareness and self-discovery evolve. Humanistic therapists function by fostering an environment that encourages individuals to express themselves freely, ultimately facilitating authentic self-actualization and personal growth.

Answer C: CBT enhances an individual's understanding of the comprehensive interplay between thoughts, emotions, and actions. It provides individuals the cognitive tools to detect and reconstruct negative thought processes, serving as an effective means for emotional regulation through behavioural modifications. Cognitive behavioural therapy fosters human agency by assisting individuals in cultivating healthy lifestyles and coping strategies.

Answer D: Individualistic therapy emphasises self-identity and subjective reality, encouraging individuals to discover an internal source for their own vitality and independence. It emphasises a collaborative, equitable connection between therapist and individual to deliberately explore and understand the person in order to foster self-reliance. Humanistic therapy, grounded in an individualistic and meaning-oriented perspective on life, fosters a fulfilling and valuable journey.

Answer E: Despite their differing emphases, CBT and humanistic therapy both prioritise mental health and personal development. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy addresses issues via cognitive and behavioural modifications, while humanistic therapies focus on inner potential and self-actualization. Therapists may either integrate or select a method from these options to enhance therapeutic efficacy.

Question 11: In addition to the current status quo, what trends or developments do you foresee in personalized treatment in the future? What factors do you think will influence its acceptance and use?

Answer A: A technologically advanced future may utilise gene editing and cell therapy to tailor solutions on a scale significant to the individual. As technology continues to advance in affordability and accessibility, adoption rates will also increase. Due to the recent rise in technological dominance and declining costs, individuals can obtain personalised treatment.

Answer B: As personalised treatment advances in precision, it is likely to adopt a multidisciplinary strategy that incorporates expertise from several medical specialities. The public's awareness and confidence in personalised therapy will determine the acceptance of the strategy. Consequently, public information should be enhanced to inform the public about personalised treatments and their implementation.

Answer C: Data-driven personalised medicine likely involves the extraction of extensive information and the execution of analytical operations utilising that data. Nonetheless, the concerns over data ownership and privacy could significantly influence its adoption. Secondly, the proper utilisation of patient data for therapy optimisation must align with the assurance of privacy.

Answer D: Personalised treatment may enable patients to have enriching experiences or address specific needs. The enhancement of regulations will contribute to its growing popularity. Government action via supporting policies and effective regulation is essential for specialist services to address demands.

Answer E: Upcoming advancements in therapy will be intriguing to see, encompassing technological advances, multidisciplinary integration, data-driven methodologies, and enhancements in patient-centred care. The elements influencing its acceptance encompass technical cost, public perception, data privacy, and legislative initiatives. Implementing a cohesive array of solutions for these concerns will effectively foster broad acceptance and interchange of personalised therapy.

Question 13: How does your attitude toward individual therapy affect your career aspirations in the field of psychology?

Answer A: My favourable perspective on individual therapy has profoundly influenced my job decision. I perceive it as essential for comprehending individual requirements, which drives my aspiration to become a counselling psychologist and assist others.

Answer B: Individual therapy has directed my interest towards clinical psychology. I am pursuing further skills via training and workshops to provide successful therapeutic approaches.

Answer C: Personal practice has underscored the significance of communication and teamwork. I concentrate on enhancing interpersonal skills and empathy to establish robust rapport with patients.

Answer D: Individual therapy fuels my passion for continuous learning in psychology. I prioritise contemporary approaches and innovative interventions in my practice.

Answer E: My perspective on individual therapy drives my career aspirations, motivating me to explore new research and methodologies. I strive to offer intuitive, personalised treatments that integrate the dynamic advancements in psychotherapy.

Interview Analysis

In this qualitative study, seven first-year psychology students were asked open-ended questions to explore their experiences with individual therapy. Thematic analysis identified key themes: perceived benefits, emotional and psychological challenges, therapy's impact on personal and educational development, and barriers to effective therapy. Findings revealed a complex attitude towards therapy, including acceptance and concerns such as mental health stigma, privacy, and access to therapy.

Perceived Benefits of Therapy

One emerging theme from the analysis was the role of psychotherapy in addressing participants' mental health needs. Students recognised individual therapy as a technique for fostering emotional development. It provided a space for them to discuss feelings and psychological concerns with a professional, gaining insight into their behaviour patterns. Some students noted that this reflective process helped them self-regulate emotions and learn adaptive coping strategies, crucial for their well-being during the transitional freshman year. del Corso (2017) similarly found that psychotherapy enhances young adults' ability to manage emotions and cope with new developmental challenges.

One participant mentioned, "Therapy helped me understand the root of my anxiety and gave me tools to manage it, which allowed me to focus better on my studies." This reflects the emotional growth theme, illustrating how therapy supports emotional stability in dealing with anxiety. Another participant linked therapy to academic success, stating that it reduced stress levels and provided

clarity, thus helping them reach their academic goals. This is supported by (Conley et al., 2013), who found that therapy enhances stress management, ultimately leading to better academic performance.

Many participants identified positive changes following therapy, particularly in their autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These improvements were linked to the challenges they faced during their transition to university life. This theme was categorised as transformational, as participants reported significant shifts in their perceptions and behaviours, contributing to their personal development. Their experiences highlighted the importance of therapy in supporting them through transitional phases, underscoring the value of personalised care. In conclusion, therapy not only addressed students' emotional needs but also served as a vital tool for achieving success during their academic journey.

Challenges Faced in Therapy

Several perceived barriers to effective therapy emerged from the interviews, despite the evident benefits of therapy. A major challenge was the cultural stigma surrounding therapy, particularly within a university environment, where students feared being viewed as weak or unable to cope. For example, two participants mentioned they only agreed to attend therapy with their spouse to avoid being perceived as 'crazy'. One student shared, "I did not want people to know that I was in therapy because I believed that it meant that there was something wrong with me." This stigma, combined with a lack of mental health awareness, hindered students from fully embracing therapy. (Corrigan & Rao, 2012) note that self-stigma and limited access to healthcare often prevent individuals from seeking necessary mental health services, even when they recognise the need.

Despite the clear benefits of therapy, several barriers to its effectiveness emerged from the interviews. A significant challenge was the cultural stigma surrounding therapy, particularly in a university setting, where students feared being perceived as weak or incapable of coping. For instance, two participants stated they only agreed to attend therapy with their spouse to avoid being seen as 'crazy'. One student expressed, "I did not want people to know that I was in therapy because I believed that it meant that there was something wrong with me." This stigma, compounded by a lack of mental health awareness, prevented students from fully embracing therapy. Corrigan and Rao (2012) highlight that self-stigma and limited access to healthcare often deter individuals from seeking mental health services, even when they recognise the need.

Another barrier identified by participants was access to therapy. Several students expressed difficulty with therapy scheduling, citing long wait times and clashes with class timetables. One participant explained, "I wanted to continue with therapy, but most of the time I had to fit it around my class schedule, and it was often difficult to arrange at a convenient time. It's frustrating because you know you need help, but can't get it at the right time." This aligns with findings by Eisenberg et al. (2007) who note that logistical barriers, such as scheduling conflicts and long wait times, are significant deterrents for students seeking mental health services.

Role of Therapeutic Relationship

The relationship between therapist and client was identified as a crucial factor influencing the effectiveness of therapy. Several students noted that their relationship with the therapist significantly impacted the outcomes of their sessions. One participant described their therapist as "someone who I believe had an interest in my welfare," highlighting the importance of empathy, trust, and encouragement in fostering a productive therapeutic relationship. This aligns with Norcross and Wampold (2011) findings, which identify the therapeutic relationship as one of the most robust predictors of therapeutic success. Students perceived trust and rapport with their therapist as essential for creating a safe environment where they felt comfortable expressing themselves during therapy.

Participants expressed appreciation for holistic, client-centred approaches that incorporated various therapeutic methods, including CBT and humanistic therapies. They valued therapists who did not adhere rigidly to one model but instead adapted their approach based on the client's needs and progress. This flexibility helped students feel that their perspectives were valued, fostering trust in the therapist and contributing to effective therapy. Lambert and Barley (2001) support this finding, noting that therapists who work in a client-centred manner and adjust their approach to meet individual needs are more likely to build strong therapeutic relationships and achieve better outcomes.

Clients' engagement was identified as a key factor in the therapeutic relationship, with several students highlighting how feeling safe and supported encouraged them to fully embrace therapy. A positive, flexible working alliance fostered not only participation but also personal growth and the resolution of psychological distress. Such a relationship was characterised by trust, respect, and mutual understanding, all of which were deemed essential for successful therapeutic outcomes. This emphasis on trust and flexibility underscores the

importance of a person-centred approach, where the interpersonal dynamics of the therapeutic relationship are central to the process.

Influence of Psychotherapy on Knowledge System

A prominent issue identified during the interviews was how psychotherapy enhanced students' understanding of psychological theories and concepts, thereby enriching their learning. Several participants noted that they were able to observe first-hand how these theories were applied in therapy and how they could be beneficial in real-life situations. One student expressed this connection by stating, "The theories that I learnt in class were made real to me through therapy. It was not just something theoretical; it was something I experienced personally." This highlights how therapy bridged the gap between theory and practice, making psychological concepts more tangible and applicable for students.

The correlation between therapy and academic achievement suggests that psychotherapy may serve as a form of inductive learning. Students reported that their therapeutic experiences enabled them to grasp psychological concepts more deeply than what was taught in class. Theories related to emotional regulation, cognitive structures, and humanism became more meaningful when demonstrated in therapeutic contexts. Makransky et al. (2016) similarly found that many participants recognised how personal therapy helped them bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world application, thereby supporting their academic knowledge.

For many students, the practical approach of therapy provided a deeper understanding of psychological theories and their real-life applications. It helped them apply concepts in practice, enhancing their ability to analyse events in line with the academic curriculum. This hands-on experience improved their learning and focus in class. Such findings align with the study of Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) who noted that personal therapy enhanced psychology students' understanding of therapeutic practices. Furthermore, several participants reflected that their therapy experiences gave them a new perspective on psychology, enriching their theoretical knowledge and contributing to their career development.

Therapy can be enjoyable and foster personal growth, contributing to both academic and professional success, which is why it holds broader educational value. Psychotherapy not only helped students address personal issues but also enriched their academic experience, offering metaphorical insights linked to their psychology courses. These theoretical connections illustrate how therapy

can influence students' academic choices and career paths in psychology. By actively engaging with these concepts, students developed a deeper, more comprehensive understanding, enhancing their academic performance and preparing them for future careers.

Benefits and Limitations of Introspection

The interviews highlighted both the benefits and challenges of using introspection as the primary therapeutic approach. Some students expressed that therapy provided them with an opportunity for personal reflection, helping them rediscover themselves and gain insight into their thoughts, emotions, and actions. One participant stated, "Through therapy, one is able to analyse past experiences that lead to the present self. This was really enlightening and enabled me to understand things that I had not thought about." This reflects the critical role of introspection in promoting self-awareness and understanding emotional and psychological patterns. For these students, introspection proved to be a valuable tool for addressing their mental health challenges. Grant et al. (2002) support this, noting that self-reflection enhances self-awareness and personal development.

The interviews also revealed the limitations of relying solely on introspection in therapy. Some students indicated that while reflexive analysis helped identify emotional issues, it was not enough to address deeper psychological concerns. One student shared, "I noticed some overthinking and a tendency to be lost in my thoughts at times; I wanted my therapist to give me more practical tips on how to proceed." This highlights the potential drawback of over-relying on introspection, as it can become overwhelming without guidance. Teasdale et al. (2000) acknowledge the value of introspection but stress that it must be combined with techniques like CBT for lasting change. These insights suggest that integrating introspective approaches with other methods, such as CBT or solution-focused techniques, is crucial in helping students effectively manage mental health issues.

In conclusion, the semi-structured interviews with first-year psychology students provided valuable insights into their experiences with individual therapy. While the students recognised the positive impact of therapy on their mental health and academic performance, issues such as stigma, privacy concerns, and affordability emerged. These challenges highlight the need for universities to address these barriers by improving mental health services and supporting students' emotional wellbeing. By doing so, universities can foster

a supportive environment that promotes personal growth and academic success.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of individual therapy for first-year psychology students, uncovering their multifaceted beliefs about treatment and emphasizing the therapeutic benefits of self-recognition and resilience, while addressing accessibility concerns. Psychology faculty, particularly during the freshman year, should help students understand the benefits and limitations of individual therapy, integrating mental health education into the curriculum to provide students with information about treatment, common issues, and available resources. Universities should create stigma-free spaces for open discussions about mental wellbeing and implement support programs, such as peer groups and mental health events, to encourage treatment-seeking behaviours. Additionally, experiential learning, including roleplays and therapy simulations, can help students better understand therapy processes. To ensure accessibility, universities must offer affordable counselling services and promote community resources, fostering a supportive environment that enhances students' mental health knowledge, career readiness, and overall wellbeing.

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Appendix

Interview Transcript

How do you feel about personal therapy?

1. Can you provide examples or describe your understanding of individual therapy to illustrate your knowledge?
2. How has your understanding of individual therapy evolved since beginning your studies in psychology? Are there specific psychological concepts or theories that have influenced this evolution?
3. Could you share any personal experiences or observations that have influenced your attitudes towards individual therapy?
4. In what scenarios do you believe individual therapy could be most beneficial, and why do you hold these beliefs?
5. What specific goals or outcomes would you hope to achieve through individual therapy, and how do you envision therapy helping you reach these goals?
6. Are there any concerns or misconceptions you have about individual therapy that you would like to address?
7. Can you provide examples or describe the qualities and skills you believe are essential for a therapist to possess?
8. How do you perceive the importance of the therapeutic relationship in the effectiveness of individual therapy?
9. Before discussing, could you briefly explain your understanding of different individual therapy methods, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy or humanistic therapy?
10. What factors influence your preference for certain treatment methods, and how do they align with your beliefs about therapy?
11. Beyond its current status, what trends or developments do you anticipate for individual therapy in the future, and what factors do you think will influence its acceptance and usage?
12. What challenges or obstacles do you foresee in the future development of individual therapy, and how might they be addressed?
13. How do your attitudes towards individual therapy influence your career aspirations within the field of psychology?
14. Can you elaborate on your considerations for potentially working in an individual therapy setting, including any factors that may influence this decision?