Supervisor Experiences with Clinical Telesupervision During COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

Although much has been written about providing quality in-person clinical supervision, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a swift transition to telehealth and telesupervision. Previous studies found both benefits of and challenges to conducting telesupervision as a supervisor. Telesupervision can be more economical, provide diverse experiences, and inclusive to clinicians living in more remote areas of practice. However, many supervisors have not received telesupervision training and find maintaining confidentiality and communicating effectively more difficult. Additionally, there are concerns around how telesupervision impacts the quality of the supervisory working alliance. This mass transition to telesupervision has provided us with an opportunity to collect more diverse data around supervisor experiences with telesupervision as well as provide a historical record of the use of telesupervision during a pandemic.

METHODS

Mixed-methods approach qualitative method was CQR-M (Spangler et al., 2012) while quantitative data were collected using self-report surveys.

Participants 123 participants who identified themselves as supervisors and engaged in telesuperivision shortly after the pandemic began.

Sampling Our sample was collected through contacting program directors, training coordinators, internship site directors, or department chairs of all APA Clinical/Counseling Psychology doctoral programs, CACREP and MPCAC accredited programs, and APPIC internship sites. These individuals were asked to forward the study on to those within their programs who were currently engaging in practicum or internship. Those individuals were asked both to participate in a supervisee version of this study and to pass the study on to their supervisors so that they may participate.

Measures Attitudes Toward Telesupervision Scale (ATTS; Inman et al., 2018), Working Alliance Inventory/Supervision – Short Form (WAI/S-Short; Ladany et al., 2013), & open-ended response questions regarding benefits and challenges of the switch to telesupervision.

CHALLENGES

Technology	57%
"Interruptions (loss of connection, poor connection)"	*n = 70*
Communication & Connection	46%
"...it feels more difficult to connect to supervisees through telesupervision. Silences feel more "loaded" than in pers	*n = 56*
Organization & Productivity	52%
"It is easy to get distracted and not commit to the task with your entire attention."	*n =64*
Ethical Concerns	19%
"There was also some adjustment on the student's part to ethically participate in supervision. Some student wearing headphones while there were people in the house that could potentially overhear supervision."	*n=23*
Difficulty Adapting to Change	19%
"The transition from meeting in person to Telehealth was rough."	*n=23*
Pandemic-Specific Mental Health Challenges	16%
"We were all dealing with our own COVID anxieties while hearing the heightened anxiety of our clients."	*n=20*
Barriers to Educating & Supervising	11%
"There were a lot of challenges. Reliable video platform, designated space for supervision for my supervise help them have access to reliable wifi with everyone else in their space also using the bandwidth…"	*n=14*
No Challenges	2% *n=2*

BENEFITS

Flexibility	68%
"More control over my schedule, ability to flex my time from home."	*n = 84*
Communication & Connection	28%
"I've been able to maintain the same connection through Zoom since I know my supervisees well."	*n = 34*
Organization, Productivity & Growth	26%
"We can use the whole hour since there isn't any travel time, we use a supervision hour center so interns always have someone to consult with as needed and this is not searching for someone who is free to consult in an emergency."	*n = 32*
Saving Time/Money	*12%*
"I saved time not having to travel to and from work."	*n = 15*
Staying Healthy	12%
"I was able to find better work life integration while keeping up with my responsibilities at home and work." *"Staying safe; reducing potential spread of virus."*	*n = 15*
Comfort & Convenience of Home	10%
"It was nice to have the comforts of home while experiencing a lot of stress, especially in the beginning. It h the stress management to have family close by and to take more frequent but shorter breaks."	*n = 12*
No Benefits	4% *n =5*

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How did supervisors experience the transition from in-person supervision to telesupervision at the start of the pandemic?
2. What is the relationship between the supervisory working alliance and supervisor attitudes toward telesupervision?

RESULTS

Supervisors shared a variety of experiences related to the sudden shift to telesupervision. Some of these challenges and benefits related specifically to telesupervision, the pandemic, and sometimes both. A summary of the results can be found in the tables shown. Each theme also had its own subthemes with more detailed explanations of the kinds of benefits and challenges experienced which can be found in the full article. Regarding the quantitative analysis, there was a moderate positive relationship between supervisor perception of the working alliance and attitudes towards telesupervision (r=.28; p<.002)

DISCUSSION

Supervisors reported mixed experiences about the quality of communication and connection between themselves and their supervisees. It may be that prior in-person contact allows for the continuation of quality connection and communication, although nonverbal communication may still be limited which should be considered before beginning telesupervision. Privacy and confidentiality concerns while supervisees were working from home were also noted and perhaps supervisee training around the subject is necessary. There were also mixed responses regarding the level of organization and productivity that supervisors were able to maintain while working remotely. For some supervisors, adapting to the switch both in terms of technology and readjusting supervision/pedagogy style was challenging. Overall, telesupervision may be beneficial to those who value flexibility, comfort, convenience, and saving resources. If the challenges are considered well, supervisors hoping to reap the benefits of telesupervision may be able to do so while continuing to provide quality training while reaching out to supervisees with less access to traditional supervision.