

The Views of Mental Health Professionals Towards Psychotherapy— A Singapore Survey

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Abstract

Objective: There is no published data on how mental health professionals (MHPs) in developing Asian countries view psychotherapy. Since practitioners of psychotherapy may come from both medical and non-medical (e.g. clinical psychology, social work, counselling) backgrounds, differences between the 2 groups may have practical significance. The aims of this study were to examine the views of MHPs in Singapore towards psychotherapy and to determine if there are differences in the views of psychiatric versus non-psychiatric professionals. **Materials and Methods:** Fourteen statements covering various aspects of psychotherapy were given to a sizeable sample of MHPs consisting 70 psychiatric and 70 non-psychiatric professionals. Their responses on a 5-point Likert scale were analysed using appropriate statistical tests to determine similarities and differences of the 2 groups. **Results:** Despite essential agreement in the definition of psychotherapy, significant differences exist between the 2 groups in the following areas: (1) distinction between psychotherapy and counselling, (2) use of medication during psychotherapy, (3) whether the duration of psychotherapy should be determined at the start of treatment, and (4) whether negative effects of psychotherapy exist. There was consensus that psychotherapy should be stopped when psychotic symptoms emerge in the course of such treatment. **Conclusions:** Significant similarities and differences exist in the views of psychiatrists and the other MHPs. The practical implications of these findings for psychotherapy training and the provision of psychotherapy services in Asia are discussed. Literature is reviewed to address the issues raised.

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