

# My psychotherapy career: From NHS to private practice

With UKCP psychotherapist Victoria Dada

Jenna:

Hello and welcome to 'My psychotherapy career', a podcast we explore the different therapeutic settings our members work in and how they came into their career. I'm Jenna Rachid, the digital engagement officer at UKCP. Our host Helen Willingham is the head of content and engagement at UKCP, overseeing all our communications to members and the public as well as our policy and research work. In this episode, Helen speaks to UKCP psychotherapist Victoria Dada. After completing a degree in accounting and finance, Victoria sought a new path where she could explore her desire to help others. Drawn to counselling and later psychotherapy, she began training whilst working in a call centre. Throughout her training and career, faith, culture and race have informed Victoria's psychotherapeutic journey. Following her training, Victoria entered the NHS as the only black therapist in her team. There she works with a variety of client experience. In 2020, Victoria set up in private practice where she navigated the impact of the pandemic and establishing her business. In this episode, Helen speaks to Victoria to find out how she used her own identity and experience to attract clients to her private practice.

Helen:

Really nice to have you today Victoria. Thank you for joining us. I want to kick off with a big question. Why did you become a psychotherapist?

Victoria:

I feel for me personally, growing up in a community where the village [accepts] you as a child, so that has really been embedded in the importance of a sense of community. And as a result, I've always loved connecting with people. And also, I grew up listening to my grandma telling me a lot of stories about the culture. And she also would tell me about what has not been right in the culture. For example, some of the hurt and harm and the oppressions that previous generations experienced. So, unknown to both of us, as a myself and my grandmother, she was actually training my listening skill. And I've always loved to listen to people, interacting and encouraging people. And I must also add as well, emotional healing has always been very important to me. And my experience being part of the BAME community is how oppression has forced people to be who they are not. So, helping people to be who they are is really, really massive for me. So, I will say that was my 'why' on becoming a psychotherapist.

Helen

So, it sounds like you started really early on really, and it was a calling, if you like.

Victoria

I can say that. Absolutely. I will say for me, it's more of a calling, to be honest. Yeah.

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Helen

And what then prompted you to start training. Was there a specific point where you thought, now this is the time?

Victoria

Yeah. I think it was after the completion of my first degree in accounting and finance. And I just had to sit down and have an honest conversation with myself, that pursuing a career in accounting doesn't feel like it would give me a sense of purpose and fulfilment, to be honest. So, I think that was the point where I just had to take a U-turn. And because I know that I would [be] involved in absolute grassroots level in someone's life, so I had to kind of enroll on a professional training that is very thorough, to help me to develop. That prompted me to begin the training.

Helen

And what does being a UKCP member mean to you?

Victoria

The education, the training that I get as a therapist is delivered at a nationally recognised standard and the standard practices are respected and expected. For example, having a monthly supervision helped me to be held accountable, and also to work ethically. And the regulation also helped me to maintain a good practice and also to protect the public. And to add to that as well, it also gives a sense of community and belonging. And being a part of the big BAME community, having a sense of community is very important to me. The value [of being] heard and being held accountable, it gives me a sense of working ethically, and the safety of others means a lot to me. So, I feel that'd be part of UKCP holds that safety net for me. Being accredited is something that is also required of employed work. But it means so much more to me than that.

Helen

Yeah, I can see that from your answer. And talking about employment. You've worked within the NHS. Why did you enter the NHS and what's it been like working in that setting?

Victoria

At the start of my career, being part of a team, it was very important to me. And also, during my training, I had to take about a two-year gap for me to be able to be there for my twin boys. So, on completing the training, I needed job security and stability. Because if I had gone straight into private practice, I wouldn't be able to have the security and stability that would come within the NHS. And also, it comes with the opportunities of having training and they were free. It's all part of the provisions that have been given by the organisation. It also allowed me to assess different support for the clients that I'm working with. And also, it gives me a sense of connection with other colleagues. And yes, private practice there is more autonomy in that. But it can be isolating. So, being part of a team gives me that connection. As we all know, the NHS is a well-established organisation. It also comes with the richness of the opportunities to grow and also widen my knowledge. So, I think the complexity of the work sometimes has really helped me to understand and appreciate the referral protocol, because we have to refer clients. So, it also opened my mind to short-term therapy. And yes, it comes with the frustration, because it's time limited. And it can be very frustrating because I am trained as a developmental, relational, integrated therapist. So, working within the NHS has not given me the opportunity to work in the fullness of my training. So, that comes with that frustration. And

another benefit of them, what it's been like working with this setting, is that it allows me to be able to work with other various professionals like social workers, like GPs - because sometimes we do work with the GPs - psychologist, and the secondary care team, the crisis team. So, it widens my knowledge. It has also helped me to accept that I will be left with unfinished businesses with some of my clients. So, that allowed me to be realistic with the goal and to make the most of each session. And lastly, I've also learned the importance of self-care. So yeah.

Helen

And I think that's a really important one as well, especially as like you said with private practice it can be quite isolating and you've actually set up in private practice now. What prompted you to start that?

Victoria

The private practice has given me a greater freedom to be able to offer more to my client in comparison to NHS, where I'm working within a structure and parameters that's already been laid down by the organisation. Face to face, that was my experience when I trained. So, when the COVID came, and at that time as well, the NHS was actually kind of thinking outside the box, because they had to adapt to the change that time. Before COVID, the service that we were offering, 90% of the clients that we saw before COVID was face to face. So, for the first three, four months, we were only offering telephone sessions. So, it was after four months they now came up with the option of attend anywhere, which was the video. So that was a change that I had to adapt to. And during the adaptation for myself, it made me realise that I really enjoy my own company. That even though, at the beginning... at the beginning of my career, I needed to be part of a team. But I have grown now to have enough robustness in myself and be able to offer myself via online platform to my client in a safe and comfortable environment. So yeah, I think that was what made me realise it.

Helen

And how did you attract clients?

Victoria

I've always been a Christian myself. I've already had that trusted relationship within my church, within my community. So that really helped. People already knew me and the trust was already there. And visibility also, because then that was when I started my social media on Instagram, and also the website as well. So the marketing side of the business has to really, really begin to happen. And when I was trying to navigate starting my business, I had to join an online community. And that really made me understand the importance of having a clear niche. So, having a clear niche allowed me to target my ideal client. So, it doesn't feel like I'm talking to everyone. And that add substance to my message. So that actually really helped me to attract clients.

Helen

Yeah, that's great. And I think that's a really important thing that's come up in a couple podcasts before about really knowing who you're targeting, because you can't reach everybody, and you're not going to be able to work with everybody but being able to manage that.

Victoria

Absolutely. And that's really worked for me right from the very start. Because I remember that at the very

beginning, when I was going into the private practice during COVID, I had to join the online community called 'Grow your private practice' run by a lady called Jane Travis. She's an ex-therapist, she's also an ex-marketer, and being part of that community really built my confidence. And I have to go through some training as well. And it was really important having a clear niche to be able to have a clear message that I want to pass on to your ideal client.

Helen

And what advice would you give to someone who's looking to start their own practice?

Victoria

I will say, explore your relationship with money. And be willing to invest in your practice, and work towards having a clear niche. I have a very supportive supervisor and also have a peer support space to be able to reflect on your own process. And surround yourself with people who will understand your vision and be very clear in your boundary and respecting boundaries. And very realistic about the time commitment, and also what you will actually earn. I will say those are my advice.

Helen

I think that's really helpful and you've covered quite a bit there. I think that's really interestingly like you said about exploring your relationship with money, be willing to support your practice but also being realistic about time and how much you want to earn, because that's all about the balancing of your own work and your life as well.

Victoria

Absolutely. Very, very important to have that at the back of your mind while you are establishing your own matters, the money and the time commitment.

Helen

I'm going to take you back to training a bit. Looking back now, is there anything you wish you'd known before you started training?

Victoria

When I was going into the training, my focus was on how to help others. But actually, it was the relationship with myself that was the key thing. That was a big eye opener to be honest, Helen. It's a very demanding training financially, emotionally. And again, time commitment, big time and the academic pressure, there's a lot of pressure in the academic side. Yes, it would have been good if I had known about this. But that would not have changed my view, I would have still done it, to be honest.

Helen

And you mentioned about the demands of time and money and academic pressure, how did you manage the logistics of training? The costs, the time, those sorts of aspects.

Victoria

Yeah, like I said earlier on. During my training, I had my twin boys, being a first-time mom as well. So that was a lot and I had to pay the bills, I had to pay for the cost of the training. So, there was a lot on me. So, I had to really be very careful and be very protective of my time. And my boundary as well, I had to have a realistic

expectation on myself. So I had to make some sacrifices. And I had to be honest with some of my friends that, I'm sorry, I won't be able to come. And thankfully, they were understanding. And one of the ways I was able to manage the logistics of the training, I was also making sure I made the most of the healthy support network around me at that time, and my husband and my mom were very much on board. Because there was no way I could have been able to achieve without having the solid of support of my husband and my mom.

Helen

You are making sacrifices to have those around you support and that is really key.

Victoria

Absolutely. Yeah.

Helen

And what advice would you give to someone who's thinking about training as a psychotherapist or a psychotherapeutic counsellor?

Victoria

The training is very demanding. So, you need a very good support network. And take your time to research into a good training organisation who will be willing to support you during the duration of your training, especially in the area of securing a good placement. And also, it's costly in every area of your life. In fact, the financial aspect is the easiest. So, be prepared for the sacrifice. A good training organisation will challenge you to grow in a safe and supportive environment and also encourage you to embrace your uniqueness. I feel that is very, very important. And lastly, be open to learn about your relationship with yourself.

Helen

Thank you. And how has psychotherapeutic training changed you, do you think?

Victoria

To put all the changes in words, I'll probably be here till tomorrow. There is a log. But I want to give you a few points. My confidence has really, really grown and that is priceless. And it's very rewarding. Yes, it's demanding, but it's very rewarding. And I feel so fulfilled. And it has also helped me to have a better relationship with myself and a better understanding in how I relate to the world. And also, in the case of parenting, it has also helped me in parenting my children. And lastly, it's given me the opportunity to contribute to my community.

Helen

I think that's great. Thanks, Victoria. And I think there's some really key things that have come out of talking to you, which is about your relationship with yourself, embracing uniqueness and working with your community as well. And I think it's been really lovely to talk to you about your career and how you've been able to develop that. Thank you for joining me today. It's been great.

Victoria

You're most welcome.

Jenna

That was UKCP psychotherapist Victoria Dada speaking to Helen Willingham, our head of content and engagement. If you're interested in exploring training, then you can visit our psychotherapy training page, where you can find information on psychotherapy as a career, as well as the different training pathways available to you. Just go to [www.psychotherapy.org.uk/psychotherapy-training](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/psychotherapy-training). All episodes of 'My psychotherapy career' are available on our website, [psychotherapy.org.uk](http://psychotherapy.org.uk). You can also subscribe to our channel, UKCP on your favourite streaming platform. Do you have any feedback you'd like to share with us on this episode or any from our series? Get in touch with us at [communications@ukcp.org.uk](mailto:communications@ukcp.org.uk). Join us again next month. Till then thank you for listening and take good care of yourselves.

