A Qualitative Study on the Need of Peer Group Supervision for Psychologists Working in the University

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The European Conference on Psychology & the Behavioral Sciences 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

When psychologists facing crisis cases, they will look for individual supervisions. Sometimes, the institutions also provide group supervisions. However, the quality and the quantity of these supervisions are far more below their practical needs and cause some following problems: Stagnation of self-development, Insufficient professional growth, Unable to handle crisis cases, and Financial problems. In order to understand the need of peer group supervision for psychologists working in the university in Taiwan. The researcher using semi-structured technique to interview six counseling and clinical psychologists working in university counseling centers. This research is divided into three dimensions: Case intervention, Professional development, and Selfgrowth. The major findings are as follows: Firstly, the diversity of the professional backgrounds broaden the thinking point of views, and the years of experiences did help the younger colleagues to handle administrative communication. However, the personal traits might be the barrier that need to take care of. Secondly, some psychologists want to learn some latest theories and techniques though these peer study groups, but the others just want to do some case studies to make sure that they didn't do anything wrong in the counseling room. Thirdly, although some psychologists are unwilling to share personal issues in these groups, all of them are willing to make time for the groups, no matter how busy they are. Finally, the researcher also provides some useful suggestions about how to take care of the psychological need of these psychologists for the better efficiency in clinical practices in the end.

Keywords: peer group supervision, case intervention, professional development, self-growth

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Introduction

In a systematic psychologists training program, it is very important and indispensable to have a professional supervision system. When most of the psychologists looking for supervisor, the first thing that comes to their mind is individual supervision. However, professional supervision does not limit in professional supervision. Group supervision and live supervision are widely used in some countries. Besides, there are some benefit to having supervisions, on one hand, psychologists being supervised can not only help them provide most appropriate services to their clients but also help psychologists themselves to have personal and professional growth (Lin, 2008). Moreover, when crisis cases happened in the university, they have to take high pressure and multiple responsibility to deal with the cases. Under this situation, they not only have to take care of the clients' emotions and having crisis evaluation, but also have to cooperate with the relevant staffs and correspond with clients' parents in need. If they can handle these cases well, it is the time that their professional knowledge can be seen (Chen, Wang, & Liao, 2012). In short, group supervision not only provide administrative and educational function that give knowledge and experience to improve working ability but also provide supportive function (Wang, Li, Xie, & Peng, 2003).

When psychologists facing crisis cases, they will look for individual supervisions, sometimes, the institutions will also provide group supervision sessions for them. However, the quality and quantity of these supervision sessions are far more below their practical needs and cause some following problems. (1) Stagnation of selfdevelopment: Most of the psychologists are very concerned about their own growth and believe that self-growth requires a lifetime learning. However, when entering working environment, it is often too busy to take care of themselves. (2) Insufficient professional growth: The Ministry of Education subsidizes the universities to handle many professional courses, such as seminars, workshops and so on. However, most of these opportunities are short-term on-the-job training, resulting in insufficient professional growth. If psychologists can participate in the peer group supervision regularly, it will be able to improve the current situation. (3) Unable to handle crisis cases: Many state universities are willing to provide funding for counseling centers to seek external supervisors when facing crisis cases. However, the frequency is still far below the actual needs and most of these supervision is focus on crisis cases but not individual growth. As for some private universities, owing to the shortage of funds, it's more unlikely to provide external supervisors, which results in poor professional service quality. (4) Financial problems: Although there are many organizations that hold various seminars and workshops, the cost is still too high for novice psychologists just graduated from the school. Even if they are interested in these seminars and workshops, they are often deterred in the end.

Literature Review

Differences between peer group supervision and group supervision

Peer group supervision is a kind of group supervision and it has two, three and group modes, but group supervision mostly refers to a combination of three or more (Shyu and Huang, 2007). Besides, group supervision is a relationship that is intensively focused on interpersonal interaction (Loganbill, Hardy, & Delwoeth, 1982). The main

difference between the two is that peer group supervision means that there are no external professional supervisors in the process of group supervision, but the leaders are rotated by their peers. Therefore, there is no fixed supervisor role, and there is no hierarchy in the group. When discussing the need for supervision, there are two questions that psychologists may have to face: (1) how to learn from the supervision to keep up with the trend of the times; (2) how to learn from the supervision to improve their own counseling skills (Runkel & Hackney, 1982). A good professional supervisor should include both questions above, because continuous learning and challenge are the core of the professional training in counseling and psychotherapy (Grant & Schofield, 2007).

In general, peer group supervision confirms the learning topics for the first time, and the supervisor's job is to establish a supportive growth environment and help the members to create open and honest environment. A study by Baggerly and Osborn (2006) found that peer group supervision can improve the job satisfaction of psychologists, but few institutions use a structured approach to support each other and use peer group supervision. Xie, Weng, and Zhang (2007) found that the research of individual counseling and supervision was more than the research of group counseling, and the researchers collected relevant literature and found that the research of group counseling was more than that of peer group. Huang, Lin, and Zhang (2010) believe that the need for supervision is usually in the course internship. When a student leaves school, even if he is still a novice psychologist, he still rarely seeks supervision at his own expense. Instead, he will seek the assistance of the agency's supervisor. However, the functions and efficiencies are unlikely to be compared with formal professional supervision. Under the consideration of economy, time and costs, peer group supervision becomes a feasible approach (Ray & Altekruse, 2000).

The leader of the supervisory group is the observer or moderator of the group process, but the leader with the teacher status is easily regarded as a knowledge expert. Therefore, one of the best methods of counselor practice training is to put it in group supervision. Discussions with peer groups can often stimulate members to think more about the differences in their work ideas and get immediate help. Such peer group supervision can be carried out to achieve immediate support (Bailey, Bell, Kalle & Pawar, 2014).

Peer group supervision process

Peer group supervision is a process in which psychologists use mutual relationships and expertise to help solve problems that affect individual learning and work. Mastroleo, Turrisi, Carney, Ray, and Larimer (2010) argue that the use of non-standardized peer group supervision or training, as well as the use of less experienced peers as providers of supervisory learning resources, may have unexpected effects on each other's trust relationships and the effectiveness of interventions. Besides, Lattanzi, Campbell, Dole, and Palombaro (2011) also argue that peer learning requires several essential elements: trust between observers and observers, clear assessment projects, and mutual observation and feedback to promote learning experiences. Moreover, Zhang (2015) mentioned that we should be aware that not letting peer group supervision become an emotional support group and a complaint-type group, and reduce the effectiveness of peer group supervision. Although professional supervision has many benefits for psychologists, but studies found that

psychologists working in the universities rarely use peer supervision or group supervision to help professional growth (Wang, Shyu, & Lian, 2006).

Novice and senior psychologists have different needs when seeking peer supervision. Novice psychologist refers to the chartered psychologists who are actually engaged in counseling work for less than three years. For novice psychologists, their demand for supervision is significantly higher than that of senior psychologists (Shvu, 2005). However, their economic status is mostly lower than that of senior psychologists. Under this circumstance, if the colleagues can provide similar opportunities for supervision, such as crisis case intervention, the opportunities for professional growth and the space for self-growth, most of the novice psychologists are willing to participate in the peer group supervision. Senior psychologist refers to the chartered psychologists who have actually engaged in counseling work for more than 3 years. For this group of senior psychologists, the frequency they seek for individual supervision is much lower than that of novice psychologists (Shyu, 2005). However, this does not mean that they do not need any support, assistance or advice. If there is an opportunity for peer group supervision, it can provide learning, growth and communication from different experiences and professional growth. Researcher believe that these senior psychologists are willing to provide their experience in the group to discuss with their colleagues and learn from each other. Especially when crisis case happened, although individual supervision after the crisis intervention can provide effective assistance for the psychologists, immediate peer supervision provide more effective crisis intervention plans and emotional support in time (Mai & Cai, 2004).

Research method

Design & Participants

The researcher using semi-structured technique to interview six counseling and clinical psychologists working in university counseling centers. The background of selected research participants are shown in Table 1.

 Table 1

 Background of selected research participants

Participants	Gender	Education	Work Place	Years of Experiences	CERTIFICATE
A	Female	M. in Counseling Psy.	National U.	5	Counseling Psy.
В	Female	M. in Apply Psy.	Private U.	10	Counseling Psy.
С	Male	M. in Counseling and Clinical Psy.	Private U.	6	Counseling Psy.
D	Female	M. in Behavior Psy.	National U.	14	Clinical Psy.
Е	Female	M. in Counseling Psy.	National U.	8	Counseling Psy.
F	Female	M. in Counseling and Rehabilitation psy.	Private U.	5	Counseling Psy.

Research tool

In qualitative research, the researcher himself is the tool, therefore, the researcher's skill and ability will affect the validity of the research (Wu & Li, 1995). In this study, the researcher uses the open-question techniques to interview six participants with the following question. (1) If the institution set up a system of peer group supervision, what's the merit, deficits, and limitations of Case Intervention, Professional Growth, and Self-Development? (2) What are the forms and contents of the peer supervision group in your university? (3) Will you look for individual supervision on your own expense? (4) Have you ever received supervision training? How does it help you? (5) What kinds of ability do the psychologists need to work effectively?

Results and Discussions

The research is divided into following three dimensions, shown as table 2.

Table 2Research dimensions and discussed topics

	CASE INTERVENTION	PROFESIONAL DEVELOPMENT	SELF-GROWTH
1.	Professional background	Research ability	Self-identification
2.	Counseling intervention	Professional growth ability	Peer support
3.	Experience differences	Counseling supervision ability	Self-management
4.	Personality traits		

Case Intervention

When having peer group supervision, psychologists not only sharing their counseling intervention experiences, but also talk about cultural differences, administrative considerations, clients' family relationships, crisis invention and so on. In this research, it is divided into the following four topics: Professional background, Counseling intervention, Experience differences, and Personality traits

1. Professional background

It means that psychologists should have considerable differences in theoretical schools, philosophical views, and human nature based on their individual professional training background. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, client center, and even the postmodern school, the feminist point of view, and the context of multiculturalism, we can provide a theoretical perspective on the diversity of group members.

(1) Different perspectives has its own advantages and disadvantages The advantage is that you can hear different opinions, peers' background orientation, professional context or philosophical views. When you present a case for discussion, and then you can help with the peers, you can get a multi-faceted view. Integrity and comprehensiveness. However, owing that everyone has his viewpoints, it is possible to bring out some restrictions because of this advantage.

When everyone reads things in different angle, sometimes I might be affected and start to doubt myself that am I doing the right thing (A02-02)?

I think I can hear more different voices (B26-01).

(2) Provide different views from the perspective of psychopathology When psychologists discuss crisis cases, cases often have symptoms of mental illness. Compared with counseling psychologists, clinical psychologists or psychiatrists will provide assessments and recommendations from the perspective of psychopathology.

I was working in the psychiatric department, after that, I still had an experience working in the social welfare agency and hospital, so I would be able to cut-in from the perspective of psychopathology (E09-01).

2. Counseling intervention

Psychologists provide reference guidelines for group members to learn based on their experience in dealing with similar cases, intervention skills, the consequences, the issues needing attention, and the possible impacts.

(1) Provide advice on short-term or long-term crisis cases

When a campus crisis occurs, it is very important to be able to cut in from different aspects and conduct a holistic assessment. If a peer group supervision system can be established, the psychologists will have a better understanding of each other's case profiles. In times of crisis that require urgent treatment, there will be more effective responses.

As special cases focus on the point of crisis, we will not look at the complete picture of the case. Everyone will still discuss it but not see it in depth (D10-01).

(2) Provide advice on administrative considerations

When handling crisis case in the university, it takes a lot of communicate with different administrative department. Psychologist can discuss what difficulties he may have in dealing with the case or how to deal with it.

Novice psychologists try very hard to maintain the counseling relationship, but when working for a long time, I personally think that we need to find out the balance point between the administration, school-reputation, family, and the clients (E04-01).

3. Experience differences

Psychologists provide many types of cases according to their working years. The matters that need to be paid attention to during the intervention, and the possible impacts. It usually cover with systematic suggestions.

(1) Rich years of experience can provide better suggestions

If the peer group supervision can be organized effectively, it can help each other in the integration and application of theory and practice. However, if the relationship is not good enough, it may not work well due to anxiety and disapproval. In addition, the same recommendations have different effects on senior psychologists and novice psychologists.

It depends on the psychologist's experience, I think it is not bad for an experienced psychologist to share his own structure and experiences. (D25-01).

(2) Different years of experience has different stages of need

Novice psychologists and senior psychologists have different needs for peer group supervision. The assistance that a novice psychologist needs may be operational skills. However, the assistance that senior psychologists need may be more inclined to hear different perspectives.

When working for a long time, it will be more like working with intuition. There will be so-called myths and fixations. When listening to different opinions, you can learn some ideas or find something you have forgotten before. Because there is no such thing within "intuition" (E01-03).

4. Personality traits

Psychologists provide different supporting dimensions in the case intervention according to their personal traits.

(1) Presenting needs of peer supervision and doubting their own counseling abilities Everyone needs to be recognized in the workplace or prove that they are capable to doing their job well. Express his need for help doesn't means that he has insufficient counseling ability.

I don't have confidence in some parts of myself and I worry about that somebody may find it. So when someone giving me advices, it makes me feel that I am really not good enough (A32-01).

(2) Relax discuss cases with colleagues without fear of criticism Peer group supervision requires an atmosphere of trust and an uncritical attitude to be able to help each other grow in the process. In the interview, psychologists also revealed their uncomfortable feelings and internal concerns.

It's an uncomfortable feeling if I have done something bad. Then, I double check with other people, just to make sure that I really done something wrong. The mood is very bad (C10-01).

Professional Growth

It means that we can get further professional learning from each other. In this research, it is divided into the following three topics: Research ability, Professional growth ability, and Counseling supervision ability.

1. Research ability

Psychologists exchange and interact with each other in the field of study according to their differences in research fields, in addition to deepening their professional competence, and accumulating their ability to study.

(1) Psychological assessment and research methods

The researcher found that psychologists seemed to be less interested in this part and worried about their lack of ability.

I think I am still adept at some aspects at this stage, for me, I need to be very skillful to know how to do assessment and analysis (A09-01).

(2) Read the counseling literature and submit to a seminar or journal Psychologists seem to have less willingness to submit papers to the journals via peer group supervision, but they are willing to share the experience of study to enhance professional knowledge.

If you have a colleague in common, it may make you feel that you can always have some connection with him and exchange knowledge (B19-03).

2. Professional growth ability

Psychologists learn from each other's theoretical expertise based on their theoretical expertise to expand their multi-faceted and theoretical application skills.

(1) Live role-play and practical exercises

When entering the workplace, it is often impossible to report cases in this way. On one hand, psychologists feel that they will spend more efforts, on the other hand, it will also cause greater pressure on the psychologists. However, some psychologists said that it may be possible for psychologists to choose practical exercises in order to avoid the troubles caused by written reports.

I think it is possible, but its burden is also quite large. It feels like you have to report when you are in class doing a 50-minute practice. If you seriously invest in peer group supervision, there will be more effort to supervise the practice (F46-01).

(2) Case study of recording video

Regarding whether psychologists are willing or not, the interviewed psychologists raised four major concerns: First, the cases usually disagreed, especially in crisis cases requiring case studies. Second, the psychologist disagrees because it creates higher anxiety. Third, the purpose of audio and video recording seems to be for the psychologist's study, which will affect the trust of the case. Fourth, although some cases agree to recording, in order to have good performance, the counseling process is often made very unreal.

The difficulty in recording video lies in the cases, because they are usually unwilling. Moreover, cases that need to be discussed are often hard to deal with (C37-01).

3. Counseling supervision ability

Refers to whether psychologists have received relevant training in counseling supervision, or applied the theory and skills of counseling supervision to assist the interns.

(1) Insufficient supervision knowledge and affect self-confidence Although peer group supervision is based on an equality of mutual trust and mutual learning, rather than emphasizing the entire discussion led by an external professional supervisor. However, some psychologists still feel that they have not received professional supervision training and feel that they have insufficient ability.

If I were the supervisor today, I will seriously prepare the report, so the process gives me a chance to jump out and see how I am doing to that process (C02-05).

(2) Seniors are more likely to be supervisors and affect the willingness to share Some senior psychologists interviewed said that they have invisible pressures and responsibilities and expected to make effective suggestions.

I feel that sometimes I was shaped to lead my colleagues (B94-01). We have colleague working for fourteen years, I think we can learn different things and aspects from seniority (E11-01).

Self-Growth

In this part, it is returning to the psychologist himself, focusing on the inner self-sublimation level, such as paying attention to spiritual growth and elevating to another inner level. In this research, it is divided into the following three topics: Self-identification, Peer support, and Self-management.

1. Self-identification

Even in difficult cases, resisting cases, or failed cases, psychologists still believe that they are capable, and they will not be easily knocked down or change their faith to help others.

(1) Learn from differences and enhance self-awareness

The purpose of peer group supervision is not just how to give the best assistance to the case. Sometimes, the focus is on the psychologist himself, so that the peers can see each other's efforts.

Behind the recognition, I actually did my best, not because I didn't try hard to do it but I wanted to be seen (A21-01).

(2) Open discussion of personal issues without worrying about being measured Some of the psychologists interviewed said that they can return to self and gain growth from such a process. However, some psychologists have expressed that they are inevitably competing with their peers, they are worried about being evaluated, they hope to have a good reputation, and they are not willing to open up their own internal issues.

I may also wish to have a good reputation. When I having my own private clinic someday, people will know that I am a reliable psychologist (C13-02).

2. Peer support

This part refers not only the support ability of the peers in the case, but also the ability of the counselors to open themselves in the peer group supervision, discuss the individual issues, and give each other support.

(1) Colleagues are not friends and there will still be issues of trust and safety Peer supervision sometimes involves a lot of interpersonal and workplace politics. If they did not get along well, peer group supervision will be difficult.

It is difficult for me because colleagues are not necessarily friends (C11-02).

(2) Psychologists feel lonely while facing crisis cases, and hope to be seen and supported

It is better for the unit to have peer supervision, because the psychologists can know which cases are more serious and can support each other in the case of crisis.

When facing crisis, I will seek the assistance of my peers. Compared to other schools that only have one psychologist, it's really lonely (A96-01).

3. Self-management

Psychologists are still willing to take the initiative to conduct peer group supervision on a regular basis when they are busy, usually covering the time allocation, the way they are conducted, and the content of the discussion.

(1) Rotate as moderators and take turns in case reports

Even if it is a peer group supervision, it is still necessary to arrange the host in turn. However, some of the psychologists interviewed said that they have evolved into a state that they do not need to have a specific moderator and peer group supervision can proceed smoothly.

We hold the meeting once a week. This is a result of a long-term evolution. Therefore, it is OK for us to have no leader in the group. It has become an organizational culture (D44-01).

(2) Perform in a relaxed environment outside school to create a relaxing atmosphere In order to create an atmosphere that is easy to discuss, some psychologists feel that peer group supervision can be carried out on off-campus occasions. However, some psychologists said that if the peer group supervision meeting is outside the school or in the evening, it may not be easy to handle.

The place can be in the cafeteria, but I know this is impossible because of the need for privacy, but I am talking about the atmosphere (C30-03).

Conclusion

Based on the research results, the research has six main findings as follows: Firstly, psychologists with different professional backgrounds can bring a variety of reflections, but they also influence the depth of case discussions because of the differences. Among psychologists interviewed in this study, some are psychoanalytic orientations, some are client center orientations, and some are postmodern orientations, most of them indicate that they can be rewarded from other psychologists during the peer group supervision process.

Secondly, when a psychologist conducts a case-study report, most of the responders are senior psychologists. In addition to the intervention of theoretical technology, they also provide a lot of administrative experience. However, the purpose of peer group supervision is not just to regard seniors as free external professional supervision, but take care of everyone's needs. The more experienced psychologists interviewed in this study indicated that because of the long-term conceptualization of their own theoretical background, their need for peer group supervision requires different perspectives. On the other hand, for a novice psychologist with the same background is required to provide a more detailed approach or improvement suggestion for the theoretical techniques.

Thirdly, although peer group supervision focuses on professional interaction on trust, equality and openness, it is still unspeakable to say that everyone has affirmative needs and critical concerns. Case-reporters worry that they are not doing well enough and affect self-confidence; novice psychologists worry that if they do not adopt the advice of seniors, they might be regard as not respect the senior colleagues. Besides, psychologists who give feedback are worried that they cannot give specific and effective suggestions. Seniors worry that they are given an invisible case-supervising role, and it seems that they are responsible for the group. All of these will affect whether the peer group supervision can be handled smoothly or not.

Fourthly, psychologists are willing to elevate their professional knowledge via study group. However, it is not appropriate to conduct literature review or journal submission through this system. In this study, the researchers attempted to understand whether psychologists working in the universities, are willing to conduct counseling researches and submit to professional journals through their knowledge. However, the psychologists interviewed said that on the one hand, they are busy on psychological prevention and the planning of the counseling research is not taken into consideration. On the other hand, most of the time in the group is used to discuss cases. However, they do not exclude the exchange of new theoretical knowledge or reading clubs.

Fifthly, it takes time to establish mutual trust to decide the way of presenting cases, such as case reports, practice exercises, or recorded video discussions. All the interviewed psychologists agree that audio and video case report is the most effective way of case discussion. However, when asked if they would like to present the case in this way, the psychologists said that there are many difficulties, such as the crisis case does not agree, the videotaping will affect the actual counseling session, the psychologists will be questioned their professional ability...etc. Besides, when asked if they are willing to conduct practical exercise, the pressure is not on the psychologist who present the case, but on the one who act as a psychologist. Moreover, if

presented in written report, some psychologists have indicated that there are too many written reports, case records, meeting materials, and event plans to do on weekdays. How to achieve consensus under the minimum pressure, the researcher believes that "trust" is the best antidote.

Finally, researcher wants to explore whether peer group supervision is likely to discuss personal issues or not. Most of the psychologists interviewed said that although there will be too many concerns about self-disclosure, there will still be thoughts in the heart that they want to try. The researcher boldly assumes that the group motivation of the peer group supervision is similar to the group motivation of the general group that require four stages, such as initial stage, transition stage, working stage, and final stage. Although researcher understand that interpersonal relationships in workplace are complex and difficult to solve, researcher still convinced that as long as we are willing to hold an open heart, accepting our own deficiencies, respecting others' openness, and sharing without giving criticism, there can be no doubted that peer group supervision will bring more professional learning and self-development to ourselves.

Suggestions

The researcher has two suggestions for the head of school institutions. Firstly, peer group supervision cannot replace individual or group supervision of external supervisors. The purpose of peer group supervision is not to replace outside supervisor and save the administrative expenses of the unit. On the contrary, we should make the best use of the background differences between peers to enhance each other's professional knowledge. The head of the school institution should not cut off the costs of the external supervisors because the psychologists propose peer group supervision program. Secondly, the university should allow psychologists to plan more relaxed peer group supervisory environment, such as half a day every two weeks. Psychologists working in the universities are not only busy with individual counseling, but also busy with crisis case prevention, suicide attempt prevention and so on. It also takes a lot of time and energy to plan these mental health promotion activities. Moreover, they still need to handle some psychological lecturer, such as emotional education, interpersonal relationships, career planning, time management, stress adjustment, etc. All these things require brainstorming between psychologists to create a variety of activities. Therefore, if the psychologists can meet in a comfortable and open corner of the university or communicate in a comfortable cafe outside the school. It should be able to stimulate more creative mental health activities, which not only enhance the participation of students, but also effectively provide a comfortable situation for colleagues.

The researcher also has two advices to unit psychologists. Firstly, peer group members are equal in status and senior psychologists do not have to take on supervisory positions. Owing that many administrator of student counseling centers are full-time professors in other fields, they often rely too much on senior colleagues in the unit to take charge of administrative duties, and even require them to supervise new psychologists. If the senior staff is authorized this job, they should immediately clarify to the supervisory role and responsibilities, and the possible negative impact on peer group supervision. Secondly, the purpose of group supervision is to create an open and interactive learning environment. Novice psychologists can try to give

senior peers generous feedback and learn from feedback. Some novice psychologists said that they are still young and they did not take supervisory training courses. Besides, they are still in the stage of exploring the society and everything is still learning. Most of them think that they are not qualified enough. However, the purpose of peer group supervision is to create an open and trustful situation where members are trying to open themselves. It seems that it is a little bit difficult at the beginning, but the researcher still believes that they will gradually realize the effect of growth after gradually establish the atmosphere of group trust.

Limitations

This study uses a semi-structured in-depth interview method of qualitative study, which collects a small but in-depth information, besides, the participants in the study were selected in Taiwan, and it cannot represent the views of all the population. Hence, the results should not infer to all situations. In the future, the research subjects can be increased and in-depth comparisons of psychologists' needs in different universities and countries. The purpose of this study is to understand the needs of peer group supervision in the universities. However, there are still many issues worth discussing in the current situation. Future researchers can conduct more on different issues.

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