

Clinical parapsychology: Counselling experiences of clients who report anomalous experiences and the training needs of therapists

ABSTRACT:

Objectives

To investigate 1) the experiences of clients who have reported anomalous experiences (AEs) in secular counselling services, 2) the experiences of therapists who work with such clients, and 3) the training needs of students.

Methods

Questionnaires were used to investigate the range and incidence of AEs, interviews were conducted with clients and therapists, and an online survey and focus groups explored the training needs of students.

Results

Few clients reported AEs in a secular counselling service over a one-year period ($N= 8$). Consequently, an additional study was undertaken on help-seeking for AEs (i.e., if individuals do not seek support from counselling services, where do they seek support or do they not seek support?). When clients did seek counselling the majority of participants we interviewed said that they felt dismissed when they tried to discuss AEs or reported that their counsellor did not take into account their worldview. Therapists reflected on how clients are often reluctant to disclose AEs to them for fear of being seen as 'mad'. They emphasised the importance of exploring the meaning with clients rather than imposing an explanation or making a judgement as to the authenticity of AEs. Most of the students that took part in the focus groups felt that they were unequipped to work with clients who reported AEs and stated that they had not received any training on these issues.

Conclusions

Findings have implications for clients in terms of accessibility of services, engagement with therapy, and psychological adjustment following AEs. It would be useful for therapists to have reliable and accurate information about AEs and/or for students to be introduced to the topic whilst undertaking training.

Keywords

Anomalous experiences, Clinical parapsychology, Counselling/psychotherapy; Thematic analysis, Qualitative methods

Published Work:

Roxburgh, E. C., & Evenden, R. E. (2016). "It's about having exposure to this": Investigating the training needs of therapists in relation to the issue of anomalous experiences. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*. doi: 10.1080/03069885.2016.1213375

Roxburgh, E. C., & Evenden, R. E. (2016). "Most people think you're a fruit loop": Clients' experiences of seeking support for anomalous experiences. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 16, 211-221. doi: 10.1002/capr.12077

Roxburgh, E. C., & Evenden, R. E. (2016). "They daren't tell people": Therapists experiences of working with clients who report anomalous experiences [Special Issue: 'What is paranormal: Some implications for the psychological therapies?']. *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*, 18, 123-141. doi: 10.1080/13642537.2016.1170059

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