

Self-Care Regimens & Wellbeing of DBT Therapists

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PSY 498A Senior Capstone: Applied Projects

Project Questions

What kind of self-care regimens do therapists practice in order to maintain their mental health to feel successful in their work life and their personal life? Or do they not practice any self-care habits at all? If not, why? Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected their self-care practices?

BACKGROUND

- My capstone project is about the self-care practices and wellbeing of therapists who practice Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT).
- After co-leading therapy group sessions at the Portland Dialectical Behavior Therapy Institute (PDBTI), I wanted to learn more about the ways that DBT therapists practice or do not practice self-care, and how these activities benefit or do not benefit them.

METHODS

Participants (N=8) were asked a series of 22 questions divided in to four sections through an online survey.

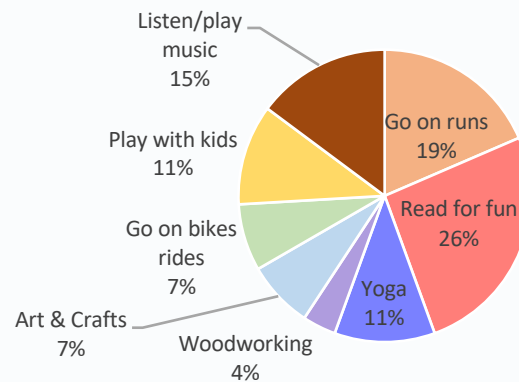
- 1st block: Roles and a day in the life at PDBTI.
- 2nd block: Self-care regimens – what they are, what self-care habits they want to develop, and stressors that encourage them to practice them.
- 3rd block: DBT skills used
- 4th block: Stressors created by the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected their self-care regimens.

References:

- Figley, C. R. (2002). Compassion fatigue: Psychotherapists' chronic lack of self-care. *Journal of clinical psychology, 58*(11), 1433-1441.
- Jergensen, K. (2018). Practice What You Preach: An Exploration of DBT Therapists Personal Skill Utilization in Burnout Prevention. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 46*(3), 187-199.
- Morse, G., Salyers, M. P., Rollins, A. L., Monroe-Devita, M., & Pfahler, C. (2011). Burnout in Mental Health Services: A Review of the Problem and Its Remediation. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 39*(5), 341-352.
- Figure 1: <https://www.skylandtrail.org/our-programs/what-we-treat/dbt/>

RESULTS

Activities Therapists Do to Maintain Their Own Mental Health



- Data shows that the largest stressors for therapists are clients in emotional distress, balancing work/life, and managing back-to-back sessions.
- Although COVID-19 has created different stressors for therapists, they have been able to implement self-care practices like exercising daily, cooking for themselves more, and playing with their kids and pets more.



Figure 1

DISCUSSION

- Therapists require self-care practices just as much, if not more, than the average person due to the emotional demands of their job.
- Data reveals an unexpected diversity in the self-care strategies of DBT therapists.
- Further research should require a larger sample size, a more inclusive demographic, and in-person interviews added to online surveys.
- The limitations on my project were the insufficient sample size and a limited demographic due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The strength of my project was the thoroughly written answers that provided insight for myself and for others.
- Since COVID-19, most found it difficult to set aside time for their self-care practices and that communication between their colleagues has either not changed or gotten worse.