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An evaluation of supervisees' perceptions of the benefits and limitations of pastoral/reflective supervision among Christian clergy in the UK

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Abstract

Clergy from several Christian denominations in the UK were invited to participate in an online survey which explored their experience of pastoral/reflective supervision. The research question was, "How has the practice of pastoral supervision within Christian denominations in the UK been beneficial, and what have been its limitations?" The aims of the research were: to explore what has been helpful to supervisees in the provision of pastoral supervision; and to determine what has not been helpful to supervisees in the provision of pastoral supervision. 173 clergy respondents took part. The data show that pastoral/reflective supervision is mostly beneficial to respondents, and that pastoral/reflective supervision enables clergy to self-perceive feelings of: support; lessening isolation; increased insight into personal process; affirmation of their ministry; and to have a better sense of wellbeing. Some hindrances to effective supervision are identified, and some recommendations for training and denominational support are made.

Keywords

Pastoral; reflective; supervision; benefits; hindrances

Introduction

It is not uncommon for many clergy to experience some form of crisis during their ministry (Cameron, 2006; Webb & Chase, 2019). These can relate to relationship issues, health issues (including stress and burnout), and failure to meet unrealistic expectations (Vitello, 2010). Clergy can face unreasonable time demands and expectations, isolation and loneliness, conflict with congregations and superiors, health issues and burnout (Hoge & Wenger, 2005; Proeschold-Bell & Byassee, 2018). Some have to deal with the consequences of sex abuse scandals even though they are not personally involved, have difficulty in making prayer a priority or sustaining it, lack support structures and have to deal with the impact of secularisation (Maloney, 2013). Ministry is not getting any easier - indeed, it is getting 'messier' as society gets more complex (Gubi & Mwenisongole, 2022).

In order to meet their duty of care, and to help strengthen safeguarding by responding to the recommendations of historic abuse case reviews (Oakley & Kinmond, 2013; Oakley & Humphreys, 2019), several Christian denominations in the UK have put individual or group pastoral/reflective supervision in place (e.g. Methodist Church, 2021; Moravian Church, 2020; Gubi, Korris & West, 2020; Gubi & Bubbers, 2023). Pastoral/reflective supervision is increasingly recognised in many Christian denominations as a way of enabling safeguarding and risk amelioration, of supporting the wellbeing of clergy and in enabling the development of reflexive practitioners for ministry in a complex society (Gubi, 2020). In 2008, the Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education (APSE) was established to promote and support pastoral supervision. Since then, pastoral/reflective supervision has been formally implemented in the UK by the Methodist Church (2017), the United Reformed Church (2020), and the Moravian Church (British Province) (2020); and is being developed in the Baptist Church, the Salvation Army, in some dioceses of the Church of England and in

other Christian denominations (Gubi & Bubbers, 2023). However, apart from the Methodist Church (2021), the Moravian Church (Gubi & Mwenisongole, 2022) and the Diocese of Lichfield (Gubi & Bubbers, 2023), there has been no evaluation of the value and limitations of pastoral/reflective supervision, and the research that is available is small-scale and limited. This research seeks to address that deficit and to gain a fuller picture of pastoral/reflective supervision provision for clergy within Christian denominations in the UK.

‘Pastoral supervision is a regular, planned, intentional and boundaried space in which a practitioner who is skilled in supervision (the supervisor) meets with one or more other practitioners (the supervisees) to look together at the supervisees’ practice’ (APSE, 2023, para. 1.). In 2021, the Methodist Church changed the nomenclature of their pastoral supervision provision to ‘reflective supervision’ (Methodist Church, 2021), but the facilitated purpose, space and relationship remains the same as in pastoral supervision. These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this article to mean the same thing.

The research question was, “How has the practice of pastoral supervision within Christian denominations in the UK been beneficial, and what have been its limitations?” The aims of the research were: to explore what has been helpful to supervisees in the provision of pastoral supervision; and to determine what has not been helpful to supervisees in the provision of pastoral supervision.

Method

Representatives from organisations who have adopted a formal policy of pastoral supervision for all of their clergy in the UK (i.e. The Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, and the Moravian Church), training organisations for pastoral/reflective supervisors in the UK (i.e. the Institute of Pastoral Supervision and Reflective Practice, the Institute for

Pastoral Counselling and Supervision, and Wesley House, Cambridge), the Salvation Army, and the Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education (APSE), were all invited to make comments on the research design and survey statements, and to distribute the survey link to the online questionnaire to all those on their membership and alumni lists. Some suggestions for amendments were made and integrated, but there was some resistance from some of the denominations and training organisations to distributing the survey link to their members or alumni. The resistance was due, in part, to data protection issues, misunderstanding about expectations, opposition to the research only being conducted among Christian clergy, or a desire to shield potential participants from being asked to take part in too much research. As a result, the survey link was sent only to members of APSE (many of whom are active pastoral supervisors who work across denominations), to alumni pastoral supervisors of Wesley House, Cambridge, and to pastoral supervisors within the Salvation Army and the Moravian Church, to pass onto their clergy supervisees. Because there was a possibility that supervisees could receive the survey from several sources, they were asked in the pre-amble to complete the survey only once. Participants had three weeks in which to submit their responses.

The online survey was based on Gubi & Mwenisongole's (2022) evaluation of pastoral supervision in the Moravian Church, which contains statements for participants to agree or disagree with, based on what research has already discovered to be the helping and hindering factors of pastoral supervision (e.g. Gubi, 2016; 2017; 2020; Gubi & Korris, 2015). There was also opportunity for additional qualitative comment after each cluster of statements. The survey tool, Jisc, was used, and it provided a statistical analysis of the quantitative data. The qualitative data was analysed using a Thematic Analysis (Braun, Clark & Rance, 2015). The analysis was inductive and semantic. The researchers familiarised

themselves with the participants' comments, looked for emerging codes, and then clustered the codes into themes. The online survey provided statistical evidence of the success or limitations of the pastoral supervision provision in the UK. The qualitative comment provided additional 'texture' to the statistical data, and generated rich data on participants' lived experiences and opinions.

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Chester through their approval process. Participation was voluntary. All data were anonymised via the survey tool. Although a coding was generated by Jisc, it was complex. So, we have translated that into a simpler code (e.g. P1-P173) to anonymously attribute data to participants. APSE has a membership of 321, many of whom are pastoral supervisors who work with a number of clergy supervisees. Anecdotally, the Methodist Church has trained approximately 500 pastoral/reflective supervisors; the Salvation Army has trained approximately 50 pastoral/reflective supervisors; the Moravian Church contracts 12 external pastoral supervisors for their clergy supervisees; and the United Reformed Church has trained approximately 30 pastoral supervisors. This does not include the alumni of the pastoral supervision training organisations. Each of these pastoral/reflective supervisors work with a number of clergy supervisees. The number of respondents to the survey was 173. The denominational affiliations of participants were:

Denomination	Number of respondents
Assembly of God	1
Baptist Church	11
Church of England	38
Church of Scotland	11
Church in Wales	7
Lutheran Church	1
Methodist Church	58
Moravian Church	5
Roman Catholic	3

Salvation Army	6
Scottish Episcopal Church	3
United Reformed Church	29
Total =	173

Findings

Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the following statements that reflect the benefits and limitations of pastoral supervision. The statistical data are presented in Tables 1-

4:

Table 1. Self-perceived benefits of pastoral supervision

Statement: My Pastoral Supervision has enabled me to...	Agree %	Don't know %	Disagree %
Feel supported	97	1	2
Feel less isolated in my ministry	86	7	7
Gain insight into the way I think	90	7	3
Process my feelings	92	5	3
Gain insight into my way of being in the world	76	16	8
Gain awareness of how I impact on others	77	15	8
Respect difference better	54	29	17
Have a better sense of self-care	83	13	4
Have a better quality of pastoral encounter with others in my ministry	73	19	8
Grow theologically	49	30	21
Interact better with others in my ministry	79	12	9
Grow as a human being	80	14	6
Trust others more	33	44	23
Experience my own vulnerability safely	92	2	6
Negotiate and manage boundaries better in my ministry	81	11	8
Deal with difficult pastoral situations more effectively	86	10	4
Become a more reflective Minister/person	83	9	8
Develop greater wisdom	69	23	8
Build and affirm strategies that can be taken back into my relationships with my congregation (or in my work)	86	8	6
Gain different perspectives on situations and people	88	7	5
Gain self-preservation strategies for managing others' expectations	65	25	10
Gain improved relationships within my work	70	21	9

Improve my ministerial skills	70	22	8
Approach meetings more positively	60	26	14
Manage situations in more helpful ways	88	7	5
Discern better what God may be saying in certain situations	66	26	8
Gain a clearer sense of my vocation	62	24	14
Gain a better work/life balance	54	26	20
Work better in the local team	52	33	15

Table 2. Additional self-perceived benefits of pastoral supervision

Statement: I have found my Pastoral Supervision to be...	Agree %	Don't know %	Disagree %
A place of learning and support that can help to stop, or diminish, my cycle of feeling constantly drained	68	20	12
A place for gaining a sense of well-being within the institutional relationships and within the Church community	70	16	14
A place for gaining a sense of well-being within family and self	65	20	15
A space for gaining self-awareness which is necessary in balancing a role that is called upon to model both authority and vulnerability	83	11	6
A chance to share my experience and to feel less alone	91	5	4
An opportunity to give and receive support and encouragement in the situation that I found myself, which can be taken back into my life and ministry	94	5	1
A place where I have gained confidence to engage/explore my call or ministry purpose	74	17	9

Table 3. Self-perceived hinderances to pastoral supervision

Statement: I have found that my involvement with my Pastoral Supervision has been held back by...	Agree %	Don't know %	Disagree %
My difficulty in committing the time to attend regularly	3	2	95
My difficulty in sharing openly with my Pastoral Supervisor	6	2	92
My difficulty in making time to prioritise attendance	2	2	96
The manner of facilitation	8	6	86
The structured nature of the sessions	1	6	93
The unstructured nature of the sessions	9	8	82
Feeling unsafe	5	3	92
The use of online provision	8	12	80

Being sent (having to do it as a denominational requirement)	5	9	86
Poor facilitation	6	4	90
Struggles with expectation	7	8	85
A lack of prayer	5	12	83
Too much prayer	1	7	92
My sense of spiritual dryness	8	6	86
Not being able to discuss my relationship with God	7	4	89

Table 4. Self-perceived opinion on pastoral supervision

In your opinion...	Agree %	Don't know %	Disagree %
Has the use of online pastoral supervision provision been of help to you?	85	10	5
Which best describes the frequency of your participation in pastoral supervision:			
Monthly (every four weeks)	28		
Every six weeks	29		
Bi-monthly (every other month)	43		
Is your pastoral supervisor also a clergyperson?	63	2	35

The additional qualitative data from participants were thematically analysed, and three main themes emerged: Benefits, Hindrances, and Ways to Improve. These are explored below.

Main Theme 1: Benefits:

Subtheme 1.1: The gains of the relationship

Some participants mentioned that pastoral supervision is a place to be open and honest (P29), to feel heard and to offload (P1, P32, P46), where the supervisee's needs and requirements are central (P21), and one can feel less isolated (P26). The fact that the facilitator is external to the denomination is important for some (P2, P49). P38 and P40 stated that it is a place for accountability in a confidential space. It is a place to gain a new perspective (P3, P11, P34, P64), to ask questions that haven't been asked of 'self' before

(P22, P60), and a safe space to practice difficult conversations (P5), and consider risk and safeguarding issues (P7, P9, P58). It is a place to gain affirmation (P9), to reflect on both 'head and heart' (P11, P54), which enables survival (P12, P17, P51, P59). Pastoral supervision is a space to speak openly about doubts relating to faith and continuing in ministry (P13), and to articulate and reflect on one's call and vocation (P19, P24, P65). It is a space for learning and opening up to new horizons (P13, P27). For P16, it has been a place to heal guilt and to reach absolution and peace. For P20, pastoral supervision affords the opportunity to engage in a disciplined framework which helps him/her to flourish in a range of aspects of ministry. P30 stated that pastoral supervision had enabled him/her to reflect on past hurtful relationships and to see the good that came out of those times. It helped him/her to become more spiritually aware and theologically grounded in his/her current role. Regular pastoral supervision makes pausing and regular reflection a habit (P42). For P45, it was an opportunity to celebrate the unexpected blessings of ministry. For P47, it was a place for 'accepting that s/he didn't have all the solutions, but it was OK to be good-enough rather than strive for perfection'.

Subtheme 1.2: Facilitative attributes of the supervisor

P33 was grateful for the 'exceptional gift to have time to reflect with a wise supervisor who has the ability to facilitate constructive outcome'. This concept of a wise supervisor is also reflected by others (e.g. P39, P51, P128, P139). P39 attributed the sharing from his/her supervisor as being helpful in finding ways through some tricky situations. For P32, his/her pastoral supervisor created a safe space for him/her to 'crash' in ministry, which was a gift at a difficult time, and enabled him/her to recover and continue to recover. P41 found the modelling of reflecting creatively through poetry, imagery and the natural environment, by

his/her supervisor, to be helpful in informing and enriching self-awareness, which impacted his/her approach to ministry and the pastoral care of others. P43 felt that his/her meetings with his/her supervisor were 'an oasis of stress-free engagement with an individual who understood the pressures of ministry'. P44 felt that his/her supervisor provided a place to 'just be' if that was needed. P48 stressed the invaluable nature of the support from her/his supervisor, in helping her/him manage a very difficult situation. P49, who describes her/himself as 'single', appreciated simply being listened to by his/her supervisor, when s/he had no other safe spaces in which to reflect. P55 stated that his/her supervisor 'helps me put language to what I am feeling or processing', and helps him/her to understand that 'some of the feelings that s/he is experiencing are normal'. P57 appreciated the continuing relationship with his/her supervisor through various change of roles and identity transitions. P64 described his/her supervisor as helping to 'get in touch with some depths of 'Soul' which have been instructive and helpful as I continue on my faith journey'. P71 recognised that s/he had a 'wonderful supervisor'. P2 also stated that her/his supervisor's close connection with clergy life, and her professional training, gave him/her confidence in the supervisor. P89 stated that s/he had 'greatly benefitted from having supervision with someone who was psychologically qualified, is not from my own denomination and does not report back to my line-management. This has enabled me to grow in boldness in dealing with difficult situations and in learning to self-reflect. After many years in ministry, it has brought a whole new dimension to my learning and resilience'. This was echoed by P24 who stated that 'my pastoral supervisor is very skilled in counselling and psychotherapy and our sessions are explorative in nature. This is an approach that I appreciate as I feel that my supervisor knows what they are doing'.

Main theme 2: Hindrances

Subtheme 2.1: Context and practice

The hindrances that participants identified, were 'having to' attend pastoral supervision as part of a denominational requirement (P18, P66, P83, P95) which, for some, carried the threat of disciplinary action if they did not attend (P18). For P81, this felt like a 'tick box' exercise. The use of online supervision was a hindrance for some (P12, P66, P76, P84), although P74 stated that online supervision mitigates against travel and enables better access to experienced and qualified supervisors. P5 wanted to be more creative in the sessions, but was grateful for the support. P9 wanted access to more sessions that his/her denomination was willing to pay for, as his/her role was particularly demanding. P68, P38 and P80 also identified 'finances' as a hindrance. P14 wasn't sure, at the beginning, what to expect. P18 felt that prayer might be used for manipulative purposes, and P24 felt that if the supervisor 'over-spiritualised' the sessions, then that would be difficult. P26 preferred sessions without prayer. P20 had experienced an unhelpful change of supervisor, and the variation in supervisory style took time to adjust to. P22, P37 and P73 felt that a 'good match' between supervisor and supervisee was essential, or else it could cause a hindrance. For P43, one hour of supervision wasn't long enough. P60 had concerns about some of the 'techniques' used, which could open up past trauma that may not be recognised by a less-qualified supervisor. P88 stated that the particular model of reflective supervision that is used in the Methodist Church (i.e. the Greenwich Foot Tunnel) is too restrictive, and being neuro-diverse, the restrictive model did not always suit his/her way of thinking. P24 also commented that, 'I have colleagues who have commented that they find a very structured approach to pastoral supervision as unhelpful and overly formulaic. They have also

commented that they feel these formulaic approaches can lead to lack of confidence in their supervisor's ability and experience'.

Subtheme 2.2: Troublesome supervisory dynamics

P69 felt that his/her supervisor interrupted him/her a lot, rather than just being allowed to talk. P58 also got frustrated with being 'made' to focus on a particular question rather than being allowed to talk. P56 experienced a 'controlling' supervisor who needed to control the space which was unhelpful. P70 felt that it could be a hindrance if the supervisor doesn't share the same, basic theology – but at other times, it could be stimulating. P78 and P47 stated that if the supervisor is also the line-manager, then it could be difficult to be honest. P50 stated that pastoral supervision had seriously interfered with the relationship between Minister, Superintendent and District Chair, where pastoral responsibility appeared to have been delegated, which, in his/her view, was wrong. P2 suggested that there might be a fear around opening up to those who have authority over them, and concern as to how this might impact on future stationing. P125 stated that not all people in oversight roles have the gifts and competence to be supervisors for those that they have oversight of. P78 was adamant that supervisors should not be line-managers. P82 felt that his/her supervisory relationship was a bit too much like friendship to afford insightful input.

Subtheme 2.3: Personal willingness and ability

P55 and P64 felt that their sometimes unwillingness to be totally open, honest and vulnerable holds pastoral supervision back. P63 felt that s/he was held back by his/her 'own disorganised style and neuro-diversity'. P124 stated that s/he needed to be more organised in him/herself. P72 stated that s/he arrives sometimes without planning what to discuss,

and is amazed what emerges. P15 stated that 'having trained as a reflective practitioner in another discipline many years ago, I have invariably worked on the issue and resolved it, often before I arrive at the supervisor's door'. P98 said that s/he 'really valued it, but that is was hard to carve out the time to do it'.

Main theme 3: Ways to improve

Subtheme 3.1: Ways to develop pastoral supervision

P86 suggested that having both individual and group supervision (one the adjunct of the other) might provide a different experience to just one-to one supervision. P3 and P87 suggested that pastoral supervision needs to become part of the culture of the denomination so that the ritual of having to explain it ceases, and that the profile of pastoral supervision is raised. P89, P21 and P26 argued for a greater financial investment from denominations so that the training of more supervisors would be enabled. P101 wished for NHS Trusts to fund pastoral supervision for Chaplains. P4 argued for supervisees to be trained in the use of supervision, so that they understood better what was being offered, and P14, P97 and P109 argued for more publicity, sign-posting (P104) and more passionate advocacy (P20) to be better informed about what supervision is, and is not (P126). P5, P94 and P122 argued for a better buy-into pastoral supervision from denominations. P90 argued for better trained supervisors who have enough practice hours, rather than having too many supervisors with limited experience and little chance to practice. P112 argued for a greater diversity of supervisors, and P115 wished for more choice of supervisors. P118 simply wished for more supervisors. There was criticism from P90 of denominations who have tried to roll pastoral supervision out when there are not enough supervisors to support. P10, P32 and P38 wished for more availability of trained supervisors and a greater use of online

supervision. P12 wished for supervision to be available to all working clergy. P93 argued that documentation (agreed records) from supervision sessions should not be sent to your Superintendent/line-manager.

P17 and P99 stated that an hour wasn't long enough, and P28 and P103 wished they could meet more often. P18 argued for groups of supervisors to meet to learn from each other's experiences. P20 argued for greater development of supervisors' skills so that they gain more confidence to move beyond denominationally-approved methods. P40 felt that it was important not to supervise members of the same staff team. P41 wished for more opportunity to physically walk with their pastoral supervisor, as it drew on place and landscape to aid the reflection. P50 stated that it was important to be able to refuse the 'wrong' supervisor for him/her. P108 asked for pastoral supervision to be 'more like spiritual direction, and less like business'. P109 wondered if 'touching base the week before by email to suggest topics, ideas or situations to discuss so that s/he enters the session with a clear sense of direction', would be a good idea. P116 wished to have supervision when s/he needed it, rather than to fulfil a criterion; and P126 suggested that 'co-consultancy' might be just as good a way of providing the equivalent of pastoral supervision. P120 stated that six weeks between sessions wasn't enough time to engender any significant change.

Subtheme 3.2: Improvement not greatly needed

However, for many of the supervisees, improvement wasn't greatly needed (e.g. P4, P11, P17, P48, P53, P67, P72, P92, P106, P107, P119, P128). Pastoral supervision has been a good, essential (P29), invaluable (P12), and transformational (P26) experience. P4 and P92 described pastoral supervision as 'life-giving'; P5 stated that it had 'revolutionised my ministry, wellbeing and resilience'; P7 said that it was 'the best thing that the Methodist

Church has offered to its ministers'; P125 described his/her supervisor as 'a valuable resource for me and my ministry'; P14 stated that pastoral supervision was 'the first chance I have had in 30 years of ministry to talk about my work, faith and family life with someone who listens without judgement and provides that safe space to help me reflect honestly. I was close to resigning and think that without my pastoral supervisor, I would not have continued in ministry. I can now reflect honestly on how ministry affects me and feel I am growing spiritually'; P127 stated that pastoral supervision made him/her a 'better and safer minister'; P95 stated that pastoral supervision has 'made a tremendous difference to me in my ministry, and as an individual. It has allowed me to process so much over the last number of years and, without it, I would not have been able to function'; P96 said that 'it has been consistently excellent'; and P21 said that 'without pastoral supervision, I am fairly sure that I would have burnt out'.

Discussion

Based on 173 respondents, it is not clear how representative they are of the wider clergy supervisee experience in the UK. This may be due to a lack of distribution of the survey link by some organisations and supervisors. It may also indicate a culture that is resistant to research in pastoral/reflective supervision, or/and a busyness in clergies' lives that prevents the prioritisation of participation in research. Participants may have interpreted the language of some of the statements in different ways. There may have been misunderstanding about what the statements mean, or they may not have sufficiently fitted the participants' context. Language is always a limitation of any survey. There isn't the opportunity to have the statement reworded to be more applicable, or relatable to, in individuals' specific contexts. There were a lot of 'don't knows' to many of the statements in

the data, which could be interpreted as not understanding what the statement is trying to illuminate. The quantitative research design is also limited as many of the statements can be agreed, or disagreed, with 'sometimes', but not all the time. Instead, participants have had to take a view about whether the statements encompass the majority of their experiencing, or not, and agree or disagree based on that perception.

However, this research gives the fullest picture, so far, of pastoral supervision among clergy supervisees, across denominations, in the UK. As in other research (e.g. Gubi & Mwenisongole, 2022; Gubi & Bubbers, 2023), the data in Table 1 and 2 suggest that pastoral supervision is hugely beneficial to most respondents, and that pastoral supervision enables clergy to self-perceive feelings of: support; lessening isolation; increased insight into personal process; affirmation of their ministry; and to have a better sense of wellbeing. Indeed, some describe it as 'life-giving' (P4, P92) and 'transformative' (P26), and P5 stated that it had 'revolutionised my ministry, wellbeing and resilience'.

The data also suggest that pastoral supervision does not largely enable clergy to 'trust others more' (33%), nor to 'grow theologically' (49%), nor to 'gain greater respect for difference' (54%). Although the supervisory relationship can enable trust to grow between the individuals in the relationship (Mullally, 2023), the data suggest that it is problematic to assume that this building of trust within the supervisory relationship will enable trust in others to grow beyond the supervisory relationship. This may reflect the untrustworthiness of political and competitive cultures in some Christian denominations, or reflect the public persona of being a clergyperson within societal norms in which it is difficult, and risky (even unwise), to be vulnerable. The lack of theological growth may indicate that theological reflection may be less prevalent in pastoral supervision than is presumed, or indicate a lack of competence in supervisors in enabling theological growth (Gubi, 2023). The development

of 'greater respect for difference' may be more difficult in one-to-one pastoral supervision where there is a natural limitation to the range of views expressed. Research into Reflective Practice Groups (RPGs) (which is a form of group pastoral supervision in community) (e.g. Gubi, 2016; 2017; 2020; Gubi & Korris, 2015; Gubi et al., 2022) shows that RPGs do enable growth/development in these areas, as participants learn from each other's views, differences, theologies and experiences. Indeed, one participant suggested that having opportunity to access both individual and group supervision, as an adjunct to the other, would be beneficial (P86).

The qualitative data suggest that 'the right match' of supervisor/supervisee is important, and that 'wisdom' in the supervisor is appreciated and facilitative. Yet, 'match' and 'wisdom' are difficult attributes to determine and train. Some respondents (e.g. P2, P49) felt that the facilitator should be from outside of the denomination. Yet, much training in pastoral/reflective supervision is done internally within denominations (e.g. Methodist Church, 2017; Gubi & Bubbers, 2023) to enable the financial viability of the provision. It has been well known for some time that pastoral/reflective supervision is inhibited and less-effective when conducted by line-managers (Wheeler & King, 2001). This is also evident in the data in Subthemes 2.2 and 3.1. Some respondents questioned the mandatory nature of pastoral/reflective supervision (P18, P66, P83, P95), and preferred to be able to access it on a consultancy basis when needed.

The data indicate that pastoral supervision is not limited by the use of online platforms (80%), nor by the ability to commit time to attending (95%), except for a few who prefer face-to-face supervision (P12, P66, P76, P84) and find it hard to prioritise the time (2%). Indeed, online supervision has placed less demand on time as it eliminates the need for travel and arguably enables access to, and choice from, a wider pool of supervisors than

those available locally (P74), which can ensure a better 'match' of supervisee/supervisor if a choice of supervisor is allowed.

The data highlight some concerns with the level of training of some supervisors, and the use of restrictive and formulaic models of pastoral/reflective supervision (P24), particularly when working with neuro-diverse supervisees (P88). There was also concern expressed about how some of these methods might unwittingly facilitate supervisees into exploring areas of past trauma, which were beyond the competence of some supervisors to manage appropriately (P60), and thus be potentially harmful. Indeed, some respondents preferred supervisors with a counselling or psychotherapy background who were able to hear and process at a deeper level, and whose training and insight engendered greater confidence in the supervisor's ability (P24).

Some supervisees recognised that they were held back by unhelpful aspects of the supervisory dynamic, e.g. controlling behaviour (not being allowed to talk) (P56, P58), not sharing the same theology (P70), and being supervised by their line-manager (P47, P50, P78). However, some recognised that it was sometimes an unwillingness within the themselves to be organised, open, honest and vulnerable, which hindered the process (see Subtheme 2.3).

Conclusion

This research has attracted the largest sample size in the UK to-date, and does demonstrate the helpfulness of pastoral/reflective supervision to many clergy. The data suggest that it is something that denominations should embrace, celebrate, and continue to make more available, and better, in the exercise of their duty of care and support of their clergy. There are some recommendations that come from the data. These are: a) that there needs to be a

greater financial commitment to, and advocacy for, pastoral/reflective supervision from all denominations; b) that there should be greater psychological training and/or developed awareness into psychological process and trauma included in the initial training and development of pastoral/reflective supervisors; and/or pastoral/reflective supervisors should have a psychological/counselling background before training as a pastoral/reflective supervisor. Theological training, and training for ordination, is usually not sufficient enough of a training for many supervisors to ensure competence in dealing with complex issues that may arise in pastoral/reflective supervision; c) that it shouldn't be assumed that 'ministers in oversight' (or line-managers) make good pastoral/reflective supervisors. Indeed, the difficult dynamics and messy boundaries/roles that this creates are often unhelpful. The frequency and mandatory nature of denominational expectation suit some, but not others. Some want more, and some want less supervision to be provided. That will, no doubt, be a continued debate and be governed by the funding abilities of each denomination.

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