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An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Senior Therapist Experience of using Energy Psychology in the Treatment of Trauma

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## Abstract

Energy Psychology is a novel and controversial family of mind/body approaches that purport to offer an effective treatment for a variety of psychological disorders including Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. The approaches are based on combining concepts from Traditional Chinese Medicine with simple cognitive interventions. Initial empirical investigation has supported claims of efficacy. The aim of this study is to expand and enrich existing research about the use of Energy Psychology in the treatment of PTSD through analysing the accounts of three senior psychotherapists. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to develop an understanding of the central research question: *How does Energy Psychology impact and inform the life and work of experienced psychotherapists who use Energy Psychology in the treatment of trauma?*

Four themes emerged from the analysis: energy psychology catalyses a transformational process; a paradigm shift; a state of presence; and spiritual realisation. The participants attributed significant changes in their personal philosophy, overall contentment in life, and understanding of psychotherapeutic change, to their experience of using energy psychology, leading to the central hypothesis of the study, that energy psychology has the potential to catalyse a process of transformation that results in a lived experience of serenity and flourishing.

This study theorises two new understandings for the efficacy of Energy Psychology: 1) Energy psychology may share mechanisms that are common with meditative practices, which have been shown to impact the capacity to self-regulate; 2) Energy Psychology may provide a manual technique that supports the process of 'focusing'. Non-specific factors that are common to many forms of psychotherapy also contribute to efficacy. Implications for clinical practice suggest that Energy Psychology is a suitable treatment in evidence based practice for trauma, for clients who do not favour exposure or reliving experiences, and for clients who are at risk of decompensation due to flooding of traumatic material.