

THE DIGITAL COUCH: A STUDY ON MENTAL HEALTH OF PSYCHOLOGISTS IN TELEPSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE



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The Digital Couch: A Study on Mental Health of Psychologists in Telepsychology Practice

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Abstract

Mental health practitioners tend to experience mental distress due to the demanding nature of the profession. In this advancing world, practitioners are now integrating telepsychology into psychological practice, which presents opportunities and adversities to their mental health. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to explore and understand the mental health of Filipino psychologists, particularly in the context of telepsychology. A qualitative descriptive phenomenology was employed in this study. This study gathered ten psychologists who were selected using purposive sampling and interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Using Colaizzi's seven-step data analysis, four major themes were yielded, and twelve clusters of subthemes were found. Specifically, (1) growing pains, (2) resilience, (3) ingrain transformation, and (4) treasure of fulfillment, which formulated an acronym of GRIT, representing perseverance and passion, symbolizing the persistent effort of psychologists to maintain a mental fortitude despite the adversities in telepsychology practice. The findings presented the notable reflection of psychologists that telepsychology practice has challenged their mental capacity, but their resilience and eagerness to adapt have kept them on the ground. The results were bound to fill the knowledge gaps by providing new understanding from the experiences of psychologists in telepsychology. Furthermore, this study can raise awareness about the mental health of Filipino psychologists practicing telepsychology, especially that relatively few studies are focusing on the mental health of practitioners. Indeed, this study presented the reality of the exerted efforts of psychologists to balance the edge of being a human and professional, extending their hand to people in need.

Keywords: *descriptive phenomenology, mental health, psychologists, telepsychology*

Introduction

The integration of technology into psychological practice has paved the way for revolutionizing the delivery of mental health care from face-to-face to remote settings. Telepsychology refers to the integration of telecommunication technologies with psychological practices (American Psychological Association, 2024). Telepsychology has become a global phenomenon, with many countries adopting this innovative approach during the Coronavirus-2019 pandemic, significantly accelerating the delivery and accessibility of psychological services (Perrin et al., 2020). This enables mental health professionals to provide services remotely through digital platforms (Philippe et al., 2022). However, this rapid shift has brought challenges with increased mental health demands and heightened the pressure on mental health professionals (Grover et al., 2020).

Furthermore, mental health professionals, as frontliners for psychological support, are particularly vulnerable to stress, which can negatively affect their mental health and the quality of care they provide (Sovold et al., 2021). In the Philippines, telepsychology emerged as a vital response to the Coronavirus-2019 pandemic that also addresses longstanding gaps in the mental healthcare system, especially in underserved areas (Hernani, 2022).

Prior to the pandemic, there was an apparent difference between urban and rural regions in the availability of mental health professionals and accessibility of mental health services (Lee et al., 2023). The transition to remote service delivery posed unique challenges for Filipino mental health professionals, including unstable internet connections, insufficient training, and unfamiliarity with new technologies (Simon et al., 2023). Moreover, many practitioners experienced compassion fatigue due to increased client demand, personal vulnerabilities, and work-related stress, highlighting the mental toll of their profession (Cayongcong et al., 2023).

Due to these challenges, the implementation of telepsychology underscores the need to understand its impact on the mental health of psychologists in the country. The current condition of telepsychology in the local context of the Philippines remains unexplored due to limited research on its usage (Narvaez, 2022). There are also limited studies focusing on the experiences of Filipino mental health professionals with telepsychology, which leaves unanswered questions about the practice (Rico & Namoca, 2022).

This is similar to the lack of extensive research on the mental health of psychologists, psychiatrists, psychometricians, guidance counselors, and other mental health providers in the Philippines (Unto et al., 2023). This limited body of knowledge stems from the reluctance of psychologists to disclose mental health concerns as the matter remains unacknowledged due to the social notion that practitioners have strong mental capacities (Kar & Singh, 2022). These identified knowledge gaps emphasize the need for further exploration of the mental health of Filipino mental health professionals in the context of their telepsychology practice (Mendes-Santos et al., 2022). By addressing these gaps, the study can contribute to both the enrichment of telepsychology practice and the well-being of psychologists. This study can play a vital role in shedding light on these crucial experiences to inform strategies that support the mental health and resilience of mental health professionals in the Philippines.

Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to examine the mental health of Filipino psychologists in the context of telepsychology practice. The keen interest in conducting this study is strongly influenced by the significant implication of telepsychology practice on psychological well-being of psychologists. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do psychologists practicing telepsychology perceive their mental health?
2. What simulacrum can be formulated based on the mental health of psychologists in the context of telepsychology?

Literature Review

Mental health refers to a person's psychological well-being, enabling them to manage stress, realize their potential, function effectively in work and learning, and contribute to their community (World Health Organization, 2022). It encompasses emotional resilience, the ability to build relationships and experience happiness and satisfaction (Andersen et al., 2021; Bodeker et al., 2020). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted mental health services, pushing mental health professionals to adopt telepsychology as a means to continue providing care remotely (Barberio & Jenkins, 2021). However, this shift introduced new challenges, such as burnout, compassion fatigue, and emotional exhaustion due to heavy workloads and the emotionally demanding nature of therapy (Elliot & Ragdale, 2020; Park, 2021; Selvaraj et al., 2020). These stressors were amplified by the technological and logistical barriers of telepsychology, including limited access to devices and network connectivity, particularly in remote areas, and the need for increased digital competencies (Goldschmidt et al., 2021; Dobson et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, telepsychology also fostered positive outcomes for mental health professionals. It increased accessibility to clients, particularly those in rural areas, providing professionals with a greater sense of meaning and fulfillment (Scanlan & Hazelton, 2019; Mair et al., 2022). Moreover, it enhanced the development of both technical and therapeutic skills, contributing to the overall well-being and accomplishment of mental health professionals (Lin et al., 2022; Howland et al., 2020). Therefore, while telepsychology introduced both burdens and benefits, it highlighted the need for comprehensive support for mental health professionals to ensure their well-being as they continue to support their clients.

Methodology

Research Design

This research employed a descriptive phenomenological approach to examine the mental health experiences of psychologists practicing telepsychology. Descriptive phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that focuses on describing lived experiences of an individual that directly emerge from their personal accounts without the influence of pre-existing theories and biases, capturing the essence of a specific phenomenon (Christensen, 2017).

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria relevant to the study (Nikolopoulou, 2023). The participants of this study were ten psychologists who utilize telepsychology in delivery of psychological services. Thus, the selected participants for this study are psychologists with prior experience in onsite psychological practice, at least one year of experience in telepsychology, and are from the National Capital Region (NCR). The study excluded psychologists who are exclusively practicing face-to-face modality.

Instruments

The study utilized semi-structured interviews for data collection. Semi-structured is a type of interview that uses a predetermined set of questions and follow-up questions that allow the researcher to explore the responses of participants in greater depth (Laksov et al., 2017). Four experts in the field validated the interview questions. A robotfoto was employed to gather demographic profiles of respondents that includes their demographic profile and work experiences. In research, robotfoto refers to a data sheet used to collect necessary personal and professional details about the participants (De Guzman & Tan, 2007).

Procedure

The NowServing app and Facebook were used to identify potential participants. Individuals who met the criteria were provided with informed consent and data privacy forms. Data collection was conducted through online interviews using Google Meet and Zoom. Before each session, participants completed a Robotfoto to gather accurate demographic information. The interviews lasted approximately one to two hours. Each session was recorded to ensure accurate documentation of responses. After the interview, a debriefing session was held to support participants' emotional well-being and address any concerns. Lastly, the verbalizations were translated into English with the aid of a language expert.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed Collaizzi's (1978) seven-step process for descriptive phenomenology. First, the verbatim transcript of psychologists' statements on their mental health and telepsychology use was read multiple times for familiarity. Relevant statements were then identified, extracted, and documented with transcript, page, and line numbers. Next, these statements were examined to

formulate meanings, which were organized into categories and themes. These themes were used to create an exhaustive description of the psychologists' mental health, which was then condensed into a brief summary of the key aspects. Finally, the findings were returned to the participants for validation to ensure accuracy and reliability (Gumarang et al., 2021).

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were carefully observed in conducting this study. Participants were protected under Republic Act No. 10173, or the Data Privacy Act, ensuring the confidentiality and security of all information collected. The study also complied with Section 10 of the Code of Ethics for Philippine Psychologists and Psychometricians (Psychological Association of the Philippines, 2022).

Results and Discussion

Using Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological Method, the analysis revealed four major themes of psychologists' mental health in telepsychology.

Growing Pains

Growing pains refer to the enduring professional and psychological struggles that the participants face throughout their telepsychology practice, as the evolving nature of mental health care demands constant adaptation, learning, and mental stamina. According to the study of Halder and Samajdar (2023), the growing demands of mental health care expose professionals to burnout and compassion fatigue, as constantly looking after others' needs often compromises their well-being. Four sub-themes emerged under this theme, such as burnout, technostress, doubts, and strained connection.

Burnout

Burnout among telepsychology practitioners arises from prolonged emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion due to work-related stressors, as highlighted by MacDonald (2022). Participants reported experiencing burnout due to blurred work-life boundaries, compassion fatigue, exposure to clients' trauma, and drained social energy from continuous online sessions. The lack of rest between back-to-back sessions further exacerbated their fatigue and mental distress. These findings align with Cayongcong et al. (2024), who linked burnout in telepsychology to empathic involvement, administrative burdens, and the challenges of managing trauma cases. The emotional toll of the profession, coupled with insufficient recovery time, makes it difficult for Filipino psychologists to overcome burnout, underscoring the need for strategies to mitigate these stressors in their telepsychology practice.

I have experienced several instances of burnout until now. In fact, I occasionally suffer from chronic fatigue, which I am currently consulting my doctor about. Despite getting sufficient sleep, rest, and proper nutrition, I still feel persistently tired—this is the kind of fatigue I'm referring to. (PSY #10)

In both online and onsite settings, caregiver burnout—or, more specifically, compassion burnout—is the term, I suppose. It remains a constant concern. For instance, when we therapists have back-to-back sessions, it becomes mentally exhausting. (PSY #4)

Technostress

Technostress refers to the negative feelings of tension and distress experienced by psychologists due to the demands of using technology systems, which affect their mental well-being and physical health.

Technostress refers to the anxiety, tension, or distress that occurs when individuals have difficulty adapting to new technologies and are unable to use them in a healthy and productive way (Riscifina et al., 2025). Participants have experienced challenges in their practice, including physical strain from prolonged sitting and screen exposure and internet connectivity that affects their work and causes delays in communication. Participants also raised concerns about maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of clients online and the limitations of applying several therapeutic techniques. These challenges mirror the technostress that Holgado & Villazor (2024) observed in educational settings, where educators similarly struggle with technology integration, suggesting that technostress transcends professions reliant on digital tools.

The difficulty lies not only in being sedentary for extended hours but also in constant exposure to media, computer screens, and radiation—which negatively affects the eyes and the brain. These are some of the physical challenges involved. (PSY #1)

For example, I've had experiences where I felt triggered because the client refused to turn on the camera. I couldn't see them, and.. (PSY #6)

Doubts

Doubts imply the psychologists' skepticism about their professional abilities and competencies in delivering proper psychological care to their clients through telepsychology. The technical and ethical challenges of telepsychology fostered frustration, inadequacy, and reduced treatment confidence among practitioners (Erlandsson et al., 2022). Practitioners faced particular uncertainty about whether clients properly follow interventions, if treatments are appropriately adapted, and whether technological platforms adequately support service delivery. This led the participants to question their professional competence and the effectiveness of the services they offer to

clients. According to Roundy & Bayer (2023), the “digital displacement” of traditional therapy creates unique competency concerns, where even experienced clinicians may question their effectiveness when transitioning to online platforms.

They can't see my facial expressions, my reactions—which are actually important. As service providers, our reactions can help create a sense of safety and connection. So, when that's missing, I start to question whether the intervention I gave was effective or if I was able to present myself as a safe space for the client, even without visual contact. That's it. (PSY #6)

We kept asking ourselves: did we do something wrong? Was there something we failed to do, or did we do something we shouldn't have? Those questions became our constant struggle. And it was even more difficult because, for me, the sessions were online, while for him, they were face-to-face. (PSY #1)

Strained connection

Strained connections describe the difficulties encountered in building rapport and maintaining therapeutic connection through virtual platforms. Due to the virtual nature of telepsychology, the participants were limited in building rapport and communicating nonverbal communication, which narrowed their capacity to have therapeutic relationships with the clients. This corroborates with the study of Reupert et al. (2022), which asserted that mental health professionals were even more challenged to build trust and therapeutic alliance in sessions conducted virtually. These constraints include the reduced capacity to read subtle gestures, facial expressions, and body language, which traditionally facilitate therapeutic bonding. Therefore, this rapid transition to telepsychology has taken a toll on many psychologists who were not prepared for this innovative approach (Bumra, 2022).

You can't fully express supportive physical gestures, the way you might lean in during an in-person session or give an encouraging shoulder tap when needed. (PSY #2)

One major concern in telepsychology isn't exactly a lack of rapport, but rather the absence of certain human elements that are intrinsic to psychological practice. There's something irreplaceable about physical presence. (PSY #5)

Resilience

Resilience refers to the capacity of the participants to recover from and manage the setbacks brought by telepsychology, which enabled them to achieve positive outcomes and stability despite experiencing unfavorable circumstances. According to Van Den Broek et al. (2023), resilience plays a vital role in aiding mental health professionals and volunteers to cope with workplace stressors, which can be enhanced by providing a supportive environment and allowing them balanced control over their work. Participants emphasized various strategies, such as holistic coping mechanisms and adaptivity, which aided them in overcoming the demands of the practice. Psychological resilience is key to adapting to challenges, preserving well-being, and ensuring quality care delivery. (Rawlings Chidi et al., 2024). Similarly, Cummins (2022) cited the prevailing power of resilience, emphasizing how mental health professionals continue to help others resolve their struggles despite facing their own challenges and the risk of burnout.

Adaptiveness

Adaptiveness pertains to the participant's ability to adjust and handle changes and newly encountered challenges in telepsychology practice. According to the study of Drosos and Korfiatis (2023), career adaptability positively shapes an individual's ability to manage career transitions by building adaptive behaviors and beliefs that support effective coping and prevention. The coping mechanism enabled the participants to adjust to their sessions, which presented new challenges, technical difficulties, and the changing nature of a client's behavior. This is consistent with the findings of Aldemir et al. (2024), psychologists adaptively navigated the challenges of telepsychology in terms of their mental health through social support, resilience, education, psychotherapy, and staying informed. Scheunemann et al. (2023) highlighted that effective coping strategies, especially those involving emotion regulation or action, are vital for managing stress and maintaining mental well-being in complex situations.

Right now, I think I've already adjusted. I've found my rhythm again, especially now that I've been consistently handling clients online. But since I realized the effects, it was having on me, I made the necessary adjustments. (PSY #3)

So, for me, it's more of the mindset that you should learn to adjust, learn to adapt, learn to be open, and learn to listen to your clients, whether onsite or online. (PSY #4)

Carving Balance

Carving balance refers to the capacity of the participants to set their own limits between work and personal life, balancing their responsibilities as professional and personal time and mental well-being. According to Hoffman (2020), establishing boundaries is vital for therapists to balance themselves, preventing compassion fatigue and effectiveness in their work. Participants learned to set clear boundaries by scheduling appointments and separating personal and professional spaces, helping them maintain balance. According to Ziede and Norcross (2020), this involves creating clear yet flexible limits, resulting in reduced stress, less emotional fusion, and greater satisfaction. The participants have learned to establish clear boundaries, which helped them to have more personal time, prevent fatigue, engage in more social engagement, and organize the management of responsibilities. These findings align with Yin (2022), highlighting the importance of setting boundaries in promoting psychological resilience and sustainable practice among Filipino psychologists.

It really helped, honestly. I no longer feel overwhelmed even when I have work to do. I can carve out space for self-care and for connecting with people outside of work. (PSY #6)

I realized I needed to separate things. So now I maintain one phone just for close family and friends - the only one I check during work hours. For work, I only use my laptop, where all work notifications go. I implemented this separation because before, I only had one phone...You need to find balance...Create systems and accept your limitations. Don't say yes to everything. That's it. (PSY #8)

Self-compassion

Self-compassion refers to the participants' act of extending kindness to themselves and proactively caring for themselves. The participants have recognized the need to practice self-care to maintain their well-being, emphasizing that prioritizing their mental health as professionals is essential before offering effective psychological services to their clients. According to Posluns and Gall (2019), adopting a proactive approach to self-care can reduce adverse outcomes for mental health practitioners and enhance client care, both of which are ethical responsibilities in the profession. Moreover, the participants have learned to take care of themselves by adopting a holistic approach, supporting their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being to promote growth, reduce self-doubt, and maintain their mental health. Integrating social connection, spirituality, physical wellness, and psychological well-being are attributable to positive mental health (Kaushik & Garg, 2024). Self-compassion helped the participants build resilience, leading to the path of emotional healing. In line with this, Galbraith (2023) and Anthes and Dreisornier (2024) asserted that self-compassion is an effective antidote against burnout experienced and aided in increased psychological well-being among mental health professionals.

I always remind myself that I'm learning. This is a continuous learning process. As we all know, when you start something new, there's a learning curve before you can truly gain expertise. That mindset has helped me a lot in practicing telepsychology, especially in showing compassion toward myself, particularly when navigating something as unfamiliar as telepsychology. (PSY #9)

There are times when it gets draining, especially when you're constantly listening to people's struggles, pain, and problems. But at the end of the day, you return to self-love. (PSY #7)

Connectedness

Connectedness pertains to the positive approach and acquires support from their social connections, which influences their ability to regulate the stress brought by telepsychology. The participants have shared the importance of receiving support and understanding from their loved ones and the belief that they are aiding their clients, greatly assisting them to decompress and maintain well-being. Additionally, telepsychology enabled more accessible psychological services, which enabled the participants to feel more connected to their clients despite the distance. This corresponds with the study of Labrague (2021), stating that there has been significant evidence claiming the positive impact of social support on the mental well-being of healthcare workers. Similarly, Shahwan et al. (2024) highlighted that strong social connections serve as protective factors against stress and burnout, enhancing coping strategies and resilience. Social support from family, friends, and clinical supervisors acts as a buffer zone to destress from work therapists (Posluns & Gall, 2019).

The support system is more accessible since everything is done from home, which makes the stress more manageable. (PSY #2)

I absorb so many stories and emotional experiences. So, it's important to have someone to talk to. Aside from having a therapist, you need friends—and, if you're lucky, an understanding partner. Fortunately, I have one. (PSY#8)

Ingraining transformation

Ingraining transformation refers to the process of personal change and ongoing journey of professional development, where one remains open to new strategies and experiences to enhance one's telepsychology practice. This transformation not only applies to their professional development but also contributes to flourishing their mental well-being. Telepsychology became an opportunity for growth for psychology trainees and supervisors (Perrin et al., 2020). According to Hanaba et al. (2022), transformation refers to critically reassessing and reinterpreting previously acquired knowledge, leading to profound changes in one's understanding, perspectives, and self-concept.

Continuous learning

Continuous learning refers to the dedication of participants to continuously learn new knowledge and skills to improve their psychological practice. The integration of newly learned techniques and proficiency positively influenced their mental well-being. According to Ransdell et al. (2021), continuous learning is crucial to elevating competence in rapidly evolving fields like telepsychology, where practitioners must stay updated with emerging trends and technologies. The participants have expressed a deep commitment to continuous learning to improve their professional development, underscoring the importance of being constantly updated on various strategies and technologies to deliver the best services. In line with this, Brightman and Sant (2023), telepsychology urges practitioners to continuously learn and educate themselves on the latest advancements in the field to deliver best practices. Beyond this, learning new skills and education that elevate one's career are proven to improve mental health (Bupa, 2023).

I'm a newly licensed psychologist—it has really been helpful. I've been exposed to many clients and various cases. That allows me to

study and reflect on each one before and after sessions. It makes me crave more learning and further improvement in my professional expertise. (PSY#2)

I still have so much to learn—new methods and new strategies. I believe there should always be a growth gap. Just because a particular strategy worked for me once doesn't mean I'll stick to it forever. I still need to discover new ways. (PSY #3)

Resourcefulness

Resourcefulness refers to the ability to adapt and effectively use techniques, digital tools, and strategies to manage challenges in online practice, maintaining professional growth and supporting their well-being. In accordance with the study of Comer (2021), the telepsychology prompted by the CoronaVirus-19 pandemic has reinforced the field to be more resourceful, promoted the development of new standards of care, and changed the scope and delivery of psychological services and set the mental health care to address current unique needs of clients. Participants have demonstrated resourcefulness in telepsychology by adapting assessment tools, troubleshooting technical issues for clients, and modifying therapeutic approaches for the online setting. In line with this, Flores and Rungduin (2024) stated that practitioners have begun to use a variety of communication platforms and procedures to address the limitations of online sessions.

Even though I'm newly practicing as a psychologist in telehealth, it has really helped me become more creative in building connections with my clients. I've learned to use different online tools and resources—like sharing mental health journals and guides that they can use as part of their daily healing. (PSY #3)

So, the ways that I utilized, or the other things that I've utilized to try to make things a bit more interactive between me and the client, it does help them understand, and it helps me understand them more. It's like, slowly, the fact that we're online is no longer a barrier to our connection. It becomes less of a burden. (PSY #4)

Self-awareness

Self-awareness refers to participant's increased capacity to be mindful and aware of their own emotions, behavior, and thoughts that help to enhance their own mental health. According to Li et al. (2021), self-awareness is an individual conscious understanding of their feelings, character, and preferences, which fosters development and well-being. Telepsychology has exposed participants to challenges such as boundary difficulties, burnout, doubts, and strained therapeutic connections. The challenges brought by telepsychology have given the participants the realization of the need to be mindful and aware of their mental health to maintain their mental well-being as they practice. Consequently, self-awareness among therapists allowed them to intentionally limit their patient load and be proactive in applying preventive measures, which foster lower stress levels (Schaffler et al., 2024).

It's important to continuously reflect on what I'm providing to clients. I often ask myself, 'Why was I triggered by that?' or 'Why do I suddenly feel like my competence is being questioned?' That kind of introspection helps me identify what's really going on internally. (PSY #6)

You see when you are a psychologist. When you're a psychotherapist, you become the container of the person, and if you are not expansive as a container, you can only hold so much space for them. And so, on my end, it helps me expand my horizons more and expand my consciousness and awareness more. (PSY #7)

Self-improvement

Self-improvement refers to the development that participants went through, which enabled them to become a better version of themselves professionally and personally. Telepsychology enhanced participants' confidence while fostering greater empathy through exposure to diverse cases, requiring extra effort to make clients feel valued. According to Lin et al. (2022), telepsychology offers mental health professionals the chance to enhance their technical and therapeutic skills, leading to increased accomplishment and improved well-being. This aligns with the study of Sperandeo et al. (2021), where telepsychology helps participants become more empathetic and better versions of themselves, especially in online sessions with technical barriers in which clients perceive therapists as more empathetic in online sessions. The practice of telepsychology cultivated both personal and professional confidence among practitioners, especially in problem-solving (Cosh et al., 2021; De Camargo Catapan et al., 2024). As cited by Moon et al. (2021), confidence is a vital component in promoting one's mental health.

So, that's mostly what was added. And also, being more self-reliant. Since you're doing telepsychology independently, you can consult colleagues for guidance, but the actual work falls entirely on you. (PSY #9)

It made me have more empathy; it made me have more compassion with other people. And when it comes to dealing with people not just in my work, but also in my day-to-day life. (PSY #1)

Treasure of Fulfillment

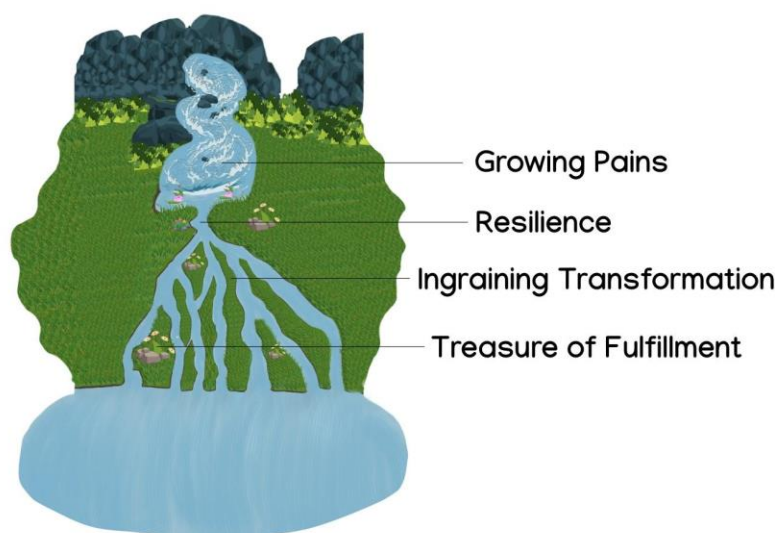
Treasure of fulfillment refers to the participant's experience of a deep sense of fulfillment that comes with the rewarding feeling of helping other people, which enhances their mental health. In a cross-sectional study by Hanel (2023), positive well-being is congruent with a sense of fulfillment. The practice has opened the door of opportunities for making services easier to access which provided a

wide-range of reaches of people in need. This fulfillment emerges from witnessing the progress of their client, which is a reflection of the fruit of their hard work. This aligns with the study of Howland et al. (2020), which found that psychiatrists and psychologists experienced deepening fulfillment due to expanded capacity to help through telepsychology. This experience enabled the participants to find a purpose that reinforces their reason to continue their practice despite the setbacks of being a mental health professional. The sense of meaning and purpose are the strongest indicators of resilience among therapists, surpassing the influence of positive emotions and relationships (Lakioti et al., 2020).

Like, the mere fact that other people who came to you for help and are now functioning better, able to solve their own problems, have a clear direction in their life. That's really the most rewarding aspect... I think, like I said, most professionals would say that that's really the, the, the hidden gem of our practice is really seeing people doing better. (PSY #5)

When clients message me outside sessions to share their progress. It means therapy is working—even when we're not face-to-face. That impact is profound. And with telepsychology, I get to experience this fulfillment right at home. (PSY #9)

Simulacrum



The formation of the river delta represents the mental health of psychologists within their telepsychology practice. As rocks and changing currents hold back the formation of the delta, this obstacle represents the growing pains brought by telepsychology that pose a psychological burden to psychologists. Despite this, the river continuously flows with gentleness, symbolizing the resilience of the psychologists to be adaptive amidst the challenges of evolving practice. The newly formed delta reflects the ingrained transformation among psychologists in their professional and personal roles. Lastly, the delta harvests fertile grounds that capture the treasure of fulfillment coming from the heart of helping people through telepsychology.

Conclusion

This study explored the mental health of psychologists within the context of telepsychology practice. The findings of this study identified four major themes and twelve subthemes. The "Growing Pains" theme emphasized the toll of telepsychology on the mental health of psychologists, marked by burnout, technostress, doubts about their professional competency, and weakened connection. Despite this, the theme "Resilience" showed the participant's ability to adapt, balance work and life, practice self-compassion, and maintain social relationships. This resiliency is strengthened by "Ingraining Transformation," which reinforces them to commit to continuous learning, resourcefulness, deepening self-awareness, and self-improvement. This study also uncovered the "Treasure of Fulfillment" theme, encompassing the sense of purpose and satisfaction that psychologists experienced in helping others despite their own struggles. Overall, psychologists not only face the psychological tool, struggles, and challenges of the telepsychology practice but also their ability to grow, adapt, and find a sense of purpose in their professional role. Indeed, this study presented the reality of the exerted efforts of psychologists to balance the edge of being a human and professional, extending their hand to people in need.

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