Social Workers' Narratives of Experiences and Transformations Through Personal Psychotherapy

Eleni Konstanti; Kountouras Georgios

Democritus University of Thrace, Greece

E-mail: gkountou@sw.suth.gr

Abstract

Psychotherapy constitutes an evidence-based method aimed at promoting psychological well-being, grounded in diverse theoretical frameworks and reliant upon the clinical competencies of the psychotherapist. It represents a dynamic and collaborative process involving the exploration of an individual's internal experiences and the effective resolution of psychosocial and emotional difficulties. Participation in psychotherapy has been shown to alleviate symptoms of mental disorders, enhance quality of life, and contribute meaningfully to continuous personal growth and development. Social workers, who operate simultaneously as mental health professionals and as individuals facing their own personal challenges, appear to derive substantial benefit from engaging in personal psychotherapy. Their motivations for seeking therapeutic support often encompass the need to manage the emotional toll of their profession, navigate ethical dilemmas, strengthen empathic capacities, pursue personal development, and cultivate a heightened sensitivity to issues of diversity. The present study aims to investigate the impact of personal psychotherapy on social workers, with particular emphasis on its influence on both personal well-being and professional practice. Specifically, it seeks to examine the ways in which therapeutic engagement shapes cognitive and emotional processes, professional competencies, and relational dynamics with service users. Drawing upon semi-structured interviews with nine social workers from diverse occupational contexts, the findings underscore the significance of psychotherapy as a catalyst for professional self-improvement, a preventative measure against occupational burnout, a means of reinforcing professional integrity, and a vital source of personal relief and empowerment.

Keywords: *Social Workers; Personal Psychotherapy; Professional Development; Emotional Well-Being; Transformative Experiences*

Introduction

Psychotherapy constitutes a therapeutic approach aimed at enhancing an individual's psychological well-being. It is grounded in theoretical frameworks drawn from various psychological

schools of thought and is facilitated by the professional skills of the therapist. It represents a dynamic and collaborative process that requires a profound understanding of the individual's internal experiences and seeks to address emotional and psychological challenges in a meaningful and experiential manner. Through the therapeutic relationship and process, psychotherapy can contribute to the reduction of mental health symptoms, improve quality of life, and foster ongoing personal growth.

Social workers, on the one hand, serve a critical role in promoting the mental health of their clients, families, and communities, and on the other hand, are individuals who carry their own personal experiences and challenges. They appear to benefit substantially from engaging in personal psychotherapy. The reasons prompting social workers to seek therapy include the need to manage the emotional demands of their professional lives, navigate ethical dilemmas, cultivate empathy, pursue continuous personal development, and enhance sensitivity to diversity.

Social Workers and Personal Psychotherapy

Within the field of mental health and care, social workers play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing individuals' psychological needs. Personal psychotherapy emerges as a vital factor in their personal development and self-improvement, influencing both professional and personal trajectories. According to Ryff and Singer (2008), personal growth is a lifelong process of self-discovery, self-enhancement, and self-actualization. Through this process, individuals come to recognize both their strengths and vulnerabilities, setting meaningful goals for development.

Psychotherapy, in particular, facilitates deeper self-awareness and fosters a heightened sense of personal insight (Beck, 2011). Self-awareness forms a cornerstone of professional ethics and effectiveness and is a fundamental pillar of the psychotherapeutic experience. Furthermore, self-care is a foundational practice for all mental health professionals, as it helps prevent burnout and enhances resilience (Barnett & Cooper, 2009). Self-care activities vary widely but are primarily focused on managing stress and sustaining overall well-being.

Given the emotionally demanding nature of their work, social workers often utilize supervision, consultation, or peer support to process challenging cases and ethical dilemmas (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014). Their profession is characterized by high emotional intensity and stress, underscoring the necessity of consistent support systems (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). As Bride (2007) notes, personal psychotherapy offers a secure environment for processing traumatic experiences arising from continual exposure to human suffering.

Traumatic encounters are common in social work practice, intensifying the need to effectively manage emotional burden. Psychotherapy plays a significant role in promoting self-care and ongoing professional development. By focusing on psychological resilience, it enables social workers to preserve professional mindfulness and sustain a sense of vocational purpose (Barnett & Cooper, 2009).

Moreover, psychotherapy cultivates the professional's empathy, enriching their understanding of clients' lived experiences (Farber, 2010). By processing personal emotions and reactions, social workers strengthen their self-awareness, thereby improving interpersonal relationships in both professional and personal contexts (Corey, 2016).

Figley (2002) highlights that working closely with trauma survivors can lead to secondary traumatic stress, emotional exhaustion, and professional deterioration. Personal psychotherapy functions as a preventive mechanism against such risks, providing a stable framework for empowerment and self-regulation.

Additionally, the therapeutic relationships that social workers develop may involve complex issues of boundaries, countertransference, and ethical ambiguity. Psychotherapy aids professionals in recognizing personal patterns and biases, establishing clear and healthy boundaries, and managing client

relationships while maintaining professional integrity (Gelso & Hayes, 2007). As Reamer (2018) emphasizes, psychotherapy facilitates the avoidance of projecting personal issues onto clients, thus safeguarding the quality of service delivery.

According to Bernard and Goodyear (2018), psychotherapy can function as a complement to clinical supervision, offering a secure space for reflection and personal guidance. In a constantly evolving social landscape, social workers are called upon to demonstrate heightened cultural competence. Psychotherapy supports exploration of the professional's own cultural identity and promotes acceptance of diversity. By understanding their own biases, practitioners are better equipped to approach clients from varied cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds with empathy and respect (Sue & Sue, 2016).

In summary, personal psychotherapy represents an indispensable tool for social workers, significantly contributing to the strengthening of their professional identity and psychological resilience. In order to respond to the needs of others with consistency and sensitivity, social workers must actively care for their own mental health. Through the psychotherapeutic process, they establish a reflective and developmental space that nurtures their integrity and protects the ethical standards of their profession.

Research Aim and Objectives

The present study aims to explore the impact of personal psychotherapy on social workers, both at a personal and professional level. Given that social workers are engaged daily with populations facing a range of social and psychological challenges, personal psychotherapy may serve as a critical tool for enhancing their psychological resilience, self-awareness, and professional efficacy.

The research seeks to document the effects of the psychotherapeutic experience on professionals in the field, to highlight the specific benefits observed following the completion of therapy, and to examine how such experiences influence their self-perceptions and professional practice. Simultaneously, the study attempts to capture the changes participants identify in their daily lives, in order to highlight psychotherapy as a factor of personal and professional empowerment.

Specifically, the objectives of the research are:

- To document the effects of the psychotherapeutic process on the mental and professional well-being of social workers;

- To identify the specific outcomes observed after the completion of psychotherapy;

- To investigate how psychotherapy influences social workers' perceptions and thinking regarding themselves and their professional practice;

- And to record changes in their daily and professional lives, as experienced and articulated by the participants themselves.

Research Instrument

This study employed the semi-structured interview as the primary research instrument for data collection. The semi-structured interview allows participants to articulate their thoughts and experiences freely, while also enabling the researcher to pose SWMrifying questions or adjust the flow of the discussion in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' views and perceptions. This method enhances the narrative dimension of experience and enables an in-depth exploration of the participants' subjective understandings.

The semi-structured interview follows a guide with predetermined questions, yet offers flexibility to the researcher to modify or omit certain questions according to the natural progression of the conversation. Open-ended questions are used to encourage reflective thinking and deeper exploration of the topic, while closed-ended questions serve to gather basic personal data. This data collection method provides the opportunity to capture authentic and detailed information with minimal researcher interference, thereby ensuring the objectivity of the results.

As emphasized in the literature (Berg, 2009), the semi-structured interview promotes participant engagement in the research process and allows individuals to express their personal experiences as they naturally unfold, without being constrained by rigid frameworks.

Sample

The study sample consisted of nine social workers who had either been in psychotherapy for at least two years or had completed a therapeutic process of more than two years in duration. Participants represented a variety of psychotherapeutic approaches. Sampling was based on the snowball and criterion sampling methods. The primary inclusion criterion was engagement in psychotherapy within the past two years.

The sample included six female and three male social workers, with an average age of 35, residing in various cities across Greece, with one participant based abroad.

Data Analysis Method

The data collected in this study were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), aiming at an in-depth understanding of the participants' subjective experiences. This methodological approach focuses on how individuals perceive, interpret, and make sense of personal experiences, placing emphasis on their thoughts, emotions, and meaning-making processes (Smith et al., 2009). The purpose is not to generalize findings, but rather to explore in depth the meanings participants assign to their lived experiences (Tsiolis, 2015).

The selection of IPA as the methodological framework was deemed appropriate for this study, as it facilitated the analysis of complex personal experiences in a sensitive and meaningful way. It allowed participants' voices to emerge and highlighted their own interpretations of their experiences. IPA thus provided a suitable lens for examining the intricate and nuanced ways in which social workers reflect upon and understand their psychotherapeutic journeys.

Data Analysis

Theme 1: Reasons for Initiating Psychotherapy

One of the most prominent and recurring narratives emerging from the interviews concerns the reasons that led participants to begin psychotherapy. A detailed analysis of the interviews revealed a shared foundational theme: the experience of panic attacks emerged as the primary and catalytic factor that drove the majority of participants to seek therapeutic support.

This aligns with the dominant narrative type of «crisis as a breaking point," where psychotherapy is not approached as a preventive choice, but rather as a necessary response to a perceived psychological collapse. These crises were not described as isolated anxiety episodes but as intense and disorganizing experiences—both psychologically and somatically—that disrupted daily functioning and triggered a need for external support.

The Panic Attack as a Critical Starting Point

Participants described powerful panic attacks—whether isolated shocks or recurring phenomena—as the moment when their internal distress became unmanageable. These experiences were perceived as traumatic, marked by somatic manifestations and an overwhelming loss of control.

«I decided to start therapy after a panic attack I had when I was 24. » (SWW1)[1]

This narrative reflects the panic attack as a disruptive event functioning as a wake-up call, an existential rupture that necessitates psychological intervention. It corresponds to the narrative type of «acute awakening", where the decision to start therapy follows a dramatic event laden with emotional and existential significance. Here, psychotherapy is not sought spontaneously or preemptively, but as a response to a crisis that surpasses one's coping capacity.

Recurrent Crises and Escalating Intensity

In other cases, it was not a single event but the repetition of panic attacks, accompanied by feelings of helplessness and fear, that prompted the decision to seek therapy.

«I started going [to therapy] because I had some panic attacks… to learn how to manage them.» (SWW3)

The recurring nature of these crises and the inability to control them amplified participants' sense of disorientation and entrapment. This reflects a cumulative deterioration narrative, where therapy is sought as a tool for emotional containment and coping with persistent dysregulation. Psychotherapy, therefore, is perceived as the only viable option for regaining functionality and emotional balance.

Somatization and Psychological Collapse

The lived experience of crisis often manifested in intense physical symptoms—numbness, sensory loss, «darkness"—which amplified the sense of danger and prompted recognition of deeper psychological struggles.

«I couldn't feel my head… it was numb. Everything looked black.» (SWW3)

This account exemplifies the somatic disintegration narrative type, where the psychological crisis is experienced as a breakdown of bodily and sensory coherence. The blurring of the body-mind boundary marks a total disorganization, signaling a critical need for therapeutic containment. Here, the crisis transcends psychological discomfort and becomes an embodied existential emergency.

Panic Attacks Accompanied by Other Disorders

In several cases, panic attacks were accompanied by secondary or comorbid conditions, such as agoraphobia or generalized anxiety, further intensifying emotional distress and complicating everyday functioning.

«And I started having panic attacks and severe agoraphobia.» (SWM8)[2]

This reflects a multiplex crisis narrative, where the therapeutic need goes beyond managing a single symptom and instead encompasses a range of interconnected psychological burdens. Psychotherapy here serves as a more holistic intervention, addressing complex emotional and functional challenges.

---

[1] Social Worker Woman
[2] Social Worker Man

Personal Growth and Self-Exploration

While panic attacks were the predominant reason for initiating therapy, some participants cited personal introspection and a desire for self-understanding as key motivations.

*«I wanted to answer some questions I couldn't resolve on my own.» (*SWW7) «It wasn't obligatory, but I thought it would help… to experience what it's like being a client.» (SWM5)

These narratives correspond to the existential exploration or growth-oriented narrative type, where psychotherapy is pursued not due to acute distress but as a conscious choice for personal development. Such participants—often mental health professionals themselves—sought therapy as a means of cultivating self-awareness and empathy, enriching both their personal and professional identities.

Psychotherapy as Informal Supervision

Several professionals described therapy as serving a dual purpose: a space for personal processing and also a form of informal supervision for professional matters.

«It was also linked to my work, as we sometimes used sessions like supervision… some were about personal issues, others about cases we handled at work.» (SWW4)

This describes a hybrid narrative of personal and professional resonance, where therapy becomes a reflective space that nourishes both the personal self and the professional role. It illustrates the intricate interplay between private experience and clinical practice, especially for caregivers and therapists.

Prevention of Professional Burnout

Therapy also functioned as a means of preserving mental resilience in the face of occupational burnout. The emotionally demanding nature of social work and therapeutic professions was explicitly acknowledged by many participants.

*«The reason I'm still in therapy is also my job… I've gone through four or five burnouts and that's probably why I kept going.» (*SWW6)

This reflects a preventive and protective narrative, where continued therapy becomes a strategy to counteract emotional exhaustion and maintain psychological balance. Here, psychotherapy is a long-term self-care practice aimed at sustaining mental health amid ongoing professional pressures.

Life-Defining Events

Beyond panic attacks or professional needs, many participants reported initiating therapy in response to major life transitions or emotionally charged experiences—such as adolescence, family pressures, health concerns, relational ruptures, or significant decisions.

«When I was 16–17, I went for career counseling and said I felt I needed to start therapy… I had fears and concerns as a teenager.» (SWM8)

These narratives fall into the transitional turning point type, where psychotherapy serves a supportive role during phases of existential change—adolescence, identity shifts, relational crises, or significant losses. Regardless of the event's nature, the common thread is the recognition of internal limits and the need for external support when personal resources prove insufficient.

Theme 2: Selection of Psychotherapeutic Approach

Multiplicity in Psychotherapeutic Experiences

The testimonies highlighted the fluidity and developmental aspect of the therapeutic journey. Many clients did not follow a fixed approach throughout their therapy but transitioned from one approach to another, depending on their needs and personal development.

«I started with systemic therapy… then I did psychodrama… then existential therapy…» (SWM8)

The continuous search for more «suitable» methods suggests an increasing awareness of internal needs and perhaps a constant desire for depth or for a new redefinition of the self and experiences. This corresponds to the «type of evolving search,» where therapeutic identity is progressively formed through trials and experiences. Different life phases seem to require different therapeutic «tools,» highlighting the flexibility of clients in dealing with emotional pain.

Knowledge and Familiarity with the Therapeutic Approach

Pre-existing familiarity with specific therapeutic theories, either through studies or professional collaborations, emerged as a crucial factor in the selection process. The narratives showed that the «familiarity» with an approach strengthened the sense of safety and «natural identification» with it.

*«It was obvious to me that I would choose systemic therapy…» (*SWW6)

Here, knowledge functions not only as a cognitive advantage but also as a psychological anchor: it reduces the unknown and provides a sense of control. This experience belongs to the «type of cognitive identification,» where theoretical familiarity becomes the driving force behind the choice. Furthermore, when this familiarity stems from shared languages or values with colleagues, it seems to strengthen the decision.

«…I liked the way the psychiatrist worked with psychodynamic therapy…» (SWW2)

Search for Deeper Psychological Changes

For several participants, the choice of approach was linked to a deeper desire for existential meaning, internal processing, and psychological transformation.

«I wanted something deeper… about the meaning of life…» (SWM8)

The need for therapy was not limited to the alleviation of a symptom but extended to the understanding of existence, identity, and meaning. This narrative belongs to the «existential type of search,» where psychotherapy becomes a tool for personal reconstruction. In contrast, when the need was more immediate and specific (e.g., panic attacks), approaches such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which are more structured and targeted, were preferred.

«When I had panic attacks, I went for CBT…» (SWW4)

This range indicates a clear distinction between functional relief and deeper personal processing, with corresponding differentiations in the chosen approach.

Personal Reasons and Social Influences

In several cases, the psychotherapeutic approach appeared to be chosen based on an internal «calling,» arising from personal trauma, needs, or emotional patterns.

«…my search is related to some trauma… that's why I chose psychodynamic therapy…» (SWW2)

Here, the «traumatic type of therapeutic direction» emerges, in which the approach stems from the need to shed light on and understand unresolved emotional burdens from the past. The choice of therapy appears to serve as a way to return to unsolved issues through the appropriate tool. In other cases, the influence of others' opinions and the desire for a tried-and-tested option determined the direction.

> *«My colleagues suggested it to me… I started Gestalt therapy without knowing it beforehand»* (SWW4)

This type reflects socially mediated choice, where the influence of others acts as a catalyst for trust.

Therapist-Therapist Relationship

Often, the approach is chosen indirectly, as a «by-product» of the decision to work with a specific therapist. The chemistry, trust, and sense of safety that the therapist exudes play a crucial role in forming the therapeutic relationship.

> *«I trust the therapist more than the approach.»* (SWW9)

This experience fits into the «key relationship type,» where the human factor overrides the need for theoretical alignment. This finding strengthens the well-documented view that the «therapist factor» is crucial in determining the outcome of therapy – in some cases, perhaps even more so than the approach itself.

Practical Factors and Random Selection

There were also cases where the choice of approach was made on behalf of the client, either due to ignorance or limitations, primarily within the context of public mental health services.

> *«I had no idea about approaches… I didn't choose…»* (SWM5)

The absence of choice revealed an important social dimension of therapy. It represents the «type of external guidance» or «therapeutic contingency,» where the course is determined by external frameworks and less by internal selection. However, even within non-selected frameworks, the therapeutic relationship can develop functionally when trust is established.

Theme 3: The Impact of Psychotherapy on the Professional Identity of Social Workers

Improvement of Skills and Techniques

Enhancement of capabilities, upgrading of techniques, acquisition of practical tools through self-awareness and the processing of information.

> *«Psychotherapy helped me as a social worker. It taught me how to listen, observe, and understand how to rephrase what the beneficiary says, in order to help them focus on the essential, redirect their thoughts, and provide them with the appropriate directions…»* (SWW9)

Participants in the study discussed how psychotherapy influenced their professional identity. Most participants emphasized its positive impact on the improvement of their technical skills and abilities. Through self-processing, information processing, and reflection, psychotherapy supports social workers in their professional development, offering them new tools and empowering them both personally and professionally.

Self-Awareness and Empathy

A deeper understanding of personal emotions and reactions – self-awareness.

«Psychotherapy helped me better understand my emotions and become more conscious as a professional. I am my own tool. When I am in the best mental and physical state, I can be present with the client, offer what I can, and understand what the other person needs, as well as focus on their needs.» (SWM8)

Many participants recognized that psychotherapy improved their self-awareness and enhanced their empathy, allowing them to better understand the challenges of those they serve by placing themselves in their position. The deeper self-awareness developed through psychotherapy helps social workers understand their emotions, reactions, and their influence on their professional role. As a result, they can avoid phenomena like countertransference.

Prevention and Management of Professional Burnout

Relieving professional stress – increasing mental resilience and reducing emotional load.

«Burnout is not rare in our professions… I have experienced burnout, and it was difficult back then…» (SWW2)

The risk of professional burnout and the importance of preventing it were identified by participants as highly significant factors. Some mentioned that psychotherapy supported them during burnout, while others considered it useful for preventing professional burnout.

Need for Supervision

Supervision as a means of mental and professional support.

«Sometimes, supervision helped me manage personal experiences or emotions, and for the rest of the time, I focused on the supervision. Supervision was an important part of my time and helped me recognize the signs of burnout and learn how to manage it.» (SWW6)

The need for supervision is recognized as extremely important for both the mental and professional support of social workers. When professionals are exposed to intense work-related stress and emotional burdens, psychotherapy and supervision offer an effective debriefing mechanism, preventing burnout and strengthening the resilience of professionals.

Psychotherapy as a Tool for Growth

Empowerment of assertiveness, recognition of personal endurance, development of skills for boundary-setting in both professional and personal contexts.

«Psychotherapy helped me learn to set boundaries and be more assertive. I am no longer absolute in my opinions, but I know how to advocate for what I need when I believe in it. » (SWW4)

Some participants mentioned that through psychotherapy, they were able to improve their boundary-setting, both in their professional and personal lives. Psychotherapy helped them understand their limits and recognize what they can endure, which allows them to be more effective in their professional role.

Theme 4: Benefits of Psychotherapy for Professionals

Self-Awareness, Personal Development, and Reflection

Psychotherapy was recognized by participants as a valuable tool for personal processing, enhancing self-awareness, reflection, and personal growth. The ability to engage in deeper contact with oneself enables professionals to handle both their personal reactions and professional challenges with greater mindfulness.

«Perhaps all of this creates a professional who knows themselves better... and thus can manage their clients more effectively...» (SWW1)

«…how we learn, how we make changes… how we feel in specific situations, and consequently, how we can transfer what we learn about ourselves to others…» (SWM5)

The therapeutic experience provides a «space» for professionals, not only to analyze their own position and experiences but also to approach their clients with greater understanding and empathy.

Enhancement of Professional Identity and Psychological Resilience

Psychotherapy contributes to the strengthening of social workers' professional identity, providing a framework for preventing and managing professional stress and burnout.

«It is on the edge of being dangerous not to engage in this. Because we are talking about lives! Because you will prevent burnout, because you will manage burnout, because you will set boundaries.» (SWW3)

Regular involvement in psychotherapy prevents emotional exhaustion, while enhancing professionals' ability to handle the daily demands of their role while maintaining their inner balance.

Decompression and the Creation of a Safe Space for Processing

Participants highlighted the role of psychotherapy as a space for decompression, self-exploration, and managing the intense emotions that arise from the nature of the profession.

«The emotional and cognitive load is so great that you're simply not at your best... it becomes a very nice vicious cycle!» (SWM8)

The therapeutic relationship offers a safe space where social workers can gain a deeper understanding of their emotions and reactions, preventing overload and its impact on their professional and personal lives.

Finally, noteworthy is the contribution of psychotherapy to improving social workers' ability to set personal and professional boundaries. This empowerment also translates into improved interpersonal relationships within the professional context.

Professional integrity is enhanced, allowing professionals to respond consistently and authentically to the needs of their clients without sacrificing their own mental health.

Discussion

The data obtained from investigating the causes that led social workers to seek psychotherapy support highlight the connection between intense personal and professional challenges and the need for psychological support. Particularly, panic attacks, which are often described as disorganizing events, represent the primary reason for the initiation of psychotherapy. These episodes lead individuals to a deeper awareness of their psychological needs, as they exceed the capacity for self-management and require specialized support. Panic attacks are accompanied by intense physical and mental symptoms that disrupt daily life and create a sense of loss of control, which drives individuals to seek help.

Panic attacks often coexist with other disorders, such as agoraphobia, which add to the intensity and complexity of the situations, making everyday life difficult and limiting individuals' functionality. For many, psychotherapy becomes not only a means of symptom relief but also a tool for personal and professional development. This process helps enhance self-awareness, manage emotions, and understand

personal needs. Moreover, psychotherapy is directly related to professional practice, as it strengthens empathy and supports better case management and the development of professional competence.

A significant aspect that emerged is the use of psychotherapy as a tool for preventing and managing professional burnout. The intensity and emotional weight of the profession make it necessary to seek psychological support for decompression and to prevent the consequences of professional fatigue. Psychotherapy thus functions as a protective mechanism that strengthens social workers' resilience and contributes to better managing the demands of their role.

It is noteworthy that decisive life events, such as significant decisions, family pressures, or professional goals, often lead to the decision to begin psychotherapy. In such cases, psychotherapy acts as an adaptation and support tool for dealing with changes and challenges, enhancing the individual's stability and self-confidence.

Therefore, the decision to start psychotherapy is linked to recognizing the need for support during critical moments and the desire for continuous self-improvement. Particularly for mental health professionals, psychotherapy is not only therapeutic but also an integral part of their personal and professional development, offering relief and enhancing their professional practice. The multifaceted need for psychotherapy underscores its importance as a tool for self-awareness, resilience, and empowerment.

The research also revealed that clients often choose psychotherapeutic approaches based on their personal needs, experiences, and life stages. The flexibility in selecting therapeutic approaches demonstrates the importance of individualizing the therapeutic process. Additionally, familiarity with specific approaches through training or professional collaborations significantly influences the choice. At the heart of the decision lies the need for self-awareness, philosophical exploration, and the search for meaning, which guides many clients to select psychotherapeutic approaches focused on existential or psychodynamic exploration.

Trust and the quality of the relationship with the therapist also play key roles in the choice of psychotherapeutic approach. However, in many cases, external factors such as access to public services, ignorance of available approaches, and limited choice options play a decisive role in clients' decisions.

The emotions experienced by clients during the psychotherapy process are varied. From intense anxiety and fear before starting therapy to relief and self-confidence upon its completion, psychotherapy deeply impacts individuals' emotional and psychological characteristics. The relationship with the therapist, emotional safety, and the opportunity to express and process emotions are positive elements of the process. Despite the challenges that may arise from processing traumas or other deeper issues, clients recognize the importance of this process for their self-awareness and personal development.

However, psychotherapy is not without challenges. High costs, professional and personal obligations, lack of time, and difficulties with transportation, especially in remote areas, constitute significant barriers. Social stigma and fear of judgment also deter some clients, while the difficulty in finding a therapist with whom clients feel comfortable is a common challenge.

Notably, psychotherapy enhances the professional skills of social workers, allowing them to develop techniques and tools for self-awareness that improve their emotional resilience and abilities in their professional practice. This empowerment contributes to better stress management, the prevention of professional burnout, and improved communication quality with clients.

Overall, psychotherapy is an exceptionally useful and necessary mechanism for enhancing social workers, promoting their personal development, and improving their professional effectiveness. Through self-awareness and emotional support, social workers strengthen their ability to face the challenges of the profession with greater stability and resilience.

Reference

Barnett, J. E., & Cooper, N. (2009). Creating a culture of self-care. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 16*(1), 16–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.2009.01138.x.

Beck, J. S. (2011). *Cognitive therapy: Basics and beyond* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.

Berg, B. L. (2009). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (7th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.

Bernard, J. M., & Goodyear, R. K. (2018). *Fundamentals of clinical supervision*. Pearson.

Bride, B. E. (2007). Prevalence of secondary traumatic stress among social workers. *Social Work, 52*(1), 63–70. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/52.1.63.

Corey, G. (2016). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Farber, B. A. (2010). *The inner world of the psychotherapist: A psychoanalytic perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

Figley, C. R. (Ed.). (2002). *Treating compassion fatigue*. Routledge.

Gelso, C. J., & Hayes, J. A. (2007). *Countertransference and the therapist's inner experience: Perils and possibilities*. Routledge.

Newell, J. M., & MacNeil, G. A. (2010). Professional burnout, vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue: A review of theoretical terms, risk factors, and preventative methods for clinicians and researchers. *Best Practices in Mental Health, 6*(2), 57–68.

Reamer, F. G. (2018). *Social work values and ethics*. Columbia University Press.

Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2008). Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 9*(1), 13–39.

Skovholt, T. M., & Trotter-Mathison, M. (2014). *The resilient practitioner: Burnout prevention and self-care strategies for counselors, therapists, teachers, and health professionals* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Sage.

Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2016). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Tsiolis, G. (2014). *Methods and techniques of analysis in qualitative social research* [in Greek]. Kritiki.