

Background

- In the demanding scope of mental health (MH) practice, professionals often navigate multiple layers of complexities which may include societal, individual, or relational factors when providing MH services to clients.
- Professional boundaries in MH services are crucial for therapeutic alliances, the prevention of vicarious traumatization and burnout, and the promotion of practitioners's well-being (Harrison & Westwood, 2009; Hood, 2022; Valente, 2017; Wilstrand et al., 2007).
- Boundary crossing in therapeutic relationships can strengthen rapport but may lead to conflicts of interest and power imbalances, particularly with vulnerable clients. Thus boundaries serve as safety measures in mitigating these challenges (Baca, 2011; Shevellar & Barringham, 2016; Valente, 2017; Warren et al., 2014).
- The diverse roles experienced by TR practitioners within MH settings can at times blur the boundaries within client-practitioner relationships.
- The purpose of this study was to identify how TR practitioners maintained and navigated the challenges associated with boundaries when engaging with vulnerable populations.

Qualitative Methods

Data Collection:

- Semi-structured, 1:1 (30 mins - 1 hr) interviews via Zoom
- Audio recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Descriptive coding - Codebook developed

Recruitment Process:

- Through purposive and convenience sampling via email and BCTRA's recruitment poster

Participants

- Total participants (7); all female with varying experiences in the MH field
- Current organization: (5) Fraser Health Authority; (1) Northern Health Authority; (1) community MH organization
- CTRS: (5)

Research Question

“How do TR practitioners navigate professional boundary setting when supporting clients in a mental health setting?”



Research Findings

Theme 1: What boundaries looked like within the workplace

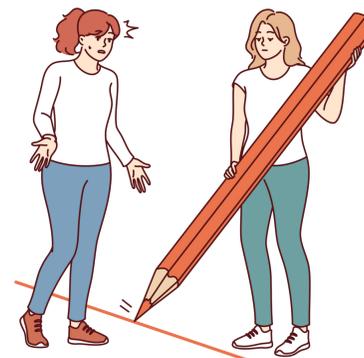
Theme 2: The impacts of the TR profession on boundaries, associated challenges, and the healthcare system

Theme 3: Strategies to mitigate challenges and future recommendations

Representative Quotations

I think for myself, I see people in their natural environment. I see them either in their home, in their community, in real-life situations. I don't see them in an office where we sit across from each other at a desk. [...] I see them in the real natural habitats. I'd say that for myself, as well. So I think we see them in a different light... [P1]

... those moments of say, being at a beach with someone or being... doing a yoga practice, they lead to a different type of intimacy. And I think a different, in some contexts, and patients identify this... a different type of safety... [P5]



Because Rec, our scope is so broad, and we're not black and white, we often will support clients with different goals... [P7]

Because people see us as the fun people, the people that aren't necessarily that medical model strict... [P2]

...it's blurred because like we're really trying to dig deep on their passions and interests and provide hope and encouragement... [P3]

Key Takeaway

The roles and interventions used within TR practice add complexity to boundary setting, which leads to blurred roles due to the personal nature of client-practitioner relationships.

Discussion

Existing literature highlights the critical role of professional boundaries in maintaining practitioner and client well-being, reducing burnout, and fostering a work-life balance.

Various approaches were employed as participants navigated the relational challenges associated with boundary-setting.

Each participant had varying levels of comfort in terms of self-disclosure, however, some reiterated the need for clear and transparent communication when setting professional boundaries with clients.

Boundary setting in MH services, particularly in TR practice, adds complexity due to concerns of blurred roles and friendship interpretations, this study raises awareness of these issues.

Recommendations

For Researchers:

- Include diverse and larger sampling from various genders and through the use of quantitative surveys
- Investigate the burnout rate experienced by practitioners in the field

For Health Authorities & TR Profession:

- Address areas of growth in mentorship opportunities
- Evaluate processes and approaches to team communication strategies
- Model healthy boundaries within practice

References

