

A New Normal: The Importance of Synchronous Professor Engagement, In-person Supervision, Telehealth Education, and Multicultural Competence Training in Online Counselor Education Programs in a Covid World

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Cover Page Footnote

Timothy J. Evans is now at the Department of Counselor Education and Family Studies, Liberty University. Ronnie L. Pace <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8506-6775>. Ronnie L. Pace is now at the Dept of Graduate Counseling, Grace College and Seminary. We have no known conflict of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to James Zapf, Crown College, 8700 College View Drive, St. Bonifacius, MN. Email: zapfj@crow.edu

A New Normal: The Importance of Synchronous Professor Engagement, In-person Supervision, Telehealth Education, and Multicultural Competence Training in Online Counselor Education Programs in a Covid World


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Abstract

Counselor education must adapt quickly to societal changes, including the significant effects of COVID-19 and the simultaneous racial discord in the U.S. to ensure new counselors are adequately prepared for the challenges they face. COVID-19 increased the use of technology-based counseling exponentially. The authors wished to better understand their students' experiences and confidence regarding their training/preparation during the pandemic. One hundred nineteen students from three online university master's-level counselor education programs participated in this study regarding their experiences of professor engagement, in-person clinical supervision, telehealth education, multicultural competence, and their own Covid-anxiety during the ongoing pandemic. Students strongly endorsed the need for professor engagement in online classes. Personal confidence and competence were rated higher by students when they had greater professor engagement in classes. Most students considered virtual clinical supervision to be as valuable as in-person supervision. Most students were trained primarily by their site to deliver Telemental Health (TMH) services and considered themselves competent to provide therapy virtually. Students generally felt adequately prepared for managing the highlighted multicultural issues of our current society. Most students did not experience significant Covid-anxiety. Educators should consider adding TMH training to their curriculum and should maintain their emphasis on multicultural training with up-to-date information on how to effectively encourage open and honest discussions about race inequality.

Keywords: Online counselor education, COVID-19, Covid-anxiety, professor engagement, multicultural counseling, telemental health

A New Normal: The Importance of Synchronous Professor Engagement, In-person Supervision, Telehealth Education, and Multicultural Competence Training in Online Counselor Education Programs in a Covid World

The landscape of counselor education is ever-changing. With new practice standards, legal and/or ethical challenges, accreditation requirements, state licensing requirements, and technological advances come related revisions in educational practices (Greenhalgh et al., 2020; Vostanis & Bell, 2020). The Coronavirus pandemic of 2019-20 (COVID-19) has prompted an unprecedented shift toward telehealth services (Dominelli, 2021; Nikcevic & Spada, 2020). For many just entering the profession, telehealth will be their most commonly used form of service provision (Burns & Chen, 2020; Pearson, 2020). Therefore, a growing number of student interns will complete most if not all of their direct client contact hours through a virtual portal.

A gap in the literature surrounds the following questions: What research can counselor educators point to for best practices in this new era? Will services go back to the previous norm when the spread of COVID-19 is more controlled? If not, what new concepts should online educators put in place to better prepare students for this new landscape? The following review of literature examines the importance of synchronous professor engagement, in-person supervision, and telehealth education, in online education programs, as well as the recent testing innovations pertaining to the new COVID-19 world. The null hypothesis to this study might indicate address student's indications of equal satisfaction with in-person and virtual supervision. There is the suspicion that students will most probably report inadequate TMH training. Finally, this research will address the potential belief by students that they do not feel adequately prepared to manage multicultural competencies, given the current social issues around racial/ethnic inequality/inequity. To find the evidence needed to support these suspicions, this research will

ask the students about their satisfaction with both in-person and virtual supervision. This research will also be asking about their own beliefs regarding their training and whether or not they think they are specifically, and adequately, being trained to provide tele-mental health training (TMH) and whether they believe their individual schools have prepared them for work with multicultural issues given the current state of social inequality and inequity in the U.S. The literature supports the struggles the population has with COVID-19 so there lies a question as to whether students themselves are struggling with anxiety because of this. This research posits that stronger professor engagement, especially during the pandemic, will produce a higher level of confidence among students and their ability to work within the parameters of TMH.

Advancements in Technology and the Growth of Online Counseling Programs

Ongoing advancements in internet technology have helped facilitate an increasing demand for online education (Nobleza et al., 2019, Mishna et al., 2015). In keeping up with this trend, professor engagement, through both asynchronous and synchronous forms of online counselor education, has been found to be crucial for future success (Sheperis et al., 2020). As a result, online Counseling educational programs have grown in popularity as well as effectiveness (Haddock et al., 2020). Moreover, in a recent span of less than 18 months, the Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP), increased the number of CACREP – accredited online counseling programs by 22%, to 78 institutions, before the end of August of 2019 (Villarreal-Davis et al., 2020). These recent accreditations, the proven success of telehealth counseling (Nobleza et al., 2019), as well as the convenience and flexibility of online education (Bowers & Kumar, 2015), has all but assured that online counseling and counselor education modalities offered via the Internet, will continue to become even more commonplace moving forward (Haddock et al., 2020).

The Importance of Professor Engagement in Counselor Education

Students in master's level counselor education programs must engage with counseling education professors to learn the skills that will help them become competent therapists in the future (Burns & Chen, 2020; Gomez, 2020). Students, as well as counseling educators, are dependent upon each other for personal growth, and therefore, must be careful not to cross boundaries that would blur their individual roles, which can be multifaceted (Burns & Chen, 2020). Therefore, students and counseling educators should work collaboratively to meet one another's needs, through creative approaches such as mentoring and encouragement, (McGhee et al., 2019) in a diverse society and growing profession (Gomez, 2020).

Online Counseling and Intern Supervision/Intern Counseling via Telehealth

Just like online education, online or telehealth counseling is a modality which is becoming more popular, even though until recently, some have doubted the effectiveness of its treatment outcomes (Nadan et al., 2020). The rapidly changing world of telehealth services, combined with the onset of COVID-19, requires that counselors who utilize online services must quickly adapt to new forms of communication, documentation, and billing (Haddock et al., 2020; Nadan et al., 2020). In recent years, the evidence that telehealth therapy has been an effective alternative to traditional face to face sessions continues to grow (Springer et al., 2020). Although this technological form of mental health treatment has grown in popularity, there is limited research on its risks and benefits, or perceptions of its effectiveness among counseling interns (Bender & Dykeman, 2016; Stoll et al., 2020). Master's level intern counselors who practice telehealth therapy will need to acquire unique skills that they might not have otherwise learned doing in-person therapy, such as the mastered use of video technology, or the ability to comprehend emotions or intentions while not present in the same room as the client (Stoll et al.,

2020, Tarquino et al., 2021). When conducting telehealth therapy, intern counselors need to be cognizant of the absence of personal indicators that would be more obvious during in-person sessions, such as the nonverbal cues of a client's body language or posture, or potential breaches of confidentiality (Nadan et al., 2020; Stoll et al., 2020; Tarquino et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there are advantages which have been found to be conducive to online counseling, such as the convenience of location, and time saving measures (Pennington et al., 2019).

Supervising master's level counseling interns requires that counseling educators be flexible when trying to instill positive attitudes to their mentees such as mindfulness, self-awareness, self-care, and the recognition and or suspension of self-judgment (Person, 2020). Online intern supervision can essentially be defined as the objective mentoring or observation by a counseling educator of the therapeutic services being offered by student interns through a digital or video format where the student and the counseling educator are not in the same location simultaneously (Pennington et al., 2019). Recent studies have found that online live supervision with counseling interns was unexpectedly quite effective, when compared to the standard method of in-person supervision, and that online supervision offers an effective alternative to situations when the student and the counseling educator cannot be in the same location (Bender & Dykeman, 2016; Morrison & Lent, 2018; Nadan et al., 2020). Moreover, research has indicated that master's level intern counseling students who receive online supervision reported less stress and anxiety when meeting with their counseling educators online, as opposed to meeting with them in-person (Bender & Dykeman, 2016; Nadan et al., 2020).

Methods

Participants

The participants included 119 students from three university master's level counselor education programs. All the respondents were either currently, or had recently (within the past year), participated in a practicum or internship experience. One university was on the east coast of the US and the other two were midwestern. Participants ranged in age from 21-30 to 70+ years, with the highest age being between 40-49 years. Slightly over 80% of participants identified as female. Nearly 80% of the participants identified as Caucasian, with approximately 8% endorsing Black or African American identity and another 8% endorsing Hispanic or Latino identity. All participants were second, third, or post third year counseling students, with 80% being in a practicum or internship class at the time of taking the survey.

All three university Institutional Review Boards gave permission prior to recruiting participants and also advertised through a social media post for one school's counseling program. Participants self-selected by clicking on a link to the survey. Determining sample size in a study is a critical step to determine the confidence in the results. The confidence level (CI), or the age of surety in this study, with a sample size of 117 participants assuming a population of 300 is 95%. The CI was plus or minus 7%. The researchers in this study can assume a high level of confidence in the reported results, but that confidence level is limited to the convenience sample.

Materials and Instrument

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of psychological instruments have been developed in an attempt to further explore or understand the effects of the COVID-19 virus (Nikcevic & Spada 2020). For example, The Fear of COVID-19 Scale (Ahorsu et al., 2020), was one of the first instruments that attempted to focus on general fear aspects of the virus. The Perceived Coronavirus Threat Questionnaire (PCTQ; Conway et al., 2020), examines threat related thoughts and anxieties. The COVID-19 Anxiety Syndrome Scale was developed in an

attempt to provide a clearer understanding of the anxiety features concomitant with Covid -19 (Nikcevic & Spada 2020). Recent research has revealed that The COVID-19 Anxiety Syndrome Scale was found to possess adequate levels of reliability and concurrent validity (Nikcevic & Spada 2020).

The COVID-19 Anxiety Syndrome Scale (Nikcevic & Spada, 2020) was used to measure anxiety features associated with COVID-19 in counselor education internship students. The scale consists of 11 Likert scale questions, answering on a 6-point scale ranging from “Nearly Every Day” to “Not at All.” An example item is “I have been paying close attention to others displaying possible symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).” The present study uses the 11 item COVID-19 Anxiety Syndrome Scale. The authors of the scale do not give a Cronbach's Alpha for this scale. However, Nikčevića and Spada (2020) calculated a Cronbach's alpha using jamovi for the 6 item and the 3 item revised scales and found both demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability; C-19ASS-P (6 items; $\alpha = 0.86$) and the COVID-19 ASS-A (3 items; $\alpha = 0.77$). A survey to understand student opinion around several factors (professor engagement, clinical supervision experiences, TMH, and multicultural competence) was created by the researchers, each of whom have over a decade of experience as faculty in counselor education programs. The survey consisted of 35 multiple choice questions (46 questions minus 11 demographic questions).

Procedure

All participants were told in the email they received that the survey was “to help further the understanding of what MA counseling students are presently experiencing or have experienced in their practicum or internship as it relates to changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic” and that the survey would take approximately 15 minutes to complete. When

participants chose to click on the survey link, they then gave informed consent prior to completing the survey. Participants took the survey through EvaluationKIT (Watermark, 2021).

Outliers were eliminated and coded as errors, i.e., 45 was deleted and the cell was left empty. This showed up in the analysis as a missing variable. Empty cells were not used to compute means or standard deviations. The data were not normalized. The data was skewed positively which is expected for our participants. The descriptive data were used in their original form. No compensation strategies were used to replace missing variables. There were not enough missing variables to warrant a replacement protocol. The data were computed using missing variables that were not used in the calculations.

Results

Research Questions

1. Are students who have experienced both in-person and virtual supervision, equally satisfied with either type of supervision?

The results from the survey indicated that all the respondents had received supervision from a clinical site supervisor, when they were in a practicum or internship setting. Of those respondents, 87.39% reported that they had received in-person (face-to-face) clinical supervision during their practicum or internship experience, while 80.67% had received (virtual) clinical supervision. In other words, approximately 13% had received only virtual supervision. The majority of the respondents, 66.38%, either agreed, or strongly agreed, that face to face supervision (as opposed to virtual), was important to them, while 17.65%, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. The remaining 17.65% were undecided.

When asked if virtual supervision was generally as good as face-to-face supervision, 60.51% of the participants either agreed, or strongly agreed, while 26.05% disagreed, or strongly

disagreed, with 13.45% being undecided. Respondents who believed that they received more benefit from face-to-face clinical supervision, than from virtual supervision, represented 45.38% of those surveyed, with 35.29% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, and 21.01% being undecided. Overall, 77.32% of the respondents indicated that faculty supervision is just as important as site supervision, while 15.12% disagreed, or strongly disagreed, and 8.40% were undecided.

2. Are students being specifically and adequately trained, to provide tele-mental health counseling?

Results indicated that 66.39% of the respondents surveyed, reported that they had been specifically trained by their clinical site, regarding how to implement telemental counseling, while 33.61%, indicated that that had not been specifically trained. The majority of the respondents, 63.03%, indicated that their TMH training was not supervised (as opposed to a self-study), while 36.97% reported that their training was supervised. When asked if the tele mental health training was online, face-to-face, or hybrid, 67.23% indicated it was online, 17.65% indicated it was face-to-face, while 15.13% reported that it was in a hybrid format.

Research participant responses regarding satisfactory TMH training reported that 73.95% of all participants either agreed, or strongly agreed, that they had received adequate training regarding their ability to implement telemental counseling services to their clients, while 16.81% disagreed, or strongly disagreed, and 12.61% were undecided. When the respondents were asked if their academic supervisor provided feedback regarding their provision of TMH services to their clients, 49.58% agreed, or strongly agreed, 31.93%, disagreed, or strongly disagreed, and 19.33% were undecided.

Results from the survey revealed that 85.71% of the respondents, either agreed, or strongly agreed, that they feel competent in delivering TMH counseling services to their clients, while 10.08%, disagreed, or strongly disagreed, and 4.20% were undecided. Overall, 72.27% of the respondents, either agreed, or strongly agreed, that they were satisfied with their TMH training, 16.80% disagreed, or strongly disagreed, that they were satisfied, overall, while 12.61% were undecided.

3. Do students believe they have been well-prepared by their school, to work multiculturally, given the current state of social inequality/inequity in the US?

Results from the survey indicated that 95.8% of the respondents reported having a good understanding of what constitutes multicultural competence, while 3.36% were undecided, and 1.68% disagreed, or strongly disagreed. When asked if they felt comfortable addressing a client's concerns about the racial inequality in the world at large, 83.35% reported that they either agreed, or strongly agreed, that they felt comfortable, while 9.24% disagreed, or strongly disagreed, and therefore, do not feel comfortable, and 8.40% were undecided.

Generally speaking, 84.03% of the respondents surveyed, reported that they either agreed, or strongly agreed, that overall, they were satisfied with their multicultural counseling training, while 10.92% were undecided, and 5.88% disagreed, or strongly disagreed. When asked if the counseling program at their school had done a good job of training them in multicultural competencies, 85.72% of the respondents either agreed, or strongly agreed, while an equal number of 7.56%, either disagreed, or strongly disagreed, or were undecided. Furthermore, 68.91% of the respondents either agreed, or strongly agreed, that their practicum / internship site had done a good job of training them in multicultural competencies, while 20.17%, disagreed, or strongly disagreed, and 10.92% were undecided.

The majority of the respondents, 84.04%, reported that as a result of the training they have received in their counseling program, that they now feel more confident in their abilities to implement multicultural competencies with both their current, and future clients, while 10.08 disagreed, or strongly disagreed, and 7.56%, were undecided. Moreover, 81.51% of the participants either agreed, or strongly agreed, that as a result of the training they received in their counseling program, that they now feel more confident in their abilities to implement multicultural competencies with their current or future coworkers and clients. Only 12.60% disagreed, or strongly disagreed, while 6.72% were undecided.

4. Are students themselves struggling with COVID-19 anxiety?

When respondents were asked whether they avoided public transportation because of fear of contracting the COVID-19, 87 respondents, almost two thirds of the total number of respondents (73.11%) indicated not at all and 9.24% indicated rarely. Thirteen of the respondents (10.92%) indicated that they avoided transportation due to fear nearly every day, while one respondent (0.84%) indicated more than seven days. Five respondents (4.20%) indicated several days and three respondents (2.52%) indicated less than a day or two.

Participants were asked whether they were checking themselves for symptoms of COVID-19. Fourteen of the 117 respondents indicated not at all. The remaining 103 participants indicated that they had checked themselves for symptoms of COVID-19. 3.36% indicated that they checked themselves nearly every day. Of these respondents, only 13.45% indicated that they checked themselves more than seven days, 21.85% indicated that they checked themselves several days, 8.40% indicated that they checked themselves less than a day or two, while 18.49% indicated that they rarely checked themselves.

When asked if they were avoiding going out to public places (shops, parks) because of the fear of contracting COVID-19, the majority of the respondents (47.06%, $n=56$) indicated that they were avoiding public places in some way or another. Of the remaining respondents, 3.36% indicated nearly every day, 13.45% indicated more than seven days of avoidance, 21.85% indicated several days while 8.40% indicated less than a day or two. Forty-four respondents (36.97%) indicated that they were not avoiding public places, at all.

When respondents were asked whether they were concerned about not having adhered strictly to social distancing guidelines for COVID-19, 41.18% ($n=49$) indicated not at all or rarely (31.09%, $n=22$). However, 28.57% ($n=34$) of the respondents indicated that there was some concern, 4.20% indicated nearly everyday concern, 6.72% indicated more than seven days of concern, 12.61% indicated several days of concern, and 5.04% indicated less than a day or two of concern.

When respondents were asked if they had avoided touching things in public spaces because of the fear of contracting COVID-19, 44.54% indicated that there was little to no anxiety regarding touching things, responding rarely (18.49%, $n=22$) or not at all (26.05%, $n=31$). The study revealed that 55.47% ($n=66$) of the respondents indicated some avoidance or anxiety regarding the touching of things in public places. Breaking it down, 17.65% ($n=21$) responded that they avoided touching things nearly every day, 10.08% ($n=12$) responded that they avoided touching things more than seven days, 13.45% ($n=16$) indicated that they avoided touching things for several days, and finally 14.29% ($n=17$) indicated that they avoided touching things for less than a day or two.

Respondents were asked if they had read about news relating to COVID-19 at the cost of engaging in work (such as writing emails, working on word documents, or spreadsheets). The

majority of respondents indicated rarely (25.21%, $n=30$) to not at all (42.02%, $n=50$).

Furthermore, 32.77% ($n=39$) of the respondents indicated some anxiety regarding reading about news relating to COVID-19 with 4.2% indicating nearly every day, 5.04% indicating more than seven days, 15.13% indicating several days and 8.40% indicating less than a day or two of anxiety relating to reading about the pandemic.

Respondents were asked if they had imagined what could happen to their family members if they contracted COVID-19. The majority of respondents (57.98%, $n=69$) indicated some anxiety with 5.88% indicating nearly every day, 9.24% indicating more than seven days, 22.69% indicating several days, and 20.17% indicating less than a day or two of worry regarding their family members contracting COVID-19. Lastly, 42.02% of the respondents indicated rarely (29.41%) to not at all (12.61%).

Respondents were asked if they had researched the symptoms of COVID-19 at the cost of spending time with friends/family. The majority of respondents indicated rarely (23.53%, $n=28$) to not at all (47.90%, $n=57$), 28.56% ($n=34$) indicated some form of anxiety with 1.68% indicating nearly every day, 5.88% indicating more than seven days, 9.24% indicating several days, and 11.76% indicating less than a day or two anxiety causing one to research symptoms of COVID-19.

When asked if they had avoided talking about COVID-19, the majority of respondents (73.11%, $n=87$) indicated rarely (26.05%, $n=31$) to not at all (47.06%, $n=56$). Thirty-two of the respondents (26.88%) indicated that they had avoided talking about COVID-19. 4.2% of the respondents indicated nearly every day, 6.72% indicated more than seven days, 8.40% indicated several days, and 7.56% indicated less than a day or two of avoiding talking about COVID-19.

Respondents were asked if they had checked their family members and loved ones for the signs of COVID-19. Sixty-two (52.1%) of the respondents indicated that there was some form of anxiety and therefore checked their family members and loved ones for symptoms. Four percent indicated that they check their family members and loved ones nearly every day. Ten percent of the respondents indicated more than seven days of checking, Twenty-two percent indicated several days of checking and 15.97% indicated less than a day or two of checking. Fifty-seven percent ($n=39$) indicated rarely to not at all (18.49%, $n= 22$).

The final question involved asking the respondents if they had been paying close attention to others displaying possible symptoms of COVID-19. The results are almost split in half with 49.57% ($n=59$) of the respondents indicating some form of anxiety leading to paying close attention to others' symptoms. Eight percent indicated nearly every day checking, 11.76% indicated more than seven days of checking, 18.49% indicated several days, and 10.92% indicated less than a day or two of checking. Sixty-one of the respondents (51.26%) indicated rarely checking on others' symptoms (32.77%) to not at all (18.49%). Taken as a whole, participating students were generally not displaying significant COVID-19 anxiety. Their responses indicated caution rather than anxiety. While males indicated a slightly lower level of Covid anxiety, ethnicity did not affect Covid anxiety scores.

5. How important is professor engagement during the pandemic?

With 100% ($N=119$) of the respondents answering the question regarding the importance of general engagement by the professor, results from the survey indicated that over 98% of the respondents consider this aspect of their education very significant. The respondents were asked whether the pandemic increased the importance of professor engagement. Respondents indicated that 25.21% indicated strong agreement and 26.05% indicated agreement. Twenty percent of the

respondents indicated that they were undecided about this. Twenty-two percent indicated that they disagreed with this and 7.56% indicated that they strongly disagreed.

When asked about the importance of a professor's response to discussion posts, 44.54% of the respondents ($n=53$) strongly agreed with 36.97% ($n=44$) reporting agreement. Ten respondents (8.40%) indicated that they were undecided, while 13 respondents (10.92%) disagreed and one (0.84%) strongly disagreeing with regards to the importance of professor engagement via discussion posts. Overall, 81% of respondents see discussion forum engagement as important to professor engagement.

When respondents were asked about the importance of professors using audio feedback only, 61.34% ($n=73$) agreed to its importance with 33.61% indicating strong agreement and 27.73% indicating agreement. Twenty-one% ($n=25$) indicated that they were undecided. In disagreement, 20.17% ($n=24$) believed it not important to get audio feedback by the professor, with 15.97% indicating disagreement and 4.20% indicating strong disagreement.

When respondents were asked about the importance of professors using both video and audio feedback, 46.22% ($n=$) indicated that they believed in the importance of video feedback with 24.37% indicating that they strongly agree and 21.85% indicating they agree. Twenty-nine respondents (24.37%) indicated that they were undecided. Thirty-five respondents indicated that they disagreed with the importance of the professor providing both video and audio grading as feedback with 22.69% indicating disagreement and 6.72% indicating strong disagreement.

When respondents were asked about the importance of phone calls from their professor, 37.82% indicated that they agreed with the importance of phone calls with 14.29% indicating a strong agreement and 23.53% indicating agreement. The remaining 30.25% indicated that they

were undecided while 33.61% indicated a lack of importance for phone calls from the instructor, and 26.05% indicating disagreement and that 7.56% indicating a strong disagreement.

With regards to synchronous sessions with the professor, 78.99% ($n=94$) of the respondents indicated that they agreed with the importance of having these sessions. Moreover, 42.02% indicated that they strongly agreed and 36.97% indicated that they agreed, 9.24% indicated that they were undecided, 11.76% indicated that they disagreed with the importance of these sessions. 8.4% indicated that they disagreed and 3.36% indicated that they strongly disagreed.

Finally, students were asked if they felt more confident or competent when the professor was involved. 87.39% of the respondents agreed with this as important with 50.42% indicating strong agreement and 36.97% indicating agreed. Furthermore, 6.72% indicated that they were undecided about this, while 7.56% disagreed with 5.04% indicating disagreement and 2.52% indicating strong disagreement.

Hypotheses

H₁: Students will report equal satisfaction with in-person and virtual supervision.

Confirmed. When asked if virtual supervision was generally as good as face-to-face supervision, 60.51 of the participants either agreed, or strongly agreed, while 26.05% disagreed, or strongly disagreed, with 13.45% being undecided.

H₂: Students will report inadequate TMH training.

Not Confirmed. Participant responses regarding satisfactory training, reported that 73.95% of all participants either agreed, or strongly agreed, that they had received adequate training regarding their ability to implement telemental counseling services to their clients, while 16.81% disagreed, or strongly disagreed, and 12.61% were undecided.

H₃: Students will report that they do not feel adequately prepared to manage multicultural counseling given the current social issues around racial/ethnic inequality/inequity.

Not Confirmed. When asked if they felt comfortable addressing a client's concerns about the racial inequality in the world at large, 83.35% reported that they either agreed, or strongly agreed, that they felt comfortable, while 9.24% disagreed, or strongly disagreed, and therefore, do not feel comfortable, and 8.40% were undecided.

Discussion

The overarching goal of this research was to determine whether online counselor education programs were meeting the needs of students during the pandemic with regard to professor engagement, multicultural training, supervision, and TMH training. In general, the participants indicated that their schools were doing well. Looking deeper, it is helpful to ascertain the areas that students deem more important to implement even more successful programs.

While 60% of students felt virtual supervision was as good as face-to-face supervision, 45% responded that they believed they "received more benefit" from face-to-face supervision. While the results do not allow discrimination between which students were receiving solely virtual or only face-to-face supervision, the results do indicate that not all students received the same benefit from virtual versus in-person. The fact that these numbers are not overwhelmingly skewed suggests that the method of supervision of interns should be designed around the needs and learning style of the individual student, with those who value face-to-face supervision more highly being given that opportunity if possible. A discussion with each intern prior to their acceptance of an internship site would be helpful in determining their individual preference. Virtual supervision is likely to continue into the future due to it being more widely accepted

during the pandemic. Virtual supervision may never be a complete replacement for the benefits of an intern sitting down in the same room with their supervisor.

Faculty supervision of interns is a requirement of most counselor education programs and is a requirement of CACREP accreditation. The participants indicated strongly (77%) that faculty supervision was deemed as important as supervision from their site. Interns appear to benefit a great deal from the safety net of discussing cases in groups with their peers and a trusted professor. They may appreciate the familiarity they have with the professor or the focus on the development of the entire group rather than only themselves that occurs in faculty group internship supervision. Finally, there is some level of vicarious learning that occurs as a student listens in on the faculty as they work with another member of the group on an aspect of the other student's counseling process.

This study found that clinical internship sites were doing more of the TMH training than educational institutions and that almost 74% of the participants indicated that they felt adequately prepared for TMH work. Approximately half the participants indicated that their professors were providing feedback specifically about TMH services provided by the intern. While students appear from this study to be confident in conducting TMH, there may be legal implications for universities who are not providing the necessary training for the scope of practice (virtual therapy) that their interns are expected to provide, especially during the pandemic. As this study was conducted with online students, it is important to note that each state sets its own rules and regulations regarding the scope of practice for counselors and the methods of provision (e.g. TMH). Thus, it is recommended that counselor education programs provide training for their pre-internship students that addresses the students' state specific laws

and that sites continue to offer training on their chosen TMH platforms and update students on state regulation changes.

Students indicated feeling well-prepared for multicultural work based on their school's training more so than on what they received at their clinical site. This reflected well on the schools for not avoiding this often-difficult topic but are addressing it and preparing their students well. Sites should be encouraged to bridge the gap between an academic and a practical understanding of how race, ethnicity, and culture present in counseling.

Over 98% of the participants endorsed professor engagement as very significant to them and when asked whether that engagement increased in importance during the pandemic, over half (64% when excluding the undecided vote) indicated it did. The pandemic has opened the world to virtual synchronous interaction to a new level. Students strongly desire this form of interaction with their professors while completing their internships. Schools are encouraged to make virtual supervision available, especially if face-to-face meetings cannot be safely conducted.

In general, participants did not indicate a significant amount of COVID-19-specific anxiety. Males indicated a slightly lower level of Covid anxiety and ethnicity did not affect Covid anxiety in this study. It is possible that the timing of this study allowed for a level of acceptance of the pandemic and its consequences by the participants. Another possibility is that these counseling students were successfully using the coping skills for anxiety that they had learned in their courses.

The order of importance to students of professor engagement was as follows: Discussion forum replies, synchronous sessions, audio feedback, video/audio feedback, phone calls. Discussion forum replies and synchronous virtual sessions with the professors were rated as

much higher than the other forms of engagement. Schools are thus encouraged to set standards for discussion forum replies and for virtual sessions conducted by the course faculty member.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations to the present research include the number of respondents to the emailed request for participation. While the sample was distributed across three separate school programs, it may not be generalizable to all populations. A confidence level (CI) was calculated, and while significant, is only applicable to the convenience study. The three schools utilized in this sampling are each faith-based schools. While it is not expected that their answers would significantly differ from those of participants at non-faith-based schools, this cannot be known based on the present research. The COVID-19 Anxiety Stress Scale does not have “cutoff” levels which makes statistical analysis less precise than if another scale were used. Finally, an error in the survey on two important questions disabled some of the analysis that would have been helpful to understanding student perceptions. The first question was “My clinical supervisor provides feedback regarding my provision of TMH to my clients” and the second was “I was trained by my school regarding how to provide TMH.” Due to the error in the survey, no responses were recorded for these questions.

Increased levels of empirical exploration can either confirm or deny the existing findings from current research. Locating research pertaining to the importance of synchronous professor engagement, in-person supervision, telehealth education, and multicultural competence training in online counselor education programs is a relatively new endeavor with expectantly sparse levels of existing empirical data. Research involving these important and fast-growing areas of pedagogy and instruction, concomitantly interwoven with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, are even more scarce in the current literature.

Potential further areas of study could investigate why certain counseling education students receive more benefit from virtual supervision with their instructors than others. Moreover, additional research could be done in the areas pertaining to the different needs and learning styles of individual students, who seek, or are currently receiving in person or virtual supervision. While the findings from this study do suggest that most counseling students view virtual supervision as being just as valuable as face-to-face supervision, it could also be advantageous to further investigate why nearly half of the student respondents (45%) believe that they experience more benefit from face-to-face supervision.

It could be helpful in future research to investigate the reasons why counseling interns may benefit from discussing issues in groups with their peers, as well as a professor who they feel a certain level of rapport with. It could also be beneficial to conduct a study that explores the level of vicarious learning that students may endure, when they mutually work with groups, as well as a professor. Special attention could be given pertaining to how this progression can affect the other members of the group, concerning their own individual progress as well. Further future studies could also be conducted that would attempt to explore if counseling intern students would benefit from counselor education programs that provide training for their pre-internship. This could be important since each state is responsible for setting their own rules and regulations for telehealth implementation. Therefore, the scope of practice for interns, as well as counseling professionals, may vary significantly based on their location.

A future study could also investigate if students feel that they are being better trained for multicultural practice by their school or by their internship site. Then too, this could help schools or internship sites, bridge any potential gaps of how race, ethnicity, and culture present themselves in the counseling field. Lastly, more future

studies could be conducted to explore how the current COVID-19 crisis can affect all areas of training and practice for counseling interns in telehealth counseling.

Conclusion

Comparing the Findings to What the Literature Says

The undisputable fact that many counseling interns, including those in this study, are currently using virtual supervision as a viable alternative to face-to-face supervision, echoes the research findings of Bowers and Kumar (2015) and Haddock et al., 2020, who found that online counseling and counselor education modalities offered via telehealth, have continued to become even more of a commonplace in the counseling field. Moreover, this study confirmed the findings of Burns and Chen (2020), who reported that students as well as counseling educators, are dependent upon each other for personal growth, which can be specific or multifaceted. This study also echoed the findings of McGhee et al. (2019) and Gomez (2020), who suggested that students and counseling educators should work collaboratively to meet one another's needs, through creative approaches, in an attempt to create a more culturally diverse society.

More than half of the participants (60%) in this study, reported that virtual supervision was just as valuable to them as face-to-face supervision. This compares to the findings from multiple studies which reported that online live supervision with counseling interns was surprisingly quite effective, when compared to in-person supervision (Bender & Dykeman, 2016; Morrison & Lent, 2018; Nadan et al., 2020). Furthermore, these authors found that online supervision offers an effective alternative to situations when the student and the counseling educator cannot be in the same location. This level of comfort and convenience was also echoed by respondents in this study.

Moreover, students in this study who were receiving virtual supervision, were found to exhibit low levels of anxiety, and did not report a significant amount of COVID-19 specific anxieties. The reasons for the lower-than-expected amounts of anxiety are not completely known. However, Bender and Dykeman (2016) had similar findings to those of ; Nadan et al., (2020), who found that master's level intern counseling students who received virtual online supervision, reported less anxiety and stress when connecting with their professors online, as opposed to meeting with them in person.

Potential Areas of Further Study

Increased levels of empirical exploration can either confirm or deny the existing findings from current research. Locating research pertaining to the importance of synchronous professor engagement, in-person supervision, telehealth education, and multicultural competence training in online counselor education programs, is a relatively new endeavor, with expectantly sparse levels of existing empirical data. Research involving these important and fast-growing areas of pedagogy and instruction, concomitantly interwoven with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, are even more scarce in the current literature.

Potential further areas of study could investigate why certain counseling education students receive more benefit from virtual supervision with their instructors, than others. Moreover, additional research could be done in the areas pertaining to the different needs and learning styles of individual students, who seek, or are currently receiving in person or virtual supervision. While the findings from this study do suggest that most counseling students view virtual supervision as being just as valuable as face-to-face supervision, it could also be advantageous to further investigate why nearly half of the student respondents (45%) believe that they experience more benefit from face-to-face supervision.

It could be helpful in future research to investigate the reasons why counseling interns may benefit from discussing issues in groups with their peers, as well as a professor who they feel a certain level of rapport with. It could also be beneficial to conduct a study that explores the level of vicarious learning that students may endure, when they mutually work with groups as well as a professor. Special attention could be given pertaining to how this progression can affect the other members of the group, concerning their own individual progress as well.

Further future studies could also be conducted that would attempt to explore if counseling intern students would benefit from counselor education programs that provide training for their pre-internship. This could be important since each state is responsible for setting their own rules and regulations for telehealth implementation. Therefore, the scope of practice for interns, as well as counseling professionals, may vary significantly based on their location.

A future study could also investigate if students feel that they are being better trained for multicultural practice by their school, or by their internship site. Then too, this could help schools or internship sites, bridge any potential gaps of how race, ethnicity, and culture present themselves in the counseling field. Lastly, more future studies could be conducted, that attempt to explore how the current COVID-19 crisis, can affect all areas of training and practice for counseling interns, in the tele health counseling realm and beyond.

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