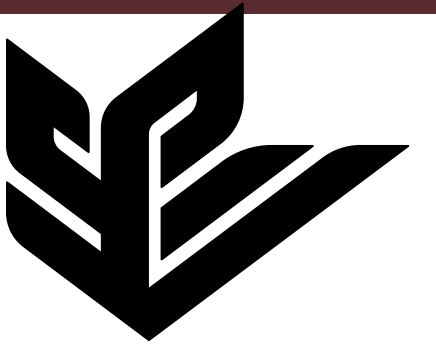


Therapist Secret Policies and Client Retention



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ABSTRACT

No-secrets policies are commonly used by many couple therapists to ensure transparency between each individual and the therapists. The current literature is divided on whether the existence of a no-secrets policy creates barriers to treatment. The present study aims to assess the impact of a no-secrets policy on couple retention rates in therapy. We propose to study this by assigning a group of couples to a therapist without a no-secrets policy, and another group of couples to a therapist with a no-secrets policy. Therapy retention will be measured and analyzed as influenced by the independent variable: the no-secrets policy.

INTRODUCTION

One of the many decisions a couples therapist makes is their policy on secret keeping. This can vary from a no-secrets-policy, to an open-secrets-policy, to a clinical judgment policy. In this context, a no secrets policy requires full revelation of the secret to continue treatment, an open-secrets policy allows for no revelation of a disclosed secret, and a clinical judgement policy offers the potential for revelation or not (Jansen, 2007).

Extensive research has been done around the reasoning and ethical decisions behind each type of policy, mainly focusing on the therapist's experience and rationale for their secret keeping policy (Butler et al., 2010; Mark & Schuman, 2020)

Given the ongoing discussion around secret policies and their ethics, efficacy, and the growing movement toward more open policies in the therapeutic context, our study aims to answer a different question. We are interested to know if a therapists secret keeping policy influences the retention rate of couples in therapy. For this study, we have simplified the secret-keeping policies into two categories, therapists with no-secrets policy and therapists without a no-secrets policy.

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

- ❑ RQ1: This study aims to examine if there is a link between a therapists secret policy and a couples retention in therapy.
- ❑ RQ2: Do therapists that have a no-secrets policy have a lower rate of couple retention?
- ❑ H1: We hypothesize that a therapists secret policy will impact couple retention in therapy.
- ❑ H2: We hypothesize that a therapist with a no-secrets policy will have lower rates of couple retention.

METHODS

Participants

- ❑ We plan to recruit 50 couples who are in a committed, monogamous relationships, and have been living together for at least one year.
- ❑ The couples will be at least mildly to moderately distressed on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS).
- ❑ Participants will be recruited for the study through the use of social media ads, community advertisements, and radio ads.

Exclusion Criteria

- ❑ Couples will be excluded from the study if there is any active domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and/or psychotic disorder diagnosis.

Procedures

- ❑ The couples will be randomly assigned to 6 different therapists to meet with on a weekly basis. Three of the six therapists will have a no-secrets policy and the remaining three therapists will not have a no-secrets policy.
- ❑ To control for theory discrepancies in therapists, all therapists will be certified EFT therapists.
- ❑ The study will follow the length of time each couple continues in therapy. The number of weeks each couple has completed by the time of termination will be collected.

MEASURES

Therapist Secret Policy

- ❑ The therapist secret policy for the purpose of this study will fall into one of two categories. A no-secrets policy, by which any secret that an individual holds in the relationship that is disclosed to the therapist in private, can be disclosed to the other partner by the therapist in order to continue treatment.
- ❑ A therapist that does not hold a no-secrets policy may hold a secret for an individual in the couple who disclosed said secret. It is not required to be shared to the other partner by the therapist in order to continue with treatment.

Couple Retention in Therapy

- ❑ Couple retention will be measured in a continuous manner by the number of weeks a couple has completed and remained in therapy by the time of termination.

RESULTS

- ❑ A T-Test will be used to find results of the study's research questions on whether there is a link between a therapists secret policy and couple retention in therapy, and if therapists that have a no-secrets policy have a lower rate of couple retention.
- ❑ A T-Test was chosen as there are wo categorical independent variables, therapist with a no-secrets policy and therapists without a no-secrets policy. The dependent variable is continuous, depending upon the number of weeks a couple completes therapy before termination.
- ❑ We expect to see a lower rate of retention for the therapists with a no-secrets policy than therapists without a no-secrets policy.

DISCUSSION

Secret-disclosure in couple's therapy is a topic of many different opinions among therapists. While the current research heavily focuses on various clinician policies and practices, there is inadequate research on how the existence of no-secrets policies impact client retention. Additional research on this will provide an opportunity for therapists to reassess how they manage secrets in therapy.

When clients come to couple's therapy, they assume the clinician has ethical protocols and systems in place for when secrets are disclosed. With the insufficient research on how no-secrets policies impact therapy outcomes, there is a lack of consistency and transparency in how these situations are handled. If handled haphazardly, the public's perception and trust in the field of therapy could be affected negatively. Understanding the implications of these policies is essential so clinicians can be clear and intentional in how they execute them.

Future directions for research are suggested to expand on how the client experiences the policies; how clearly they understood the policy, therapy retention after a secret was or wasn't disclosed, and client trust in therapy/perception of therapeutic alliance with and without the policy.