

The Challenges and Suggestions of Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programs Based on Supervision Process

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Abstract

Clinical supervision plays a crucial role in intervention programs. This research focuses on the process of skill development among therapists during group-based psychotherapy supervision, specifically examining the effects of supervision on the relationships with group leaders and members during the intervention. The aim of this study is to explore the challenges and suggestions for providing effective domestic violence perpetrator programs through supervision sessions. While various training programs offer specific strategies for domestic violence perpetrator interventions, it is essential to enhance facilitators' relationship skills to improve the outcomes of group psychotherapy. Recordings of supervisory meetings were transcribed and subjected to content analysis. The analysis revealed three key themes: difficulties in maintaining focus on group goals, obstacles related to time management, and questions surrounding confrontation. These challenges were particularly evident in the study population consisting of individuals involved in the criminal justice system due to family violence. Considering the availability of various domestic violence perpetrator intervention manuals, it is important to examine the influence of supervision on improving facilitators' skills and intervention outcomes. By addressing the obstacles faced by facilitators during domestic violence perpetrator interventions, supervision sessions have the potential to mitigate these challenges, especially among less experienced professionals. This research highlights the significance of supervision in enhancing facilitators' skills and ultimately improving intervention outcomes in domestic violence perpetrator programs.

Keywords: building skills; interventions; supervisory process; therapists' training; clinical supervision

1. Introduction

The practice of clinical supervision involves a seasoned supervisor or a more advanced professional providing guidance and support to a less experienced supervisee or trainee, who is typically a junior mental health professional (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Specifically, in the realm of psychotherapy, supervision entails a trained supervisor overseeing the work of therapists, contributing to a secure and nurturing environment, managing group dynamics, and offering personalized guidance to meet individual therapist needs (Westefeld, 2009). Supervision sessions serve as a forum for therapists to receive valuable direction, bolstering their clinical practice within a group context. Within the existing literature, the core objectives of supervision are outlined: (1) enhancing therapeutic skills, encompassing the refinement of assessment, treatment planning, and intervention techniques (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Bradley & Ladany, 2001), (2) fostering reflective practice, prompting therapists to scrutinize their own work, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and cultivate self-awareness (Haynes, Corey & Moulton, 2003), (3) nurturing ethical and professional behavior by ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines and professional standards (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Falender & Shafranske, 2004), and (4) establishing a supportive network, creating an environment where therapists can glean insights from each other's experiences, exchange perspectives, and extend mutual assistance (Falender & Shafranske, 2004). For professionals engaged in group therapy, supervision assumes heightened significance due to the intricate web of relationships within the group that necessitates adept management. Therapists overseeing group processes require targeted feedback and skill enhancement to sustain the group effectively. Supervision emerges as a pivotal avenue for obtaining constructive feedback and facilitating professional growth, thereby ensuring a continuous trajectory of advancement (Milne & James, 2002).

Managing an effective domestic violence perpetrator program poses numerous challenges for a professional. In order to cope with these challenges, it is crucial for the group therapist to seek supervision as professional support. Male and female facilitators may encounter distinct challenges while implementing the domestic violence perpetrator program. Male facilitators reported undergoing self-reflection regarding their own conduct within intimate relationships, while female facilitators frequently gained newfound awareness of their victimization experiences. Additionally, female practitioners displayed a higher tendency to perceive the men they engaged with as intimidating, thereby experiencing emotions of anger, fear, and animosity toward them (Renahan, 2021). These issues can be handled with the help of the supervision process. Also, the concurrent exposure of practitioners to both narratives of trauma and perpetration entails a heightened potential for impacting their well-being (Anderson, 2016). Perpetrators of domestic violence come from diverse backgrounds and may have complex needs, such as substance abuse, mental health issues, or trauma history. Facilitators need to be skilled in addressing these individual differences effectively. While being confronted with multiple accounts of harm, practitioners frequently had emotional difficulties in the absence of sufficient supervision (Philips et al., 2016). Emotional support in supervision can help facilitators manage their own reactions, build resilience, and prevent

burnout. Furthermore, Reene (2021) conducted a study investigating the encounters of facilitators involved in domestic violence perpetrator programs. The findings revealed that facilitators emphasized the significance of receiving supportive supervision that prioritizes the emotional challenges encountered while working with domestic abuse perpetrators. This aspect holds crucial implications for their personal and professional growth, emotional well-being, knowledge enhancement, and effective time management.

In addition, resistance and denial can be identified as notable challenges within violence prevention groups. Perpetrators of domestic violence may demonstrate resistance and denial, thereby posing challenges for facilitators in terms of program engagement and fostering transformative behavioral outcomes (Chambers et al., 2008). Also, working with perpetrators of domestic violence can involve potential risks to the safety of facilitators, other group members, or the clients themselves. Supervisors need to address safety protocols and ensure the well-being of all involved (McCosker et al., 2001; Morran, 2008). Domestic violence intervention programs often face high relapse rates, as changing deeply ingrained patterns of behavior takes time and effort (Ellsberg et al., 2014). Facilitators may struggle with maintaining motivation and perseverance in the face of relapses.

Considering the challenges in domestic violence perpetrator group psychotherapy, supervisors can help facilitators improve their skills via clinical guidance, role-playing techniques, case consultation and reflective practice during supervision sessions (McNeill & Stoltenberg, 2016). For instance, supervisors can offer guidance on evidence-based practices and intervention strategies specific to domestic violence perpetrator programs. They can help facilitators understand the dynamics of domestic violence, address resistance, and develop effective therapeutic techniques (Weck et al., 2017). Furthermore, supervisors can engage facilitators in role-plays and experiential exercises during supervision sessions. This allows facilitators to practice different approaches, receive feedback, and enhance their skills in engaging and challenging perpetrators (Falender & Shafranske, 2014). Likewise, supervisors play a pivotal role in providing case consultation, affording facilitators the opportunity to present intricate cases and seek counsel regarding intervention approaches. Through in-depth discussions and constructive feedback, supervisors assist facilitators in cultivating a comprehensive comprehension of the intricate dynamics inherent in domestic violence cases. Moreover, supervisors foster reflective practice by encouraging facilitators to engage in self-awareness and critical thinking (Corey et al., 2020). This entails facilitating dialogues concerning facilitators' experiences, responses, and countertransference while working with domestic violence perpetrators.

Overall, supervision sessions should aim to create a safe and supportive environment where facilitators can openly discuss challenges, receive constructive feedback, and enhance their abilities to effectively address domestic violence perpetration. Managing a violence perpetrator program without a supervisory process is quite challenging. However, there are very few studies on the supervision sessions with facilitators in the group process. While some evidence supports the importance of supervision for therapists' skills for effective intervention, fewer studies examined the experiences and benefits of clinical supervision sessions about domestic violence perpetrator programs. This study aims to explore the

challenges and suggestions for providing effective domestic violence perpetrator programs through supervision sessions. Consequently, this study provides a valuable resource for facilitators and supervisors as it enables the assessment of emerging issues and potential resolutions within the supervision process.

2. Methods

The data of this study was formed from the supervision notes of the group study carried out within the scope of a project, which is the implementation of a kind of violence perpetrator program. 10-week violence perpetrator program which was developed from different models in order to prevent domestic violence was applied to male perpetrators of domestic violence. This program is developed for men who are involved in the criminal justice system due to domestic violence (Turhan, 2020). Two group studies were completed and a total of 22 sessions were carried out by a male (psychological counselor) and a female practitioner (clinical psychologist) who are experienced in group work. After each session, supervision was taken from a professor who is experienced in violence programs and group work. These supervision sessions were transcribed. The verbatim transcriptions were analyzed. We attempted to apply content analysis that involved systematically organizing, categorizing, and interpreting the content of qualitative data to identify patterns, themes, and meaningful insights (Cho & Lee, 2014). Content analysis offers a structured and systematic approach to analyzing qualitative data, enabling researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the content, patterns, and themes within the data set. Therefore, content analysis was applied to supervision transcripts. After transcriptions, the coding process included assigning codes to segments of data that represent meaningful concepts, themes, and categories. As coding progresses, we organized the codes into categories and themes. Also, we iteratively refined and revised categories and themes during the analysis process. After coding and categorization, we interpreted the data to draw meaningful insights and conclusions by focusing on the relationships between categories and themes.

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the content analysis process is paramount (Taylor et al., 2016). To establish inter-coder reliability, we adopted a meticulous procedure wherein multiple coders independently analyzed a subset of the data. This step was pivotal in assessing the level of agreement between coders and bolstering the overall consistency of the analysis. Moreover, a methodical documentation of the entire analysis process was meticulously maintained, underpinning transparency and fortifying the trustworthiness of the resultant findings.

In our pursuit of augmenting the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, we judiciously applied the principle of triangulation, effectively harnessing diverse methods and perspectives to scrutinize the research question holistically (Kolb, 2012; Lietz et al., 2006; Weerakoon et al., 2022). For instance, a practice of sustained reflection and reflexivity was seamlessly woven throughout the research journey (Berger, 2013). This entailed an ongoing critical assessment of the researchers' own biases, assumptions, and preconceived notions that might inadvertently seep into the realms of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. By

conscientiously recognizing and addressing these subjective elements, we significantly bolstered the credibility and transparency of the entire dataset.

The implementation of these systematic measures, ranging from inter-coder reliability assessment to the incorporation of triangulation and reflective practices, collectively fortified the trustworthiness of our qualitative data, ensuring the utmost rigor in both the methodology and subsequent interpretations.

3. Results

According to the findings, supervision sessions played a significant role in fostering stronger relationships between group leaders and members during the intervention process. Additionally, these sessions brought to light the challenges and suggestions for facilitating effective domestic violence perpetrator programs, which were categorized into three key themes: (1) challenges in maintaining focus on group goals and facilitating effective communication, (2) challenges arising from externalization and effective strategies for time management in group work and (3) navigating confrontation and fostering self-reflection in group dynamics. Initially, the challenges were identified and subsequently followed by the presentation of corresponding suggestions within each theme.

Theme 1: Challenges in Maintaining Focus on Group Goals and Facilitating Effective Communication. The theme of "Challenges in Maintaining Focus on Group Goals and Facilitating Effective Communication" underscores the complexities that arise during the implementation of group activities. Group members encounter difficulties in comprehending the objectives, which can be attributed to a confluence of socio-cultural factors, intricate group dynamics, personal goals, and sensitivities stemming from intimate relationships.

During the evaluation phase post-activity completion, obstacles emerge as participants navigate their emotions and experiences. While encouraged to share their sentiments, gains, and insights related to the activities, some individuals grapple with intense emotions, such as embarrassment or guilt, stemming from the presence of fellow group members. Consequently, they encounter hurdles in openly discussing their personal experiences, relational challenges, or issues. This hesitance may lead to periods of silence or a sense of isolation within the group dynamics, hindering the development of self-insight.

The process of self-examination, especially delving into emotions like guilt, proves challenging. Notably, men often struggle to express deeper emotions, such as profound sadness or helplessness. Furthermore, certain individuals find it daunting to share and articulate their personal experiences due to social norms or a lack of knowledge about effective expression.

In group exercises, members may veer off-topic, discussing court proceedings, interpersonal relationships, or grievances, rather than the designated goals. The group dynamics often center around personal experiences and life stories, particularly in initial sessions where individuals seek acceptance and understanding. Setting goals becomes intricate, especially

considering past victimization experiences and the unfamiliarity of goal-setting due to life circumstances.

To address these challenges, effective supervision sessions offer practical strategies. Group leaders need to maintain a firm focus on the core goals and activities, even while navigating tangential discussions. Gently redirecting conversations and emphasizing the primary objectives can help participants align with the program's aims.

A well-prepared group leader, armed with theoretical knowledge, plays a pivotal role. Activities must be tailored to participants' needs, with clear explanations using accessible language. Group size and available time should also factor into activity planning. Furthermore, group leaders should be attuned to participants who struggle to open up or remain silent. Tailored techniques should be employed to foster effective communication, recognizing that trauma, anger, or crises might hinder expression. If challenges persist, recommending individual counseling becomes a viable option. Building a therapeutic rapport becomes paramount for participants to gradually share their emotions and experiences.

In sum, the theme of "Challenges in Maintaining Focus on Group Goals and Facilitating Effective Communication" encompasses the intricate interplay of factors that impact goal-oriented discussions within the group context, emphasizing the importance of adept leadership and strategies to navigate these complexities.

Theme 2: Challenges Arising from Externalization and Effective Strategies for Time Management in Group Work. The theme of "Challenges Arising from Externalization and Effective Strategies for Time Management in Group Work" delves into the intricacies of managing group dynamics and facilitating productive discussions, particularly in the context of externalizing problems and time constraints.

One noteworthy challenge within the group setting is the tendency of participants to externalize problems, deflecting personal responsibility. This phenomenon is exemplified by attributing issues to societal shifts, cultural values, or external factors such as the internet. Group members may engage in critiquing legal systems and sharing personal grievances, notably by scrutinizing laws that they perceive as favoring women. These discussions can become emotionally charged, with participants expressing feelings of injustice and victimization.

To address externalization, group facilitators play a crucial role in steering conversations toward human rights and justice, rather than gender-based perspectives. However, participants may resist discussing violence or harassment, perceiving them as minor concerns. It's imperative to maintain sensitivity, particularly concerning the "crisis of masculinity" some men experience due to restraining orders. Emphasizing that the program is therapeutic rather than a continuation of the court process is essential, especially for voluntary participants who may struggle in subsequent sessions.

A vital aspect of managing externalization involves conveying positive messages that encourage personal growth. Statements like "We are here to learn how to better manage our lives" and "By changing our behavior, we protect ourselves" can foster a sense of empowerment. Facilitators guide participants in developing constructive strategies to

safeguard themselves and prevent violence. Solution-focused therapy is employed, wherein questions prompt participants to reflect on ineffective past behaviors and envision effective future actions. The approach encourages transformative change and strengthens participants' connection to the group.

Participants are encouraged to take ownership of their experiences rather than externalizing blame. While external factors can impact us, individuals retain a responsibility for their actions. Facilitators utilize the confrontation technique, asking participants to reflect on behaviors that disturb them. By considering how externalization affects accountability, individuals are prompted to introspect and explore personal responsibility. This approach is enhanced by facilitators sharing relatable examples from their own perspectives.

The theme of "Challenges Arising from Externalization and Effective Strategies for Time Management in Group Work" underscores the intricate interplay of externalization and its impact on group dynamics. Effective strategies involve steering discussions, promoting accountability, fostering positive transformation, and using solution-focused therapy to facilitate meaningful change within the group context.

Theme 3: Navigating Confrontation and Fostering Self-Reflection in Group Dynamics.

The theme of "Navigating Confrontation and Fostering Self-Reflection in Group Dynamics" delves into the intricate process of addressing resistance, guiding introspection, and encouraging positive change within the group context.

The theme begins by highlighting the challenges posed by confrontation in the initial sessions. Participants may not yet be prepared for direct confrontation, potentially leading to setbacks, early terminations, or dropouts from the group. Facilitators are advised to provide genuine and sincere positive feedback to each individual, emphasizing their strengths, contributions, and valuable insights. The importance of authentic positivity, combined with an unwavering belief in each person's potential for positive change, is emphasized, even for those prone to violence.

In the group dynamic, participants may resist acknowledging their roles in problematic situations, often deflecting blame onto others. Addressing this challenge requires careful navigation of confrontation. Thought-provoking questions such as "What could your contribution be to this?" or "Could you have a role in this?" serve as constructive tools for promoting introspection without causing harm. The aim is to encourage participants to recognize the multidimensional nature of conflicts and assume responsibility in instances of violence.

As the therapeutic relationship evolves, facilitators gradually introduce more confrontational techniques. In the mid and final sessions, facilitators respectfully intervene when discussions deviate from the topic, guiding participants toward self-confrontation using the aforementioned questions. Patience and timing play pivotal roles in this process. Facilitators should gauge participants' readiness for confrontation and utilize these techniques strategically to foster introspection and personal growth. While participants may experience initial resistance or frustration, the mid-stage intervention marks a pivotal opportunity for deep reflection and transformative change.

The theme of "Navigating Confrontation and Fostering Self-Reflection in Group Dynamics" underscores the art of effectively confronting denial, shifting blame, and guiding participants toward introspection within a group setting. By combining authentic positivity, thought-provoking questions, and strategic confrontation, facilitators facilitate meaningful self-exploration and empower participants to assume responsibility, fostering personal growth and progress throughout the intervention.

4. Discussion

This study offers a unique perspective on the role of supervision in identifying and addressing challenges encountered during group-based interventions for domestic violence perpetrators. Similar to other findings in the literature (Bearmen et al., 2013; Burlingame, Fuhriman, & Johnson; Trotter, 2013), our research also highlights the positive impact of supervision sessions in enhancing therapists' skills and capabilities. Supervision is widely recognized as an effective method for professionals to establish a strong rapport with their clients, which fosters heightened motivation and promotes professional skills and development (Milne & James, 2002). These findings also demonstrate that supervision is effective when working with violent perpetrators, as it aids in developing relationships, motivating individuals, and acquiring new skills. Clearly, our observations indicate that therapists possess the capacity to acquire and refine crucial skills through supervision, equipping them with the ability to effectively engage perpetrators, establish a meaningful rapport, and motivate their active involvement in the intervention process.

One of the notable advantages offered by supervision is its facilitation of risk assessment for therapists, especially in challenging circumstances (McNeill & Stoltenberg, 2016). In tandem with this risk assessment, safety plans and action plans are deliberated upon within the supervision context, aiming to ensure the secure completion of the group process for all participants (Corey et al., 2020). Consequently, it can be argued that the supervision sessions within our study provided a supportive environment through the provision of feedback and contributed to the development of diverse strategies in working with individuals who exhibit violent behavior.

Furthermore, our study emphasized the importance of supervision as a platform for recognizing and addressing specific challenges unique to group interventions. Through regular supervision, therapists were able to discuss and receive guidance on issues such as managing group dynamics, addressing resistance, and facilitating meaningful discussions among perpetrators. Significant resistance can often manifest prominently, particularly when working with perpetrators (Chambers et al., 2008). The utilization of this supervision framework served to alleviate the facilitators' workload, thereby supporting their professional endeavors. The collaborative nature of supervision (Weck et al., 2017) allowed for the sharing of experiences and the exploration of innovative approaches, ultimately enhancing therapists' skills in conducting group-based interventions for domestic violence perpetrators.

This study encompasses several limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, it should be noted that the examination of supervision notes was limited to only two group processes,

thereby reducing the generalizability of the findings. Future research endeavors should aim to expand the scope by incorporating a larger number of group studies, enabling the generation of more comprehensive and in-depth results. Furthermore, this study did not extensively discuss the experiences of the facilitators. The examination of various aspects, such as the relationship between facilitators and supervisors, the position of the supervisors, and their connection with the group, was lacking. These aspects hold significant importance and should be addressed in future studies to gain a more holistic understanding of the subject matter. Another noteworthy point is the scarcity of resources within the existing literature concerning supervision applied after violence perpetrator programs (Lee, 2017b). Consequently, the present discussion and transfer of knowledge were restricted to the confines of these limited resources. Future studies should delve deeper into this underexplored area to enhance the understanding and application of effective supervision techniques in such programs.

Despite the limited literature and theoretical framework, this study demonstrated the benefit of supervision during the violence perpetrator program. Future studies could endeavor to formulate a more tailored supervision model for this domain or, alternatively, provide more definitive empirical evidence by examining the constituent components of supervision in conjunction with the phenomenon of violence. It is worth noting that the benefits of supervision extended beyond individual therapists to the broader program as a whole. The feedback and insights gained through supervision sessions can inform program development, refine intervention strategies, and ensure that the program remains responsive to the evolving needs of both perpetrators and survivors. Furthermore, supervision serves as a vital platform for ongoing professional development, contributing to the continuous improvement of therapists' skills and knowledge in the field of domestic violence intervention.

In conclusion, this study highlights the invaluable role of supervision in domestic violence perpetrator programs. It underscores how supervision facilitates the recognition and resolution of challenges specific to group interventions while also promoting the development and enhancement of therapists' skills. By leveraging supervision as a platform for learning, reflection, and support, therapists can effectively engage perpetrators, conduct comprehensive assessments, and contribute to the overall success of domestic violence perpetrator programs.

5. Conclusion

This research provides valuable insights into the impact of supervision on enhancing therapists' skills. In contrast to previous studies that primarily focused on the challenges of behavioral change in domestic violence perpetrator programs, our study specifically aimed to analyze how supervision sessions can shed light on the obstacles encountered by facilitators during interventions. By identifying these challenges, we have outlined key recommendations to mitigate and overcome potential difficulties that therapists may encounter. While these suggestions apply to various intervention settings, they offer specific guidance tailored to domestic violence perpetrator programs. Implementing these recommendations can greatly

contribute to the effectiveness and success of such programs, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for both perpetrators and survivors of domestic violence.

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