

**Enhancing Psychotherapy for People with Psychosis by Understanding the Experiences  
and Attitudes of the Psychologist**

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### **Statement of Originality**

*This dissertation contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no material previously published or written by another person accept where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my dissertation when deposited in the university library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the copyright act 1968.*

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### **Statement of Authorship**

*This dissertation contains a manuscript for which I am a joint author. I made a significant contribution to the development of the research reported in the paper, as well as the writing of the manuscript.*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Abstract

**Scope:** This thesis reviews and extends on research demonstrating that the combination of psychotic and substance use disorder presents treatment services and providers with a unique set of complexities. Treatment challenges in relation to engagement, alliance and retention are explored. A critical review of the relevant literature as well as manuscript prepared describing the study arising from this review is provided.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the current study is to better understand the experience of the treating psychologist when working with individuals with co-existing substance use and psychosis, with the aim of improving future therapeutic relationships.

**Methodology:** The study employed a qualitative methodology with an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA). We recruited psychologists working on an ongoing research trial, the Healthy Lifestyles Program (HLP), and conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis of their attitudes and impression of delivering face-to-face and telephone-based treatment to people with psychosis and nicotine dependence.

**Results:** Six psychologists were involved in the study, describing their experience of providing the HLP treatment to this population. Several themes emerged and according to IPA were categorised into superordinate and subordinate themes. The superordinate themes which emerged as central to the experience of HLP therapists included: the complex and unusual experience of working with people with psychotic illness, the importance of considering each client as an individual, and the many layers of interaction between therapist and client.

**Conclusions:** The current study highlights some important professional considerations for psychologists working with people experiencing psychotic illness.

Psychologists in our study expressed that alliance was a critical component of the likelihood of a successful therapeutic relationship and outcome. Our study substantiated what has been found in previous research; that stigmatising beliefs may act to hamper the relationship when working with this group. Although, psychologists expressed that they were mostly able to overcome this and establish a good working relationship, alliance, and connection, despite the complexities and challenges inherent in a psychotic population by the very nature of their symptoms and clinical presentation. Also, psychologists endorsed the potential for integrating a strong relationship, with a structured evidence-based treatment package, potentially utilising alternative treatment modalities (e.g. telephone) to traditional in-person approaches, although some concerns were raised about how this could be achieved. Along with this, psychologists in the current study indicated that processes of transference and counter transference are important clinical considerations for a psychologist developing relationships within this population.

**Implications:** The importance of appropriate training, reflective practice, clinical experience and ongoing supervision when working with people with psychosis and nicotine dependence is implicated. Further work is also required to determine the client perceptions of treatment offered within the HLP and other treatment programs for people with psychosis, along with both client's and therapist's impressions and experiences of treatment delivered via the telephone.

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