

# Clinical Supervision and COVID-19: Insights from a National Sample of Supervisors and Trainees

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## Introduction

The impacts of COVID-19 resulted in an immediate push to alter the ways we approach clinical training and supervision. In this study we sought to better understand how COVID impacted clinical supervision from the perspective of both the supervisor and trainee in regard to how their time was spent in supervision, their perception of the response and support provided by their setting/organization, and what they learned about themselves throughout the process.

## Method

We sought to better understand how COVID-19 impacted the lived experiences of clinical supervision from the perspective of both the supervisor and trainee. Using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), we surveyed doctoral level clinical psychology supervisors (N=68) and trainees (N=67) and asked them to share their insights and experiences related to COVID-19 and its impacts on training and supervision.

## Don't Lose Focus Of The Primary Responsibilities Of Supervision

Purposefully focus on client care and trainee development. Allow for supervision time above and beyond to address challenges related to technology or other contextual factors. Consider the positive impacts of reduced caseloads to improve trainee development and supervisors' ability to effectively monitor and observe clinical work.

## Learn From What Worked

Investigate the qualities and behaviors of those organizations and supervisors whose transitions were considered successful. Use this data to develop or update best-practices. Cultivate resilience and the ability to quickly adapt to changes in the training environment.

## Process Trainee Insights

Trainees in our study were more attuned to positive and negative changes in supervision. This is a strength that can be amplified to improve clinical training and supervision processes.

## Results

1. There were disparities between supervisors and trainees in regard to changes in their relationship and how time was spent in supervision, with trainees reporting more changes than supervisors. Both trainees and supervisors agreed that much more time was spent in supervision on the use of technology and dealing with technology problems. This meant in some cases that less time was spent on client care - including observation of clinical work - and/or trainee development. However, some trainees and supervisors felt that the reduced caseload associated with the transition to telepsychology allowed them to spend more time discussing individual clients in supervision.
2. Participants discussed disparate organizational and supervisory responses to the pandemic, with some referring to the flexibility and speed at which they adapted and others expressing concern that change was slow and that the adoption of new technology was challenging. Some trainees felt like their health and safety needs were not adequately taken into consideration. Again, the idea of "wasting time" on technology issues at the expense of client care and clinical training was dominant.
3. Many supervisors and trainees discussed insights about themselves and their work that resulted from the pandemic and the switch to telepsychology including their awareness of individual strengths and the unique challenges of being a trainee during the pandemic.

### References:

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Scharff, A., Breiner, C. E., Ueno, L. F., Underwood, S. B., Merritt, E. C., Welch, L. M., ... & Litchford, G. B. (2020). Shifting a training clinic to teletherapy during the COVID-19 pandemic: A trainee perspective. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 1*-11.



## *Survey Questions*

- How has your supervisory relationship changed as a result of the pandemic?
- What did your setting/site (and/or your supervisor) do well to prepare or support you for supervision during the pandemic?
- What do you wish your setting/site (and/or your supervisor) would have done better or differently to prepare or support you for supervision during the pandemic?
- How has your time spent in supervision changed since the pandemic? (regarding the amount of time, tasks, content, etc.)
- What have you learned about yourself regarding (supervision or your role as a trainee) as a result of the pandemic?

# Changes in the Focus of Supervision and the Supervision Relationship (Theme 1)

## Supervisors

- The majority of supervisors indicated that there were no or minimal changes (shifting to a remote format) to supervision:
  - *“It has not changed; we are able to focus on the same aspects of supervision.”*
- Supervisors reported changes related to client focus within supervision:
  - *“There have been less clients so there is not as much to talk about.”*
  - *“I spend more time discussing logistical issues - the transition to telehealth, working from home, how to work with patients from the framework of disaster mental health, etc.”*
- Supervisors reported that time spent in supervision changed related to the focus on trainee development:
  - *“The topic shifted from a clinical focus to a professional/personal focus.”*
  - *I have put an emphasis on demonstrating appreciation to my supervisees for their flexibility and commitment. It has made me more mindful of that in the relationship, and I feel this has improved the relationships.”*

## Supervisees

- Supervisees reported more awareness of positive and negative changes in supervision or the absence of changes that might have been helpful:
  - *“The time has stayed the same, though I think it should have increased.”*
  - *“The times change every week due to the multiple roles my supervisor is now playing and tendency to agree to other meetings during our supervision times.”*
  - *“I do not think much has changed except that perhaps we checked in more frequently/in more depth than usual. We had already established a strong supervisory relationship before the pandemic, which helped us continue to work well together.”*
- Many supervisees reported that time changed regarding client focus:
  - *“Time spent in supervision became more focused on specific clients due to a reduction in caseload.”*
  - *“Less clients, less to talk about during supervision, meeting virtually, no longer able to video record sessions with clients for review.”*
- Supervisees reported that time changed regarding a focus on trainee development:
  - *More personal sharing and checking in; less clients so talking about different things in supervision like professional roles, management styles, future job, etc.”*

## Organizational And Supervisory Support (Theme 2)

### Supervisors

- The majority of supervisors reported that their organization supported a quick adaptation to telehealth and remote work including supervision:
  - *“Supported a quick transition to working from home and use of telehealth.”*
  - *“Purchased equipment and software to allow for remote supervision and teletherapy.”*
  - *“Continued meetings, emails with bullet points to pay attention to, detailed lists of what my supervisee could or couldn't do in the new setting.”*
- Some supervisors expressed concern when asked what their site did well in preparing them for the transition:
  - *“Not terribly much, except insure that we had the infrastructure to meet via Zoom.”*

And they reflected on what additional support would have been helpful:

- *“Workgroup to discuss and get feedback about how to do supervision during the pandemic.”*
- *“I wish there had been better support for getting the interns home earlier.”*

### Supervisees

- The majority of supervisees indicated that increased communication with the supervisor was helpful:
  - *“My supervisor/site did regular check-ins, brainstormed ways to meet client needs while also meeting my own, and was patient in my transition.”*
- Many supervisees expressed concern about how their site and/or supervisor handled the transition:
  - *“I wish that they had taken it seriously earlier and not been so tied to the need to do in person services at all costs especially when clinicians had people in their family that were more at risk.”*
  - *“It has been strained and there have been ruptures that have not been navigated well by the supervisor or site. I received inappropriate comments, feedback and pressure after deciding to move to be with my primary support system after the site went remote.”*

## The Insights Between Supervisors' and Trainees' Responses (Theme 3)

### Supervisors

- The majority of supervisors gained insight about themselves in regards to their role as a result of the pandemic:
  - *“I appear to be able to respond nimbly and adjust to vast changes. And I have to work hard to compartmentalize some worry and uneasiness, while not disconnecting from intuition and instinct in order to keep working”*
  - *“It is important for me to remember and to provide acknowledgement of the many challenges and sacrifices involved with working in a supervisee role.”*

### Supervisees

- Supervisees also gained insight about themselves in regards to their role as a result of the pandemic intuition and instincts in order to keep working.
  - *“I have learned the value of advocating for personal needs and voicing various needs of clients in order to get them the help/resources needed.”*
  - *“I can deal with challenging environmental factors while still being clinically effective.”*

# Geographic Representation of Study Participants

