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**A Qualitative Study Exploring Factors
Impacting the Therapeutic Outcome and
Experiences of Clients using a
Psycho-Oncology Service**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Clinical Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Current research shows that people coping with cancer benefit from psychological interventions. This qualitative study aimed to explore and identify factors which may affect the experiences and therapeutic outcomes of clients using the Massey University Psycho-Oncology Service (POS) in New Zealand as a case study. It is hoped that the current study will add to the limited psycho-oncology literature from New Zealand and also to the international knowledge base.

The findings presented in this study arise from the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 24 participants who were recruited for the study. They included women with breast or gynaecological cancer and family/whānau clients who attended Massey's Psycho-Oncology Service as well as psychologists of the Psycho-Oncology Service and people affected by cancer who were not clients of the Service.

Four main themes were identified. These were *Meaning of cancer – creating distress*, *Dealing with it – reducing distress*, *Experience of POS*, and *Being a psycho-oncologist*. Factors that emerged which may impact the outcomes and experiences of clients using POS included client expectations, inclusion of family members in therapy, a strong therapeutic relationship and the personal connection that the POS psychologists expressed sharing with clients, their work and the team.

This study was limited by low participant numbers. No clients came forward who were dissatisfied with the Service meaning that factors which may have negatively impacted outcomes could not be identified. Findings and implications are discussed.

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