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The Impact of Veterans Perception of Therapist Empathy on Continuation in Treatment: A Research Proposal

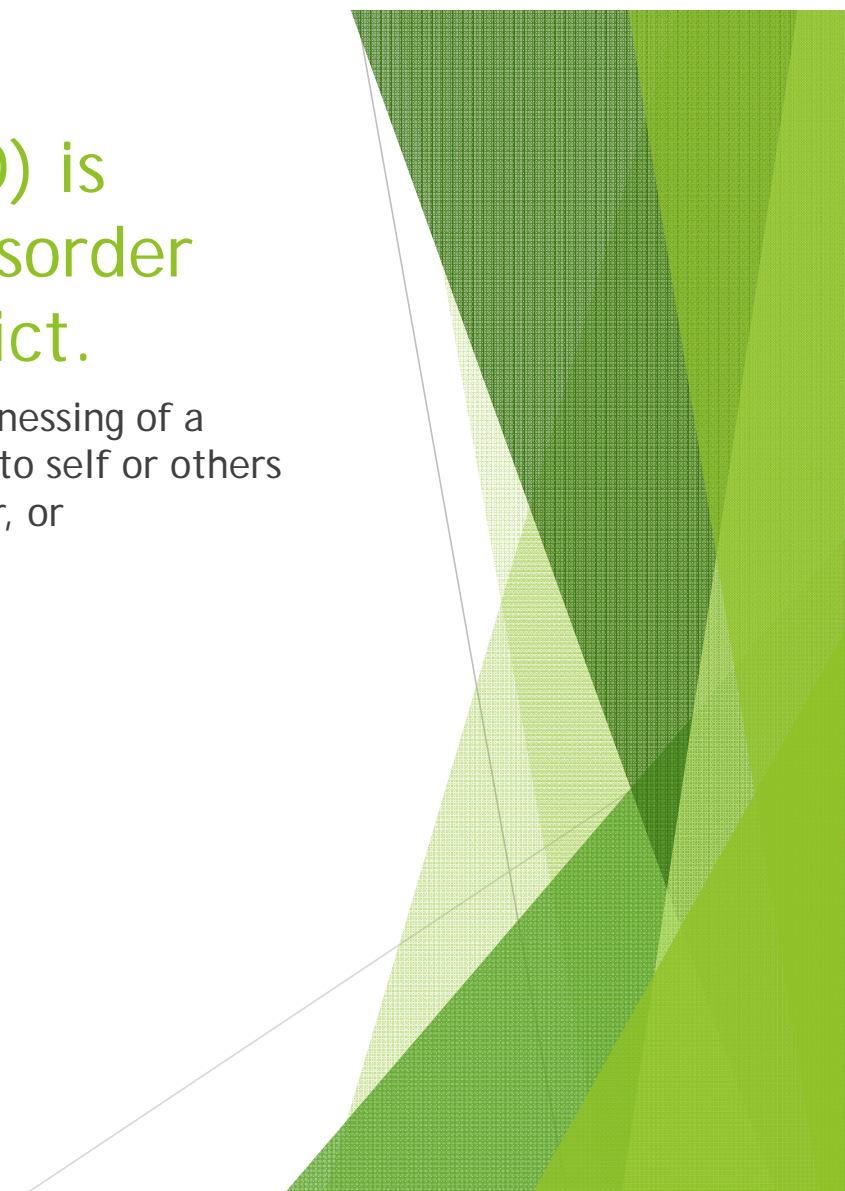
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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD) is defined as a complex and serious disorder affecting veterans from every conflict.

- ▶ Causes of the symptoms of PTSD are the experiencing or witnessing of a stressor event involving death, serious injury or such threat to self or others in a situation in which the individual felt intense fear, horror, or powerlessness.



Symptoms of PTSD

- ▶ Intrusion symptoms
- ▶ Avoidance of stimuli
- ▶ Marked alterations in arousal
- ▶ Negative cognitions



Critical Issues

- ▶ Employment
- ▶ Relationship Conflicts
- ▶ Emotional Instability
- ▶ Parent/ Child Relationship



Veterans struggling with symptoms of PTSD often deal with the following:

- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Shame
- ▶ Guilt
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Depression



The aim of this study is to explore the use of empathy as a tool with veterans diagnosed with PTSD and its relevance to duration of treatment.



- ▶ This study will examine the participants point of view of how empathy can impact continuation of therapy; facilitate interaction; and enhance treatment outcome at the individual level.

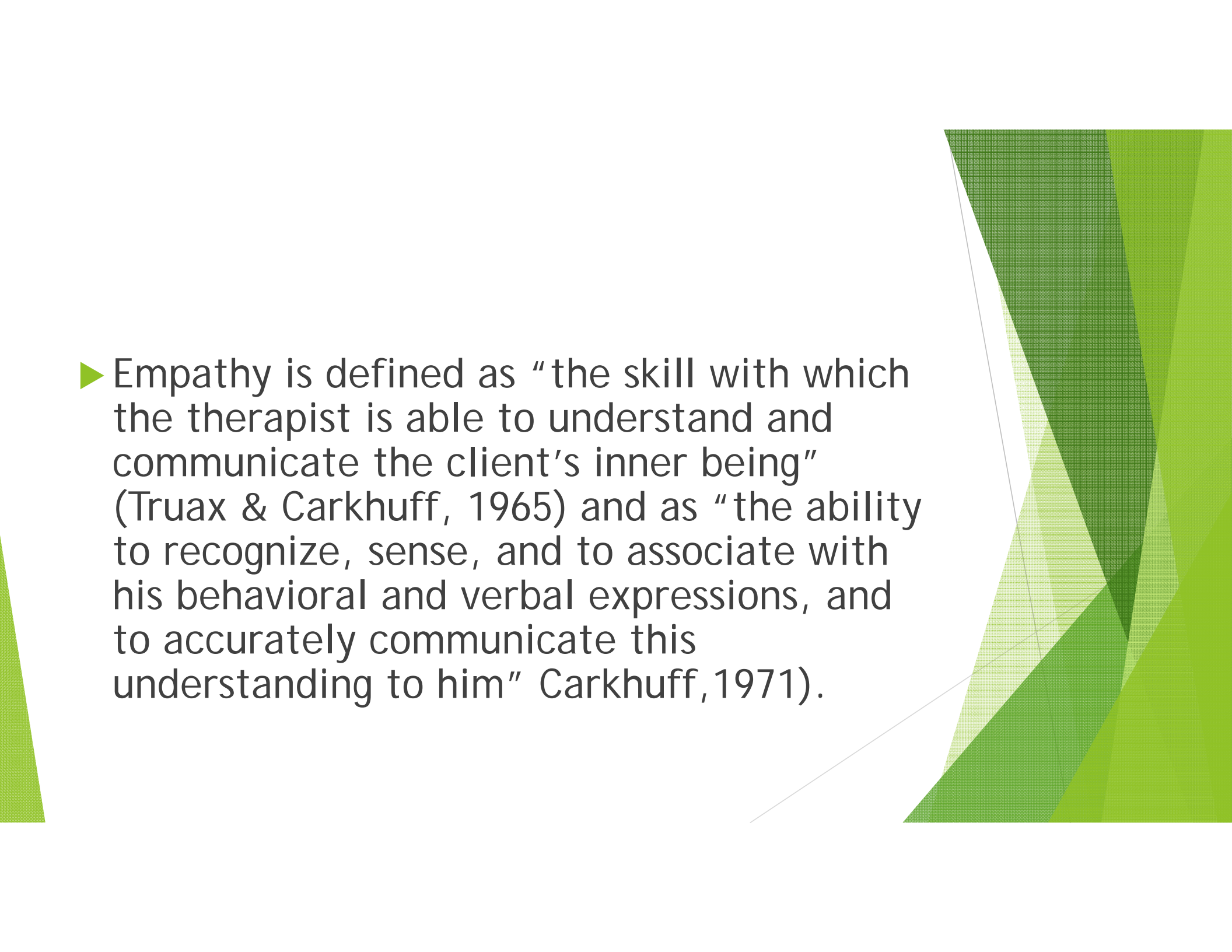
- ▶ The review of literature revealed limited empirical data regarding the affect of empathy when treating military veterans.



- ▶ One study discussed the problems faced by veterans during readjustment from active duty to civilian life. Another study described a military social work course that was developed to increase student preparedness to work with a military or veteran population and the learning outcomes achieved.



- ▶ Alexandra Bachelor(1988) attempted to provide a clearer conceptualization of “received” empathy by examining how clients actually perceive therapist empathy and what constitutes an empathic response from the client’s perspective.

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- The background of the slide features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, in various shades of green, creating a modern and dynamic visual effect.
- ▶ Empathy is defined as “the skill with which the therapist is able to understand and communicate the client’s inner being” (Truax & Carkhuff, 1965) and as “the ability to recognize, sense, and to associate with his behavioral and verbal expressions, and to accurately communicate this understanding to him” Carkhuff, 1971).


- ▶ Veterans who perceive the therapist as empathic are more likely to continue in therapy. The use of trauma focused therapies such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Cognitive Processing Therapy, and/or Prolonged Exposure has shown reductions in PTSD symptoms.

Hypotheses: (1) Veteran's perception of therapist empathy will impact veteran's continuation in treatment, and (2) duration in treatment will contribute to more effective treatment.



Methods to be used

- Data will be collected from veterans 18 years and older with PTSD; receiving treatment in the outpatient Trauma Recovery Program and Evidenced Based Program at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi.

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The researcher will employ a Mixed-Method study to explain participants point of view of how empathy can impact treatment outcome at the individual level.

CARE: Consultation and Relational Empathy Questionnaire

10 questions, five responses ranging from
poor to excellent

5 face-to-face interviews



Sample will be identified from referrals to outpatient Trauma Recovery and Evidenced Based Program.



- ▶ This study will improve the knowledge gap; examine the importance of empathy on continuation of therapy; and impact of duration of treatment on veterans employment, emotional stabilization, and level of social adjustment.