

Countertransference & Self-Care during the age of Telehealth and Practicing from Home

Elliott Duea

ABSTRACT

The sudden onset of a global pandemic put therapists in a unique position; therapists that have always practiced in an office found themselves providing therapy from their homes. With this change, this study seeks to measure two things: the first goal of this study is to determine if therapists have encountered more instances of countertransference since practicing in their homes. And the second goal of the study is to determine if it has been more difficult to practice self-care since seeing clients at home over telehealth. With less of a separation between work and home life, there are many things that can change for the therapist.

METHODS

Participants

- ❑ Survey between 150 – 200 therapists that are practicing in their homes, and have only previously practiced in an office setting

Procedures

- ❑ Responses to all surveys completed by participants were collected online. We collected the data within 4 weeks of initial send-off date, and then we followed up 6 weeks later.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS

- ❑ For Levels of Countertransference, we will evaluate the ACS scale to determine if their level of countertransference has changed since practicing virtually in their homes. We anticipate that the levels of Countertransference have increased since doing telehealth..
- ❑ For Self-Care scale, we will evaluate the scale to determine if therapist's have practiced more or less self-care since practicing virtually in their homes. We anticipate that therapists will have practiced less self-care since doing telehealth.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 has had a significant impact not just on choose who participate in therapy, but the therapy process itself. Most therapists would see clients in offices, whether it be their own, their agencies, or even office buildings of schools. With the sudden onset of a pandemic, therapists overnight found themselves needing to become versed in telehealth. Before this, there was typically a separation between the space where a therapist lives, and where they practice. In the Journal of Psychoanalytic Association, Kylie Svenson suggests that, with telehealth, clients will likely experience more feelings of vulnerability and fear about their therapists seeing into their living space, and even encountering their family (Svenson, 2020). It is also important to research how the therapist is being impacted as well, given that clients are now seeing clients in their living space. What we want to do in this study is build off Svenson's research and evaluate the therapists' side of this new unique dynamic of practicing from home health telehealth, and how the level countertransference has been impacted. We measured this countertransference through a Countertransference Scale (ACS) (Junior et. al. 2011). Additionally, we also want to survey how this change has impacted therapists' ability to practice self-care using a self-care patterns measurement scale (Gonzalez et. al. 2012).

MEASURES

Level of Countertransference (ACS)

- ❑ Therapists' Level of Countertransference was measured by a 23 item ACS (Assessment of Countertransference Scale)
- ❑ Scale has 10 items to evaluate "Closeness" score, 10 items to evaluate "Distance score" and 3 items to evaluate "indifference score".
- ❑ Participants will be asked to asked to score these 23 items thinking of their work pre-pandemic, and then take it again 2 weeks after seeing clients to score their level of countertransference post-pandemic and seeing clients in their homes

Level of Self-Care (SCPR-R)

- ❑ Therapists' level of Self-Care was measured based on 53 Item Self-Care Patterns Scale (SCPR-R)
- ❑ Participants will be asked to asked to score these 53 items thinking of how they practiced self-care pre-pandemic, and then take it again 2 weeks after seeing clients to score how they've practiced self-care post-pandemic and seeing clients in their homes

Discussion

Social Implications

- ❑ Research shows that therapists can feel more judgement towards client because of choices they make in their own home, thus creating a power imbalance client and therapist (Sayers, 2021)
- ❑ The power imbalance and countertransference can greatly impact the therapeutic relationship (Sayers, 2021)
- ❑ Cultural factors can be at play too over telehealth, and it may be more difficult to experience and share client's cultural customs and norms over a screen. If these aren't received well by therapist, then oppression can perpetuate for minority cultures

Clinician

- ❑ Research indicates that Self-Care is crucial in avoiding burnout as a therapist (Barnett, 2018)
- ❑ With increased burnout, there is an increased potential for vicarious traumatization (Figley, 1995)

Future Research

- ❑ We would like to explore research around clients that have had the same therapist in an office and then transitioned to in person. The purpose of interviewing these clients would be to determine if they have felt a difference in quality of care since the therapist has started practicing in their own home. If the participants indicate a difference in quality in care, we'd like to ask how much of this has to with it simply being telehealth, and how much feels like a change in their therapist.
- ❑ Additional research about ways that therapists can decrease levels countertransference, and increase ability to practice self-care

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

Research Question:

- ❑ **RQ1:** During the last year of telehealth practice during the pandemic, do therapists see an increase in level of countertransference in sessions?
- ❑ **RQ2:** During the last year of telehealth practice during the pandemic, have therapists found it more difficult to practice self-care?

Hypotheses:

- ❑ **H1:** Therapists have experienced an increase in level of countertransference in sessions since they've started practicing from their homes during the pandemic.
- ❑ **H2:** Therapists have experienced an increase in difficulty to practice self-care in sessions since they've started practicing from their homes during the pandemic.