



**Aim/Purpose:** To explore if commonalities exist between counsellors who work with clients self-identifying as sex addicts with the purpose of informing psychotherapeutic practice.

### Design/Methodology:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 2 UK-based counsellors and 1 US-based counsellor who specialise in working with sex addiction. The interviews were live recorded. They were then transcribed and thematically analysed.

### Results/ Findings (Main Themes and Subthemes):

Thematic analysis revealed three main themes each with its own subtheme.

- Utilisation of a **Multidisciplinary approach** to treatment (subtheme: approach derived from the counsellor's singular characterisation of sex addiction).
- **Trauma** as the primary and/or contributing factor to the client's sex addiction (subtheme: using sex addiction as a form of emotional regulation).
- **Shame** and its presence at every level (subtheme: impact of client's perceived cultural and social expectations)
- The research also yielded an **anomaly** where a subset of young clients, in particular, with no trauma history developed sex addiction solely from the prevalence of and their access to internet pornography.

### Limitations:

- Small sample size of respondents.
- All respondent therapists were in private practice; therefore client pool was mostly limited to those who could afford treatment.
- Client population mainly male.

### Conclusions:

This study found that successful outcomes in sex addiction treatment were largely dependent on the individual therapist's understanding and approach. For this reason, therapists used a variety of modalities that were clearly communicated to and agreed with the client when forming the psychotherapeutic alliance.

Working with sex addicts requires the therapist to be cognizant of how trauma and shame impact the alliance between counsellor and client, and how the presence of those factors can be a barrier to successful treatment.

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