

Integrative Psychotherapy - An Important Resource for the Psychophysical Wellbeing of the Person in the 21st Century Society

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Abstract

Keywords:

psychotherapist; psychotherapy; integrative psychotherapy; education; mental health; person

The psychotherapist is an important specialist who makes a major contribution to ensuring the mental health of people in today's society. Unfortunately, however, the psychotherapist is not correctly perceived, or he/she is even unknown to the collective mind, despite the fact that psychotherapy is a valuable resource in today's social context loaded with a multitude of stressful and traumatic factors. Integrative psychotherapy, one of the newest forms of psychotherapy, responds effectively to the challenges of today's society in an integrated way, focusing on the relationship between the therapist and the patient. The integrative psychotherapist is the specialist who, through prevention, diagnosis and intervention, guides the person towards the balance that ensures mental health. The research carried out on a panel of students confirms that the image of the psychotherapist is not known or is perceived in a distorted way, even by a public with a certain level of intellectual background. The integrative psychotherapists involved in the research also highlight that psychotherapy is an important resource in enhancing quality of life, but it is little known and not valued. Therefore, there is a need to promote the image of the psychotherapist at the level of the collective mind, the need for an education to promote mental health, an education that focuses not only on physical health but also on mental health, an education that leads to the psycho-physical well-being of the person.

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselworte:

Psychotherapeut; Psychotherapie; Integrative Psychotherapie; Ausbildung; psychophysischen Gesundheit; Person

Der Psychotherapeut ist eine wichtige Fachkraft, die einen wesentlichen Beitrag zur Sicherung der psychischen Gesundheit der Menschen in der heutigen Gesellschaft leistet. Obwohl Psychotherapie im gegenwärtigen gesellschaftlichen Kontext, welcher durch eine Vielzahl von Stressfaktoren und traumatischen Faktoren belastet ist, eine wertvolle Ressource ist, wird der Psychotherapeut nicht richtig wahrgenommen oder ist auf der Ebene des kollektiven Bewusstseins sogar unbekannt. Die Integrative Psychotherapie, eine der neuesten Formen der Psychotherapie, reagiert effektiv auf die Herausforderungen der heutigen Gesellschaft auf integrierte Weise und konzentriert sich auf die Beziehung zwischen dem Therapeuten und dem Patienten. Der integrative Psychotherapeut ist der Spezialist, der den Menschen durch Prävention, Diagnose und Intervention zu einem Gleichgewicht führt, das seine psychische Gesundheit sichert. Die in dieser Arbeit an einer Versuchsgruppe bestehend aus Studenten durchgeführten Untersuchungen bestätigen, dass das Bild des Psychotherapeuten selbst von einem Publikum mit einem gewissen intellektuellen Bildungsniveau (Studenten) gar nicht oder nur verzerrt wahrgenommen wird. Die an der Forschung beteiligten integrativen Psychotherapeuten betonen auch, dass die Psychotherapie eine wichtige Ressource zur Verbesserung der Lebensqualität darstellt, die jedoch wenig bekannt ist und zu wenig wertgeschätzt wird. Das Ergebnis dieser Studie unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit, das Bild des Psychotherapeuten auf der Ebene des kollektiven Bewusstseins zu fördern, sowie die Notwendigkeit einer Ausbildung zur abgestimmten Förderung der psychischen und physischen Gesundheit, also der psychophysischen Gesundheit der Person.

1. Introduction

In Romanian society, psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists are professional figures associated with serious mental problems, and the person who turns to these specialists is often labelled and disregarded by others.

"In Romania, unfortunately, there is still this false idea that attending a psychotherapist implies a mental illness, and the fear of being stigmatized by society with the label "crazy" often makes us mistakenly

believe that we can "carry" problems and, implicitly, the suffering ourselves" (Chiriac, 2020, p. 19).

The figures of these professionals operating in the field of interpersonal relationships are often perceived in an undifferentiated way, as the specific skills and roles of each professional figure are not known. "Doing psychotherapy is totally different from going to a psychiatrist ... Many people confuse psychology with psychotherapy" (Chiriac, 2020, p. 22). The

psychotherapist is the least known figure between the psychologist and the psychiatrist, despite the fact that today there is a diversity of psychotherapies.

"Also, while professional psychotherapy associations are multiplying and enriching their work - today the main orientations in contemporary psychotherapy (psychoanalysis, cognitive-behavioral, Jungian, Adlerian, Reogersian, transactional, humanistic, positive, integrative psychotherapy, etc..) are represented in Romania by one or more associations recognized by the College of Psychologists -, specialized publications, both translated and local, do not adequately reflect this reality" (Zamfirescu, 2017, p. 7).

It is therefore necessary, from the very beginning, to clarify the role and mission of each of these three professionals (psychologist, psychotherapist and psychiatrist) in the field of mental health. All three professions are governed by specific legislation and a code of ethics, which define their duties and limits.

The main purpose of the psychologist profession is to prevent psychological discomfort or disorders and to promote the individual's well-being and recovery. The psychologist helps the individuals to improve their ability to understand themselves and others and to behave in a conscious, congruent and effective way. Psychologists can work in the clinical field, as well as in companies, sports field, schools, health field, etc., providing interventions for individuals, groups and also the community. The psychologist's main intervention tool is psychological counselling, which may be accompanied by the administration of psychological tests aiming at establishing a diagnosis and guiding.

Psychotherapy is the clinical tool that allows the psychotherapist to treat psychopathological disorders using non-pharmacological tools. Graduates of psychology, medicine or other related specializations who undergo specific postgraduate training in psychotherapy schools (lasting about five years) may be qualified to practice psychotherapy.

In the field of psychotherapy there are many approaches, involving quite different theories and methods: from traditional psychoanalysis, to cognitive-behavioral therapy or integrative therapy, which is one of the newest and most modern approaches, to which we will offer a particular focus in this research.

Therefore, the psychotherapist – and not the psychologist – is the professional recommended to treat psychopathological disorders.

The psychiatrist is a medical graduate with a specialty in psychiatry. The psychiatrist is primarily a medical doctor, who can prescribe generic and/or psychotropic drugs, who can order and evaluate clinical tests.

Psychiatry is the branch of medicine that deals with the study, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of mental disorders and pathological behavior. The psychiatrist is able to diagnose all psychopathological disorders. He/she assesses symptoms and clinical course, and proposes treatment which may be targeted towards pharmacological and/or psychotherapeutic intervention.

Even though mental health promotion is a much debated topic and mental health activities are starting to take shape, there is still a need for education to promote the importance of mental health through psychological counselling, psychotherapy and psychiatric support.

The coronavirus pandemic, the war in Ukraine are stressful and traumatizing factors that make people vulnerable and in this current social context it becomes imperative to reconsider what mental health means and to turn to specialists who can promote or intervene on psycho-physical well-being.

The choice of the research topic is not accidental, being linked to my own experience as an integrative psychotherapist, and to the way psychotherapy is understood in the collective mind. I believe that integrative psychotherapy is the answer to the problems and the suffering faced by people in today's society, but unfortunately this resource of integrative psychotherapy is very little known and used.

2. Theoretical foundation

The theoretical framework of reference is built around the approach of integrative psychotherapy, one of the new psychotherapeutic approaches, which uses methods and tools taken from most kinds of existing psychotherapy, focusing on the co-created relationship between therapist and patient.

2.1. Definitions

"Integrative psychotherapy is a unifying approach that brings together the psychological, affective, cognitive, contextual and behavioural systems, thus

creating a multidimensional relational framework that can be created anew for each individual case.” (Gilbert & Orlans, 2013, p.7).

The integrative perspective proposed by Evans and Gilbert focuses on the therapeutic relationship in all its dimensions, "growth and healing take place in an inter-subjective space co-created cooperatively by psychotherapist and client", the patient is seen as the architect of change, and the therapist's presence is honored in the relationship (Evans & Gilbert 2014, p. 13).

Integration in psychotherapy does not mean a new form of eclecticism, a salad with different ingredients, but it means developing a new coherent structure either in terms of technical intervention or in terms of theory. Integration in psychotherapy means to unify knowledge in a systematic, coherent and heuristic way and to arrive at a "whole". (Santostefano 2002).

Integrative psychotherapy is a form of psychotherapy that synergistically draws on several theories and techniques to ensure the effectiveness of the therapeutic process. With a unifying role, integrative psychotherapy takes into account the uniqueness of the person on an affective, cognitive, behavioral and physiological level, but also on a spiritual level.

As for the integrative aspect of psychotherapy, Gilbert and Orlans (2013) define integration in four ways:

1. The holistic approach of the individual, whereby the individual is seen as an integrated whole: emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally, physically and spiritually.
2. Integration of theories, concepts and techniques from different approaches to psychotherapy.
3. Integration of personal and professional issues in psychotherapist development / training.
4. Integration of research and practice - the psychotherapist studies current research and integrates it into his/her clinical practice.

Talking about integrative psychotherapy, Dafinoiu states that integrative trends in psychotherapy are driven by the needs of psychotherapists "to build flexible curative approaches with great creative potential, able to meet the uniqueness of the problems of patients seeking their help.” (Dafinoiu 2001, p. 10).

Analyzing the above definitions we can conclude that integrative psychotherapy emphasizes the intrinsic value of the individual, trying to respond in an effective and flexible way to the needs that the individual has in all dimensions of life.

2.2. Short History

The roots of integrative psychotherapy date back to the 19th and 20th centuries and can be found in philosophy.

Interest in an integrative approach to psychotherapy has existed throughout the history of psychotherapy, starting from the complexity and uniqueness of the human being with its different psychological and relational needs. The integrative movement in psychotherapy has gradually developed over the years.

The integrative approach proposed by Evans and Gilbert has as its epistemological foundations: phenomenology, field theory, holism and dialogue. These form the foundation of the theory and working method of integrative psychotherapy. Human behavior is seen phenomenologically as determined by personal experience rather than by an external objective reality. Experience is seen as a source of knowledge. Behavior, according to Lewin's field theory, is the result of a set of coexisting events, and these events occur in a field, the state of each part of the field depending on all the others. Awareness is important for field theory, the person becoming aware and being able to select available options (the gestalt notion of figure and background is suggestive in this respect). In the holistic perspective the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, all aspects are important, nothing is ignored. The external world is observed in conjunction with the person's inner world. Holistic observation is an active, attentive and deep search into the whole of the person's existence (cognition, sensation and emotion). The relational perspective brings a new dimension to integrative psychotherapy - the inter-human dimension. Buber emphasizes the co-construction of relationships. Central to the psychotherapeutic process is the co-creation of the therapeutic relationship as an interactive event, in which both patient and therapist participate and are involved. (Evans & Gilbert 2014).

Goldfried has made an important contribution to shaping the integration of psychotherapies, trying to show that the communion between behavioral psychology and psychoanalysis has a long history

starting in 1932. Integrative psychotherapy was born as a search for the integration of perceived deficiencies in the great schools of psychotherapy: psychoanalysis, behavioral psychology and humanistic psychology. Psychoanalysis has helped to understand unconscious processes, which can influence the whole of life. Criticism of psychoanalysis is that it takes too long to treat and lacks specific behavioral changes. Behavioral psychology has helped to understand the process of learning through positive and negative reinforcement, and how behaviors can be learned, unlearned and adaptive. Behavioral therapy focuses on the symptom and does not address underlying structural issues. Humanistic psychology has emphasized confidence in the person's potential and capacity for self-healing. But this direction of humanistic therapies has been criticized as being too optimistic and minimizing the existential realities of the human condition (Evans & Gilbert 2014).

Integration in psychotherapy has manifested itself in several directions, and some of these are worth mentioning: technical eclecticism, common factors, assimilative integration, complementarity, neuroscience (Evans & Gilbert 2014).

Technical eclecticism from a therapeutic point of view means using a set of techniques from other schools or orientations. In eclecticism, techniques are the engine of therapeutic change. The representative of this direction of technical eclecticism is Lazarus, who developed the multi-modal theory, which involves a careful assessment of the patient's problems and the choice of appropriate techniques from different orientations in order to assist the patient as effectively as possible. Critics of eclecticism point out that sometimes the incompatibility of one technique with other aspects of the therapeutic process is not taken into account.

The common factors approach states that therapeutic outcomes are determined by the similarities of different therapies and less by the differences between them. But this would lose the richness of many well-developed theories and techniques.

Assimilative integration involves the gradual assimilation of techniques and concepts from other approaches into the therapist's basic orientation. Imported and pre-existing techniques transform each other into a new end product. The concept of assimilative integration created by Messer in 1992 refers to the process of gradually assimilating

techniques and ideas from other approaches into one's own approach. In integrative psychotherapy this concept of assimilating integration is experienced by psychotherapists through the ongoing training that the profession entails and through the challenges of experience/work with clients. The risk of this approach is the loss of the essence of the original approach.

Complementarity is an approach whereby two or more distinct guidelines can be combined to be effective for the patient. Over the years there have been several complementary combinations as part of the integrative approach (e.g. cognitive-behavioral therapy).

In recent years there has been a major interest in neuroscience and neurobiology, and this interest has created bridges of integration between different therapists. Emphasis on neuro-biological processes such as attunement between child and mother or caregiver can create the biological basis for attachment. Interactions between child and mother or caregiver lead to the construction of neural connections, which form the type of attachment. The interactive and mutual regulatory nature of the parent-child dyad is important and is reflected in the therapeutic dyad (thus underlining the importance of attachment in psychotherapy).

The information underpinning integrative approaches comes from theorists who have compared different hypotheses, clinicians who have experimented with integrative practice, and results from psychotherapy.

2.3. *Specifics of Integrative Psychotherapy*

Integrative psychotherapy focuses on a relational perspective, and in this sense empathic attunement is very important, the relationship being co-created.

The relational approach to integration means that "the focus on the co-construction of the relationship means that we advocate a dual therapist-client perspective of the therapeutic process, in which both participants are seen as members of a reciprocal relationship, a delicate dance of mutual interactions and influences" (Evans & Gilbert 2014, p.13).

The specificity of integrative psychotherapy in Dafinoiu's opinion is the construction of the therapeutic act, which has two main actors - the therapist and the patient and which generates a

psychosocial reality that determines the change (Dafinoiu 2001).

From the perspective of integrative psychotherapy, the patient is the architect of change and the therapist is present in the relationship, the therapeutic process being a joint effort. This perspective of integrative psychotherapy requires a number of skills necessary for an effective therapeutic process.

An integrative psychotherapist must possess several specific competencies to be a qualified practitioner:

- interpersonal skills and self-discipline, knowledge of the field of mental health and understanding of the concept of caring, all these converge towards the ability to conduct professional psychological assessments;
- ability to maintain appropriate boundaries/limits and ensure privacy;
- ability to create and maintain therapeutic alliance;
- ability to understand psychotherapy and diagnostic systems;
- ability to conceptualize the treatment plan, purpose and processes of change in the context of whole life development;
- the ability to make a commitment with the patient to the purpose of therapy, activities and outcomes;
- the ability to understand relationship dynamics at multiple levels of change in order to manage power dynamics;
- knowledge of theories of development across the lifespan;
- the ability to coherently integrate theories and skills from multiple psychological therapies and appreciate multidisciplinary perspectives;
- ability to participate and work in explicit and implicit communication;
- ability to understand how creativity and art can be used in the therapeutic process;
- the ability to be sensitive to granting/not granting;
- the ability to work with understanding the self in its multiple aspects;

- ability to understand the co-created nature of therapeutic exchange;
- the ability to use the therapeutic self effectively and creatively;
- ability to respond to complex requirements as requested;
- ability to address appropriate psychological, cultural and contextual factors and to work with issues of difference and power in a non-discriminatory way;
- the ability to work for the patient, so that the patient can understand and be aware of the steps towards change;
- ability to assess the effectiveness of interventions;
- ability to assess risk and to pay attention to safety;
- the ability to work with ethical and professional issues;
- the ability to appropriately use professional support to further develop thinking and practice;
- the ability to evaluate therapeutic practice with a view to improving the services provided;
- ability to manage closure of the therapeutic process. (Gilbert & Orleans, 2013).

Integrative psychotherapy combines theory with practice, achieving a unified approach to the individual on a psychological, cognitive, emotional, spiritual level. (Evans & Gilbert 2014).

The specificity of integrative psychotherapy results precisely from the fact that it implies a co-created relationship in which there is a therapeutic alliance that meets the patient's goals.

2.4. Relationships of the Self

Self is “the organizing principle in the personality that is the heart of the self and uniqueness and it makes the bridge towards others and physical world around us” (Evans & Gilbert 2014, p.13). The integrative perspective proposed by Evans and Gilbert is based on the concept of “self-development”; an individual's self develops and evolves throughout life according to the relationships they have and the stages of development.

The self is the ensemble of body, brain, and mind that interacts and creates the relatively stable internal reference point that experiences life both

consciously and unconsciously (Wallin, 2010). Kohut, the founder of self-psychology considers the self as the central core of the personality that organizes feelings, thoughts, and representations of self and others (Kohut 2016).

Integrative psychotherapy looks at the self within the relationship. Six areas of the self within relationship are therefore examined:

- the biological field – the self in relation to the body (the relationship with one's own living and breathing body);
- the intrapsychic field – the self in relation to the self (dialogues between the different parts of the self, the inner world of the individual);
- the inter-personal field – the self in relation to others (interpersonal relationships, ties with others);
- the intercultural and contextual field: the self in relation to the context (experiences of the self, embedded in context);
- the ecological field – the self in relation to the environment and nature (relationship between humans and nature, how humans can influence nature);
- the transcendental field: the self in relation to the transpersonal and spiritual world (the man seeks the meaning of his existence, develops his spiritual self). (Evans & Gilbert 2014).

Body image was one of the aspects that psychotherapy addressed because it can influence other dimensions of the person. In this sense the mother/attachment figures in the child's life play a fundamental role in terms of education and body self-awareness. Touching, caressing, holding helps the child to perceive his/her body and its limits. The quality of the parent-child relationship will influence the child's relationship with his or her own body (acceptance and positive attitude towards the body or non-acceptance and dissociated distancing). Body image is formed early through the process of non-verbal communication between parent and child - through the process of early mirroring. The relationship of the self to the self refers to the way in which each person mentally represents him/herself as he/she functions, how he/she perceives him/herself among other people. The sense of the self emerges from birth and needs others to develop. Psychological literature has paid more attention to the concept of the self as an object. Therapists, however, need to pay attention to both polarities of the self - as subject and

as object, pathology occurs when the balance between these polarities of the self is lost. The self's relationship with others begins in infancy, when as babies they form their attachment style through interactions with their mother/caregiver. The secure or insecure attachment style formed in childhood influences attachment in later relationships. The construction of interactions with others is conditioned by the ability to understand the other's moods - the reflective function as termed by Fonagy (Fonagy et al. 2002). The sense of the self is developed in relationships with family, peers and others, being in a continuous relationship with others. The cross-cultural dimension of the self involves an analysis of the relationship of the self to race, culture, and social-political context. Understanding the cultural context in which a person lives means recognizing the person in their complexity. Therapists integrate the patient's cultural, social context into the therapeutic process and this is why this dimension of the self is so important in understanding the person. The integrative psychotherapist is not a detached observer, has a horizontal attitude, perceives the patient in the totality of life situations and adopts a position of acceptance of the patient's subjective reality, respecting the patient's perspective and values. The ecological dimension analyses the relationship of the self with nature, with the environment in which the self is seen as a consumer. Psychotherapists have the mission to awaken consciousness, to offer a different perspective of people's role in the world. The ecological self means taking on professional and personal values such as sustainability, conservation and restoration of life on earth. The relationship of the self to the transcendent involves the search for meaning beyond persons. Through encounter with other people, through an open and vulnerable attitude, through reciprocity and total engagement, a supernatural, mystical experience can be achieved. It is only through this deep contact that one can reach that relationship which Buber describes as I-Thou. In the integrative perspective the transpersonal and the human are connected (Evans & Gilbert 2014).

2.5. Values of Integrative Psychotherapy

Starting from the philosophies underlying the integrative approach to psychotherapy, Evans and Gilbert propose a series of values of integrative psychotherapy:

1. The patient's subjective experience is the starting point in therapy, the therapist's primary

responsibility is to accept what is offered and honor the patient's world.

2. The patient's conscious present is the "present moment", which can be overwhelmed by the past or anxiety about the future. In the "present moment" the patient discovers options and values.

3. The main agents in determining behavior are people, capable of responding but sometimes too embedded in the context, which can limit them.

4. Morality is the knowledge of what it is and not of what others should think or do think, applied to interpersonal relationships, intrapsychic relationships and in the social group.

5. The therapist „explores” rather than 'modifies' behaviors, with the patient having a chance to choose the behavior in the „present moment”.

6. The therapeutic relationship is a micro-cosmos of the patient. The therapist's presence must be active, authentic, energizing, honest and direct. The therapist must be aware of counter-transference and develop self-awareness.

7. Choice and learning occur with the natural integration of mind and body, thinking and feeling, the different dimensions of the self through natural self-regulation.

8. When a person becomes who and what they are (and does not try to become what they are not), change occurs in a holistic way.

9. Therapy is influenced by the world and the world affects therapy, life being a continuous flow. Personal growth and development is possible, but intrapsychic, inter-personal and socio-political awareness is needed.

10. Environmental factors are a major source of stress, lack of power and alienation. But integrative psychotherapy fights inequality of opportunity, supporting people's right to be different.

11. Dialogue is a manifestation of the relationship; it is based on experiencing the relationship with other people and self-experiencing. "I" only has meaning in relationship with another. Therapy means co-creation; it means a process involving two persons.

12. Maturity is not just self-autonomy, but self within the relationship. Health means creative interaction between the individual and the environment.

13. The self in isolation or the manipulated self means violence towards oneself or others. Violence hinders the I-Thou dialogue and tries to annihilate the self.

14. Curiosity and compassion for self and others are recommended, rather than negative judgment.

15. Integrative psychotherapy promotes integration with the aim of maximizing development after the therapy session, supporting the patient's right to self-determination and personal dignity (Evans & Gilbert 2014).

3. Research methodology

The aim of the research was first of all to identify the image of the psychotherapist among a category of people with a certain intellectual background - first-year undergraduate students at the university. Secondly, the research investigated the perception of integrative psychotherapists regarding their perception of the figure of the integrative psychotherapist/integrative psychotherapy.

The research conducted is a quantitative one, using the questionnaire survey method and the questionnaire instrument, and also a qualitative one, using the semi-structured interview method and the interview grid instrument.

The quantitative research and the qualitative research used are complementary, being combined to capture both data, factual and numeric information as well as descriptive data, related to the perception of the interviewees. Quantitative data provides the figures that demonstrate the broad points of the research, while qualitative data provides the detail and insights needed to fully understand the implications of the phenomenon being researched. Qualitative research allowed for more exploration, but without reaching precise overall conclusions.

The survey was designed with the aim of requesting information regarding the respondents' perception of the psychotherapist and psychotherapy. Used for exploratory purposes, the survey comprised a total of 15 questions, mostly closed questions but also two open questions. The survey also included two dependent questions, linked to the answer to a previous question.

Thus, the items in the survey focused on: the difference between a psychologist, a psychotherapist and a psychiatrist; the use of psychotherapy services and the reason for seeking such services; the

willingness to seek the services of a psychotherapist if needed; knowledge of the different types of psychotherapies available and of integrative psychotherapy; whether people who seek psychotherapy are ashamed of it or hide it; perception of the psychotherapist today in comparison with the past; the role of the psychotherapist (helping me to find my own resources; guiding me in solving my problems; helping me to reduce stress and live better; taking care of my well-being; he doesn't treat me with medication; he keeps professional confidentiality; he follows a code of ethics; he is a mental health professional; he knows how my mind works); whether the psychotherapist is a specialist who treats problems (corrective intervention) or a specialist who facilitates psycho-physical well-being (preventive intervention); whether the psychotherapist only supports the individual, or also supports the community; whether the psychotherapist is the private specialist or the public specialist; the importance of the presence of the psychotherapist in schools; the reimbursement of psychotherapy services; the effectiveness of online psychotherapy.

The interview was the method used for the qualitative part of the research, being conducted face to face. A semi-structured interview was chosen, which allows for some flexibility, with the topic and questions being pre-set, but allowing for additional questions. The interview grid was structured with 11 questions, to which additional questions derived from the response received from the interviewee were added. For efficient collection of information, the interviews conducted were recorded.

The semi-structured interview items were constructed according to the following themes: experience as a psychotherapist; the category of people, who predominantly seek psychotherapy services; the main problems/conditions with which patients present for psychotherapy; the main benefits of psychotherapy for patients; the opinion related to the statement "all types of psychotherapy generally achieve similar results"; the important element in integrative psychotherapy that facilitates the therapeutic process of change/healing; the role of psychotherapy in general, and of integrative psychotherapy in particular, in the context of the problems of today's society; whether integrative psychotherapy can contribute to a better quality of life in Romania; the perception of the psychotherapist in today's society; the perception of psychotherapy/integrative psychotherapy in the

collective mind in today's Romanian society; the promotion and support of mental health through integrative psychotherapy.

The methods and tools used have been designed to mirror two dimensions: that of the specialist – the integrative psychotherapist and that of the possible patient/the patient. Thus, some of the questions of the survey are found as questions in the semi-structured interview.

The type of sampling used for both the survey and the interview is convenience sampling. The sample used to apply the survey was made up of students of 1 Decembrie 1918 University in Alba Iulia, first year, bachelor cycle, and the sample used for the interview was made up of integrative psychotherapists, trained in the ARPI (Romanian Association of Integrative Psychotherapy) school of integrative psychotherapy.

The use of convenient sampling is easy, even if not representative. However, representative groups were used for the topic of this research, considering that students in a university represent a population with a significant intellectual background, which allows them to more easily come into contact with psychotherapy. The group of integrative psychotherapists was used from the point of view of psychotherapeutic training, considering that this new type of psychotherapy uses a variety of methods and tools, taken from all types of psychotherapy, to respond more effectively to mental problems and disorders existing in today's society.

The people involved in the research freely chose to participate in filling out the survey and carrying out the interview. The request to participate in the research - survey filling, was sent online to a number of 292 students of the 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia, who shall be majoring in Primary and Pre-school Pedagogy, Occupational Therapy and Social Work. Out of the 292 students, 189 students answered the survey freely. The request to participate in the research - carrying out a semi-structured interview was sent online, on the group of integrative psychotherapists to which I belong, to a total of 57 autonomous integrative psychotherapists, of which only 13 integrative psychotherapists freely chose to participate in the interview. All research participants expressed an interest in the research conducted, being interested in the field of mental health (either the students who completed the interview or the psychotherapists who conducted the interviews), with some requesting access to the research results.

In applying the surveys and conducting the interviews, any risk of mental, emotional or physical harm to individuals was excluded. Important guiding principles for researchers were also respected: respect for participants' autonomy, fairness by including all those who wished to participate in the research, integrity and dignity by being sensitive to participants' sensitivity to any impact the research might have.

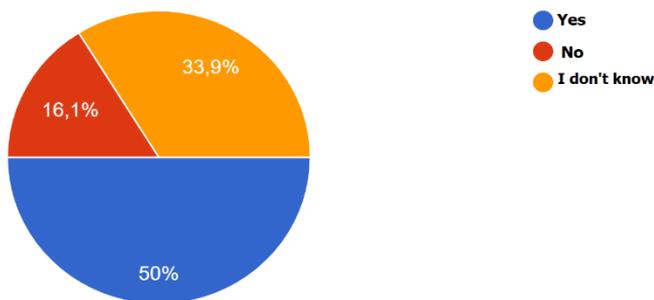
4. Results

4.1. Results Obtained from the Survey

The sample used to apply the survey consisted of 189 people, aged between 18 and 52 years, students of the 1 December 1918 University of Alba Iulia, first year of study, bachelor cycle, using a convenience sampling. 68% of the respondents were women and 32% were men. In terms of social status 83% are only students and 17% are also employees. The high number of female students is noticeable, which can be explained by the fact that most of the students come from the Primary and Pre-school Pedagogy major, in addition to other majors, and this major is chosen mainly by women who want to become primary school teachers and educators.

To the first question of the survey: *Do you know the difference between a psychologist, a psychotherapist and a psychiatrist?*, it is noted that 50% of respondents do not know this difference, while 50% know the difference between a psychologist, a psychotherapist and a psychiatrist.

Image 1. Knowing the difference between a psychologist, psychotherapist and psychiatrist



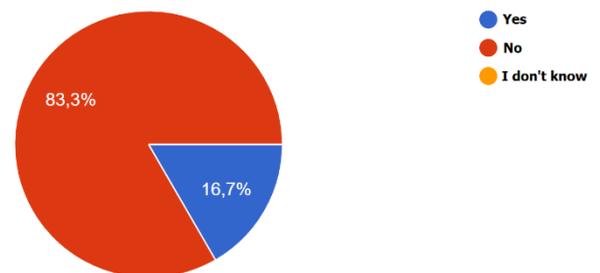
It is noteworthy that half of the respondents do not know the difference between a psychologist, a psychotherapist and a psychiatrist, a relatively high percentage, given that the respondents represent a category of people with a certain intellectual level,

who are following a university training path, although they are at the beginning of it.

Of the 50% who answered Yes to question number 1, the majority know the difference between a psychologist, a psychotherapist and a psychiatrist, but there is a significant percentage of responses that show that there is confusion in differentiating the competences of the three specialists, especially the psychotherapist (*"The psychologist - helps us to solve psychological, emotional problems, through communication, trust. The psychotherapist - helps us overcome certain fears, vices. The Psychiatrist - helps in depression"; "The difference is the method of treatment"; "The Psychologist is the one who helps you to overcome some things through therapy, and the psychiatrist is a doctor"; "The Psychologist deals with giving advice to rehabilitate the patient towards the psychological side. The psychotherapist deals with patients who need therapy, for example those who have had an accident and need both physical and mental rehabilitation. The psychiatrist is the only one who can give medication, having a medical degree. Etc."*).

To the question *Have you ever used the services of a psychotherapist?*, 83.3% say they have never used the services of a psychotherapist, and 16.7% have used this type of service.

Image 2. Persons who have used the psychotherapist's services



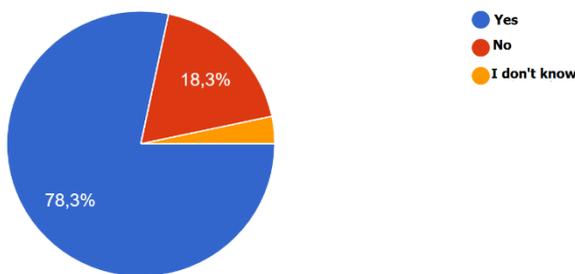
The percentage of people who never used the services of a psychotherapist leads us to two hypotheses: either these people did not need a psychotherapist, or they did not use a psychotherapist, despite having problems that required psychotherapeutic intervention.

Reasons for seeking the services of a psychotherapist (16.7%) included: depression, interpersonal relationships, stress, anxiety, rape, physical abuse, child with autism, child with

behavioral disorders, mistrust and problems with self-image and self-esteem, mourning, etc. The diversity of problems for which a very small percentage of people have turned to psychotherapy services is noticeable.

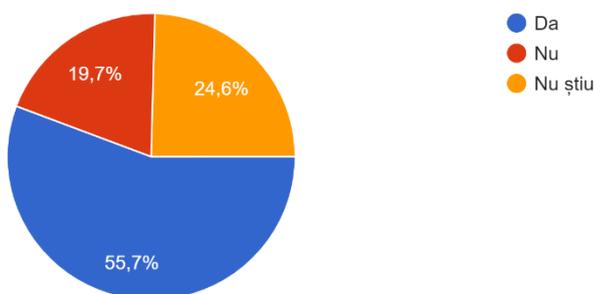
To the question *Would you seek the services of a psychotherapist, if needed?*, 78% of respondents indicated that they would seek the services of a psychotherapist if needed, 18.3% would not seek such services, and 3.3% did not know if they would seek psychotherapy services. The percentage of people who would use the services of a psychotherapist is high, which illustrates a willingness to use this type of service, despite the fact that the skills of this specialist are not well known.

Image 3 – Willingness to seek psychotherapy if needed



In terms of shame or reluctance to seek psychotherapy, more than half of those surveyed believe that people who seek psychotherapy are ashamed or hide it. Thus, to the question *Do you think that people who seek psychotherapy are ashamed or hide this fact?*, 55.7% answered *Yes*, 19.7% *No* and 24.6% *I don't know*.

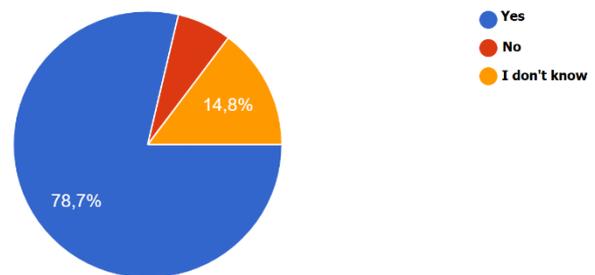
Image 4 – Shame and reluctance to acknowledge psychotherapeutic help



The interviewees illustrate that there is shame and reluctance to seek the services of a psychotherapist, which is why they often do not seek specialized help, despite the fact that they need it.

In the respondents' opinion, the figure of the psychotherapist is perceived differently today than in the past. Thus, to the question *Do you think that the image of the psychotherapist is perceived differently today compared to the past?*, 78.7% think that the image of the psychotherapist is changed compared to the past, 14.8% do not know if this image is perceived differently today, and 6.6% think that there is no difference between past and present in relation to the perception of psychotherapy.

Image 5 – How the perception of the psychotherapist's image has changed as compared to the past



The figure of the psychotherapist is perceived differently today than in the past, which may help psychotherapy services to be used in the future by a wider public, with an openness towards solving psychological problems, which could lead to an improvement in the mental health of the population.

Respondents consider that the psychotherapist has different roles:

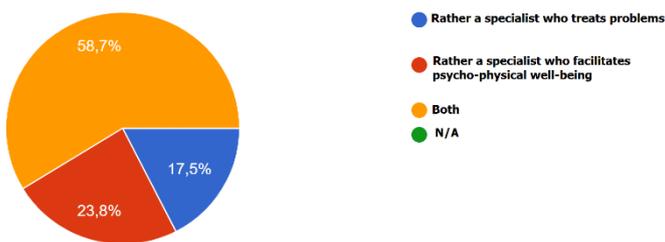
- He guides me in solving my problems – 79,4%
- He helps me reduce stress and live better – 66,7%
- He keeps the professional secret – 60,3%
- He helps me find my own resources – 54%
- He is a mental health professional – 50,8%
- He does not treat me with drugs – 47,6%
- He takes care of my well-being – 44,4%
- He complies with a code of ethics – 39,7%
- He knows how my mind works – 27%

Problem solving is seen as the primary goal of psychotherapy, or the primary role of the psychotherapist, along with stress reduction and better living. Keeping professional secrecy and identifying

one's own resources is also important to respondents, along with protecting mental health. It is thus noted that mental health is seen as important to the respondents surveyed, through problem solving, stress reduction and better living. It is also noted that respondents feel the need for confidentiality by keeping professional secrecy. The code of ethics and skills in terms of the functioning of the mind are not considered to be very important, in terms of the role of the psychotherapist.

To the question *Is the psychotherapist a specialist who treats problems (corrective intervention) or a specialist who facilitates psycho-physical well-being (preventive intervention)?*, 58.7% of respondents see the psychotherapist as having both roles, 23.8% see the psychotherapist as the specialist who facilitates psycho-physical well-being, and 17.5% see the psychotherapist as a specialist who treats problems.

Image 6 – How the perception of the psychotherapist’s image has changed as compared to the past



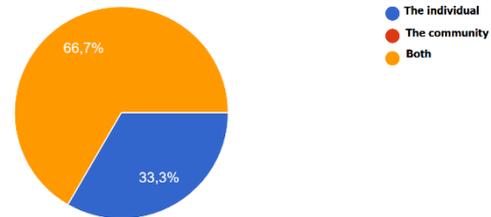
The psychotherapist's intervention is seen from both a corrective and a preventive perspective by the vast majority of respondents, which illustrates the importance of prevention in psychotherapy services.

To the open-ended questions *Are you aware that there are several types of psychotherapy? And Do you know what integrative psychotherapy is*, only 3.78% say they know about the existence of several types of psychotherapies and 1.89% say they know what integrative psychotherapy is. These percentages illustrate that psychotherapy in general, and integrative psychotherapy in particular, are not well known, although each psychotherapy has an important role in specific pathologies, and integrative psychotherapy fits any type of pathology.

According to the respondents, the psychotherapist supports both the individual and the community through psychotherapeutic interventions. Thus, to the question *Does the psychotherapist support only the person, or does he/she support the community as*

well?, 66.7% say that the psychotherapist supports both the person and the community, and 33.3% say that the psychotherapist supports only the person.

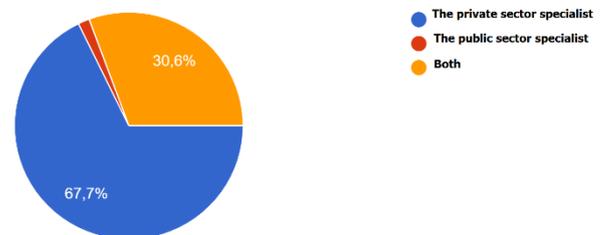
Image 7 – Does the psychotherapist support only the person, or does he/she support the community as well?



The role of the psychotherapist is also perceived at the community level, not just at the individual level, which illustrates that respondents understand the link between a person's mental wellbeing and the community.

To the question *When you think of a psychotherapist, do you think of a private sector specialist or a public sector specialist?* 67.7% of respondents say they think of a private sector specialist, 30% think of both, and 1.6% think of a public sector specialist.

Image 8 – The psychotherapist is the private sector specialist or the public sector specialist.



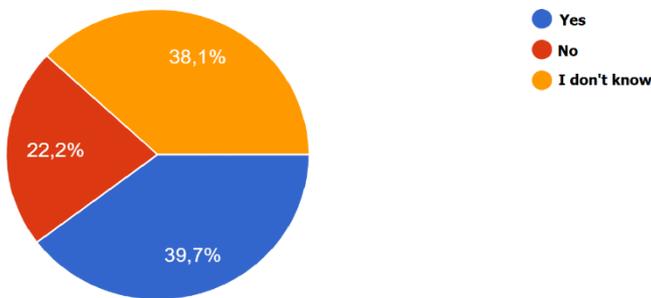
The psychotherapist is seen, by a large percentage of respondents, as a private specialist, which corresponds to reality, and despite the fact that there is a need for this specialist, few public institutions employ psychotherapists.

Regarding the importance of the presence of the psychotherapist/psychologist in schools, all respondents consider the psychotherapist and psychologist to be important in the school environment. The importance of the psychotherapist's presence in schools is noted, as the psychologist's skills are often outweighed by the multitude of problems in the school context. Also, 81% of the respondents think that the State should pay for

psychotherapy services, 7.9% think that these services should not be paid for, and 11.1% do not know whether these services should be paid for. Respondents illustrate that the reimbursement of psychotherapy services by the State is important, most likely facilitating access to these services and thus contributing to a better knowledge of these types of services.

To the question *Do you think online psychotherapy is effective?*, 39.7% think online psychotherapy is effective, 38.1% do not know if online psychotherapy is effective, and 22.2% think online psychotherapy is not effective.

Image 9 – Effectiveness of online psychotherapy



It is noted that the majority of respondents do not consider online psychotherapy to be effective or cannot comment on the effectiveness of this type of therapy, despite the fact that during the pandemic online psychotherapy was successfully used.

4.2. Results of the Semi-Structured Interview

The panel used for the semi-structured interviews consisted of 13 psychotherapists trained in integrative psychotherapy, mostly women (11 women and 2 men), aged between 32 and 54. 80% of the psychotherapists interviewed had between 1 and 5 years of experience, 20% between 5 and 10 years and none over 10 years.

As for the category of people who predominantly use psychotherapy services, respondents indicated that they work with children, teenagers and adults and less with elderly people. All psychotherapists said that both women and men use psychotherapy services. There is a diversity of categories of people who use integrative psychotherapy services (the elderly being the least likely to use these services). It is interesting to note that one category of people who use psychotherapy consists of children, which illustrates the importance of intervention in childhood (for harmonious personality development - the foundations

of the personality are laid in the first 6-7 years of life, and it continues to develop until adolescence).

The main problems/disorders patients present with for psychotherapy are related to depression, anxiety, couple problems, relationship problems, panic attacks, behavioral disorders, mourning, divorce, stress management, various children's problems (autism, ADHD, school integration difficulties), personality disorders, etc. People who seek psychotherapy do so for a range of problems that can be mild (stress management) or serious (personality disorders). Mild problems such as stress management, anxiety or relationship problems can be dealt with through psychological counselling by the psychologist, but dealing with serious problems such as personality disorders or depression is the responsibility of the psychotherapist.

The interviewees consider that benefits of psychotherapy for patients are related to their personal development, the patients gain emotional balance, the quality of their life is improved, they are regaining their well-being, their psycho-physical balance, they live a harmonious life, they become aware of the importance of childhood for the development of their personality, they integrate the physical, cognitive and psycho-social dimensions of development, the congruence of thoughts, emotions and behaviors, etc. It is clear from the respondents' statements how important psychotherapy is, and what the outcomes of integrative psychotherapy are. This is where the importance of promoting psychotherapy as an important resource for a person's psychophysical well-being comes from.

In relation to the statement "all types of psychotherapy generally achieve similar results", the psychotherapists interviewed consider that "*effective psychotherapy is that which is tailored to the needs of the patient*"; "*all therapies aim at the psycho-physical well-being of the patient, but achieve their goals by different methods*"; "*each type of psychotherapy has its own methods and tools*"; "*integrative psychotherapy brings together many of the approaches of the other types of psychotherapy, so uses a variety of tools*"; "*all types of psychotherapy must take into account the goals set with the patient*", etc. These responses of the psychotherapists interviewed show that all types of psychotherapy aim to help people identify and achieve psychological balance, but integrative psychotherapy has added value because it uses tools, methods and techniques from all existing psychotherapies.

Regarding the important element in integrative psychotherapy that facilitates the therapeutic process of change/healing, all respondents agree that the therapeutic relationship and alliance is the central aspect of integrative psychotherapy that helps the patient in psychotherapy. The relationship, as the scholarly literature also points out, is the important element that integrative psychotherapy uses as an added value compared to other types of psychotherapy, along with other important elements and aspects that derive from the specifics of each type of psychotherapy.

According to the interviewees, the psychotherapy's role in general, and of the integrative psychotherapy in particular, in the context of problems from today's society, is: prevention and intervention in psychiatric disorders; support and guidance (the role of integrative psychotherapy in society is more complex due to the diversity of methods and techniques); emotional support, replacement of irrational thinking with rational thinking, correction of behavioral disorders, etc. It can be said that psychotherapy in general and integrative psychotherapy in particular have the role of prevention and intervention, along with that of diagnosis, in close collaboration with the psychiatrist, monitoring the well-being of the person seeking psychotherapy services.

All respondents interviewed believe that integrative psychotherapy can contribute to improving the quality of life in Romania. These conclusions show the importance of integrative psychotherapy and the need to promote integrative psychotherapy, to contribute through this type of services to increase the quality of life of people living in Romania.

The image of the psychotherapist in today's society, in the opinion of the psychotherapists interviewed, is unclear, as many people do not differentiate between a psychologist, a psychotherapist and a psychiatrist ("I have patients who come to me and ask for psychiatric medication"). Most of the respondents believe that the figure of the psychotherapist is not sufficiently well known and that education of the general public is needed. The image of the psychotherapist will change in the future, especially if there are promotional actions in this respect. It is therefore necessary to inform, to promote the figures of specialists involved in the field of mental health, because they are little known or wrongly perceived. Each specialist (psychologist,

psychotherapist or psychiatrist) has a specific, distinct role in ensuring a person's mental health.

In terms of how psychotherapy/integrative psychotherapy is perceived by the collective mind in Romanian society today, respondents claim that it is an unappreciated resource because it is not known and because there is reluctance to seek psychotherapy. An insignificant percentage of people know about psychotherapy and very few know about integrative psychotherapy. Psychotherapy, despite being a resource, is not known and used. Again it is important to educate, to make known this resource of psychotherapy in general and integrative psychotherapy in particular.

Promoting and supporting mental health through integrative psychotherapy, according to respondents, can be achieved through: public mental health promotion and support programs; educating children and young people about mental health; more exposure and consideration for psychotherapy and psychotherapy through settlement of psychotherapy services. The majority of respondents agree that mental health promotion and support should be a collective effort, undertaken by different actors in the private sector as well as the public sector. Concrete, specific actions and activities are needed to promote and support mental health through a joint effort of different public and private actors. Integrative psychotherapy has a major role and contribution to make in ensuring and supporting mental health.

5. Discussions

The information obtained by using the two research methods: the questionnaire survey and the semi-structured interview were built around a common theme: the image of the psychotherapist today. This is why the analysis of the information obtained by applying the two methods was carried out in a mirror image. The perspective of the image of the psychotherapist today as seen by the respondents interviewed was complemented by that of the interviewees, looking for similarities and differences in the responses of the two types of people in the panel.

The psychotherapist is a lesser-known specialist, either in the opinion of the respondents interviewed or in the opinion of the psychotherapists interviewed. Although the psychotherapist is clearly distinct, in terms of role and skills, from the psychologist and the psychiatrist, there is confusion between these specialists.

As stated in the literature (Chiriac, 2020) physiotherapists, regardless of their training, are not known, and there is confusion in distinguishing the role and competences of the specialists involved in the field of mental health. The figure of the psychotherapist, despite the development of psychotherapy in recent years and the existence of numerous types of psychotherapy, is the least known.

It follows from this that it is necessary and important to promote the figure of the psychotherapist, who, through the specific skills he or she possesses, can even treat serious disorders, such as personality disorders (borderline personality disorder, bipolar personality disorder, etc.), which are skills that the psychologist does not possess. It is necessary here to mention the specific competences of the integrative psychotherapist which start from interpersonal skills and self-discipline, knowledge of the mental health field and understanding of the concept of caring; the ability to create and maintain the therapeutic alliance; the ability to address appropriate psychological, cultural and contextual factors and to work with issues related to differences and power in a non-discriminatory way; etc.

In the respondents' opinion the psychotherapist is a specialist who treats problems (corrective intervention) and facilitates psycho-physical well-being (preventive intervention). Hence, the importance of prevention, achieved through psychotherapy. Prevention is an essential component of psychotherapy, which, together with diagnosis and therapy, are the tools the psychotherapist uses to help the patient achieve physical, cognitive and psycho-social well-being. This highlights the importance of prevention and intervention through integrative psychotherapy, which has a unifying approach that brings together the psychological, affective, cognitive, contextual and behavioral systems.

The psychotherapist is seen by the respondents as a resource for the individual, but also for the community, which shows the importance of group interventions that this specialist can carry out. The psychotherapist is also seen as a resource at school level, where there can be problems that can only be solved through psychotherapy. It is noted the importance of integrative psychotherapy that emphasizes the intrinsic value of the person, individually or collectively, which seeks to respond in an effective and flexible way to the needs that the person has in all dimensions of life. It is also through

the values of integrative psychotherapy, and through the dimensions of the self that integrative psychotherapy considers, that the person is seen in relation to others and in relation to the environment. It is thus understood that the integrative psychotherapist is a resource for either the person or the community.

A large percentage of the people surveyed, namely 83.3%, have not turned to psychotherapy, although 78.3% say they are willing to use this type of service, and 55.7% consider it shameful to do psychotherapy. These percentages illustrate reluctance to seek specialist help from psychotherapists, although there is a willingness to seek this help. The psychotherapists interviewed confirmed that patients have difficulty and reluctance to seek psychotherapy services. There are stereotypes and prejudices in seeking psychotherapeutic services, with many people avoiding this support because of society labeling. The psychotherapist, in the collective mind, is seen on the one hand as a useless figure and on the other as a specialist to whom the 'crazy people' turn. The psychotherapist does not have a magic wand, nor does he claim to predict the future and offer immediate solutions or passive healing. He is not a figure to replace that of a friend or a simple confessor, but is a professional and, as such, guides the patient towards the change that ensures his well-being.

The reasons why respondents went to psychotherapy (a relatively small percentage of 16.7%) ranged from milder problems such as stress or anxiety to more serious problems such as depression or sexual abuse. The interviewed psychotherapists confirm that people who seek psychotherapy do so for various problems ranging from mild to very serious ones (such as various personality disorders). It goes without saying that the range of problems that can be resolved in integrative psychotherapy is vast, with the patient being able to be supported in a multitude of issues from simple "mental hygiene" to trauma that can profoundly affect the personality. Through the various specific skills they possess, integrative psychotherapists can respond to the various mild or serious problems for which the person seeks psychotherapy services.

All respondents, both respondents to survey and interviewees, believe that the image of the psychotherapist will change over time, but this change requires education and specific and clear interventions. In this respect, a specific intervention, supported by both respondents and interviewees, is the

payment of psychotherapy services by the State. Evans and Gilbert (2013) support the idea of creating a national psychotherapy service to facilitate access to psychotherapy services, although such a national service requires substantial financial resources.

The role of psychotherapy in today's social context, where there is a multitude of stressors, is seen in the dimension of prophylaxis, but also of intervention. Integrative psychotherapy, with its integrated approach and the diversity of methods and techniques used, can respond effectively to the needs of people in today's society. The relationship is the central point of integrative psychotherapy, which responds in a complex way to the needs of the person as a whole, creating a multidimensional relational framework.

"Through our professions, whatever they may be, we all have a role to play. Each of us, in our place, can lay a cornerstone in building a better society" (Andre, 2016, p. 65).

6. Conclusions

"Psychotherapy is about learning to love ourselves and those around us. It also means enriching our relationships with an extra measure of respect and joy." (Chiriac 2011, p. 22).

The majority of the respondents surveyed indicate that they are willing to go to psychotherapy in case of need, so this availability results in a positive image of the psychotherapist, and implicitly a validation of the competence and trust in this specialist.

From the research carried out, *the need for education in order to reach well-being*, the need to make known the figure of the psychotherapist who accompanies the person towards wellness is definitely and clearly highlighted. Psychotherapy is an unfortunately undervalued resource, a resource for individuals, for groups and for society. The aim of the article and of the research carried out is precisely to raise people's awareness of the importance of mental health and to promote the figure of the psychotherapist.

There is a need for a mental health promotion culture that is able to overcome prejudices about the images of specialists and to stop the stigma that still exists today towards people suffering from mental disorders. Promoting mental health culture also means making people aware of their choices and ensuring

that mental health and psycho-physical well-being become priorities in life.

Mental health in childhood is a fundamental condition for psycho-physical well-being in adulthood. One should understand the importance of prevention, diagnosis and intervention at the earliest stage of a person's development, in childhood, as these elements of mental health fall within the task and competence of the psychotherapist, who works with people at all stages of development (children, pubescents, teenagers, adults and the elderly).

The psychotherapist is a specialist in the "supportive relationship", who aims to improve the quality of life of people who turn to psychotherapy, who with the help of the specialist find within themselves the resources and potential to help themselves.

"... psychotherapy is also one of the most striking and widespread cultural phenomena of the contemporary world" (Zamfirescu, 2017, p. 8). One understands the development that psychotherapy is undergoing today and the importance of making this phenomenon known.

Integrative psychotherapy is a form of psychotherapy that is based on several theories and techniques in a synergistic way, thus ensuring the effectiveness of the therapeutic process. With a unifying role, integrative psychotherapy takes into account the uniqueness of the person.

Starting from an integrative and unifying vision of the individual, integrative psychotherapy takes into account the uniqueness of the individual on an emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological level, but also on a spiritual level. The value of this type of psychotherapy derives from this multidimensional approach, which responds in an integrated way to the needs of the individual in today's society. Integrative psychotherapy today responds to the need for a culture of prevention, a culture which places the emphasis primarily on the well-being of the individual, the protection of the environment (understood not only as nature), the value of life, joy, serenity, the enjoyment of social relationships, etc.

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