

Counselors-in-training evaluation of faculty and site supervisors' competency and effectiveness

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examined how counselors-in-training perceive the competency of faculty and site supervisors and how the perceived level of supervisors' experience impacts the counselors-in-trainings' ratings of supervision. Counselors-in-training from Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP)-accredited programs completed online surveys rating supervisory competency for faculty and site supervisors. Surveys consisted of demographic information and the instrument, Supervision Evaluation and Supervisory Competence (SE-SC) short version scale (Gonsalvez, 2020). Overall, the results of this study indicated that the role of being a faculty supervisor or site supervisor did not yield substantial differences in perceived supervisory competency. However, when examining the differences in level of supervisory experience, the results yielded a multitude of differences, notably between novice- and intermediate-level supervisors and novice- and expert-level supervisors. An additional finding revealed a high frequency of inadequate or negative supervision experiences. The results of this study provide useful information in the preparation and educational training of faculty supervisors, site supervisors, and counselors-in-training with the ultimate purpose of ensuring the delivery of competent counseling services to the public.

INTRODUCTION

With rising mental health concerns and issues of treatment access in the United States and the projected increased need for mental health counselors (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.), counselor education programs must properly prepare and educate counselors entering this profession. Because clinical supervision plays a vital role in the preparation of counselors-in-training, interest in best practices and competency-based supervision has increased. Despite the crucial role of clinical supervision, the amount of time counselors-in-training spend in supervision, and the differences in supervision training between site and faculty supervisors, little research exists examining how counselors-in-training perceive the competency and effectiveness of faculty and site supervisors. Examining supervisees' experiences of supervisors' competency provides a helpful window into better understanding their clinical training and preparation.

The practicum/internship experience for counselors-in-training is extensive and provides counseling students with professional practice with real clients, in real settings who are experiencing mental health concerns. Supervision is an essential requirement of the experience, providing the opportunity for students to apply counseling theory and develop their counseling skills. Bernard and Goodyear (2018) define clinical supervision in counseling as an intervention occurring over time, provided by a more experienced professional that is evaluative and hierarchical. The aspects of clinical supervision involve monitoring the

the quality of counseling services provided, serving as a gatekeeper to the profession, and enhancing the professional functioning of the counselor-in-training. Most previous research on supervision in the counseling field has more broadly focused on understanding supervisor development and the significance of the supervisory working alliance with little attention specifically on counselors-in-training. When counselors-in-training are first encountering clients, their need for support and guidance is considerable. Given these developmental challenges for beginning counselors, research is merited in understanding supervision effectiveness and competency during clinical internship experiences. Supervision plays a vital role in ensuring that counselors entering the profession are dispositionally-appropriate and competently-ready to provide counseling services to the public; therefore, exploring how counselors-in-training experience supervision with their supervisors provides insight into the impact of supervision in their development.

METHODS

This correlational quantitative study consisted of a non-experimental design using convenience sampling and utilized multivariate of analysis (MANOVA) and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare potential group differences. 77 counselors-in-training participated in the study. Participants were asked to identify whether the supervisor was a site or faculty supervisor, the type of supervision experienced (e.g., individual, triadic, or group), and perceived level of experience (e.g., novice, intermediate, and expert) the supervisors had in supervision. Because some counselors-in-training had more than one faculty and/or site supervisor during their internship experience, a total of 230 surveys were completed: 125 for site supervisors and 105 for faculty supervisors. The Supervision Evaluation and Supervisory Competence short scale (SE-SC8; Gonsalvez, 2020) was completed by counselors-in-training to evaluate their faculty supervisors' and their site supervisors' supervisory competency, their satisfaction with supervision, and supervision effectiveness. The SE-SC8 consists of 12 total items and captures specific supervisory competencies such as the supervisory relationship, supervisors' knowledge and therapist expertise, supervision planning and management, goal-directed supervision, restorative competencies, and insights into and management of therapist-client dynamics.

The following research questions provided direction for this study:

- 1.) How do counselors-in-training rate their faculty supervisor's competency in supervision?
- 2.) How do counselors-in-training rate their site supervisor's competency in supervision?
- 3.) Is there a difference in how counselors-in-training rate their faculty supervisors' and site supervisors' competency? If so, what are the differences?
- 4.) Do counselors-in-training ratings of competency vary based on supervisors' perceived level of experience?

Findings from this study revealed several significant insights. First, the majority of counselors-in-training indicated agreement with their overall experience of supervision as being positive for both faculty and site supervisors with no significant differences between the two roles. The item with the highest level of agreement for both faculty and site supervisor was "the supervisor was approachable, caring, and supportive." This finding supports the presence of an emotional and relational foundation between the counselors-in-training and their supervisors which is indicative of developing a strong supervisory working alliance.

A second noteworthy finding was the high frequency of negative or inadequate

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supervision experiences. While most participants indicated a positive experience with supervisors, a concerning finding emerged when examining the frequency of the lower-ranging overall average score on the SE-SC 12-item version. 17.4% of all surveys completed indicated supervision that did not meet supervision competency standards. Counselors-in-training's experiences of poor or inadequate supervision occurred in both faculty and site supervision indicating that the academic role of the supervisor does not buffer or protect against the experience of inadequate supervision. Additionally, when examining the perceived expertise of the supervisor, poor or inadequate experiences of supervision occurred across all three levels: novice, intermediate, and expert. Those with novice supervisors reported 28.6% poor or inadequate supervision experiences while those with intermediate and expert supervisors reported 14.7% inadequate supervision experiences. Finally, this study reveals marked differences between novice and intermediate supervisors and novice and expert supervisors in almost every supervision competency area. In comparing the overall SE-SC 12-item version average score and the three different levels of expertise, novices consistently scored at significantly lower rating than intermediates and experts. Lack of experience seems to have a high effect on the effectiveness of supervision for counselors-in-training and supports the premise that becoming a supervisor has its own unique process of development.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the importance of supervision in the skill development of counselors-in-training and its additional purpose of monitoring and gatekeeping supervisees, inadequate supervision has the potential effect of releasing poorly prepared counselors to work with clients. Counselor education program must actively address and provide better training and support for supervisors in the future. Understanding how counselors-in-training perceive the competency of supervisors and the impact of supervisory expertise offers valuable information and new research areas for training programs, supervisors, and counselors-in-training. Competent supervision helps assure that new counselors are prepared, educated, and well-equipped to offer counseling services to vulnerable populations.

RESEARCHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The frequency of poor and inadequate supervision experiences for counselors-in-training is concerning. Counselor education programs must be vigilant in monitoring and addressing poor supervision. Programs need to educate counselors-in-training on appropriate expectations of supervisors and best practices of supervision to help them identify inadequate supervision and how to address it. Additionally, because of the multiple layers of power differentials between students and faculty, when students report poor supervision particularly with faculty members, students must be informed about policy and procedures for dealing with difficulties and reporting grievances, if necessary. Continued attention must be directed to the CACREP requirements of approval, monitoring, and evaluation of the field placement sites through faculty site visits and review of students' regular evaluation of their sites.

The research results revealing the competency differences between novice and intermediate/expert supervisors point to the importance of programs intentionally focusing attention on all supervisors who are new to supervising, including novice faculty supervisors. Given the frequency of inadequate supervision even amongst faculty, new faculty supervisors would also benefit from additional support and education on supervision. Specifically, counselor education programs should incorporate the ACES Supervision Best Practices Guidelines (Borders et al, 2014)

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into their orientation, educational preparation, and approval of new site and new faculty supervisors. Additionally, counselor education programs should consider the preparation and educational training for supervisors in differing developmental stages instead of approaching it as a “one size fits all.” Providing sufficient education and preparation to ensure that all new supervisors can perform at the minimal acceptable level of competency should be an expectation of and priority for CACREP-accredited training-programs.

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