

Educational Psychology in the Virtual World: A Small Study on Practice Adaptations During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Potential Benefits for Future Services

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Educational psychologists (EPs) have made significant adaptations to their practice during the COVID-19 pandemic due to educational and practice restrictions in England. These adaptations, whilst facing many challenges, have also presented opportunities for growth within the profession. The current study gained a small group of EPs' views of their experiences of working remotely through the completion of an online questionnaire. Subsequent data analysis found that EPs increased their confidence working remotely and using technology during the pandemic. The main changes reported by the participating EPs related to how they accessed clients and adapted their practice to suit remote working. Personal and professional successes were identified, and many EPs indicated it would be useful to continue some elements of remote working following the pandemic. An important area for future exploration would be to further investigate the benefits of remote working and gain the views of other stakeholders regarding their experiences of remote EP practice.

Introduction and Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting the world since early 2020 and, more than eighteen months later, continues to have ongoing consequences for everyday life and professional practice in England and beyond. The first UK national lockdown took place in March 2020. Governments across the globe imposed strict national lockdowns, and, in England, people were required to stay at home on several occasions, and many employees were asked to work remotely where possible. Whilst some critical workers (N. B., commonly known in England as key workers) were unable to fulfil their duties remotely (Department for Education, 2020), EPs, like many other professionals, faced a sudden need to shift from in-person delivery to primarily remote working.

Research exploring the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychology profession is very limited. Additionally, there is no research, to the best of the authors' knowledge, that focuses primarily on EPs' perspectives of remote working during the pandemic. Because of this, the authors explored the literature available, by focusing on the experiences of working remotely identified by any psychologists, regardless of their specialism, and in any part of the world. Literature searches were conducted using Google Scholar and the PsycINFO database. Search terms included "psychologists' experiences", "COVID-19 OR Coronavirus", "remote working", "impact of pandemic", and "Educational Psychologists". The initial search produced a list of nineteen studies. Studies that did not primarily focus on psychologists' experiences of working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic

were excluded, which reduced the number of available studies to fourteen.

Consequent analysis of the literature and its findings identified four main themes, which will be explored below:

- The importance of EP work during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Challenges for psychologists working remotely.
- How psychologists have adapted their practice in order to successfully work remotely.
- Positive experiences of remote working which could inform future practice.

The Importance of EP Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Research indicates that psychologists have played an important role during the COVID-19 pandemic. A US study suggests psychologists are well placed to use psychology to understand the issues that may arise from the pandemic and help in the mitigation of the negative effects that may occur (Kazak, 2020). Additionally, specific ways in which psychology can offer a valuable contribution during a pandemic were identified by Clay (2020) and Dores et al. (2020). For instance, psychologists in the UK disseminated information about coping strategies and supported access to psychological support by signposting to relevant mental health services (Clay, 2020). Psychologists were also thought to be in a

unique position via undertaking clinical work and providing support to service users and vulnerable groups (Dores et al., 2020). Additionally, psychologists engaged in crisis response work and provided support, training, teaching and education across different settings.

Psychologists continued to undertake research to support clients during the pandemic (Clay, 2020) and advocated for children and young people (CYP). The British Psychological Society (BPS) indicates that some psychologists prioritised high-risk populations and worked in partnership with the NHS to build a multidisciplinary rehabilitation package. This contained resources to support people's psychological health as well as providing support to front-line healthcare workers. Furthermore, psychologists have worked proactively to create support hubs to aid the adjustment to working remotely for colleagues and others (Clay, 2020).

Psychologists Have Adapted Their Practice to Successfully Work Remotely

To continue to provide support during the pandemic, psychologists in the UK have made adaptations to their work, and numerous BPS guidelines were produced to this effect (British Psychological Society, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). However, it was also a renewed acknowledgement that any work outside of usual practice needed to remain within the remit of their knowledge and skill set, signposting to other professionals as necessary (British Psychological Society, 2020a). This has resulted in the EP role being yet again acknowledged to encompass areas of consultation, assessment, intervention, training and supervision, with EPs reported to be working more holistically, providing greater support to vulnerable CYP and their families (Song et al., 2020). Furthermore, EPs were reported as taking duties outside of their usual work, incorporating specific social care and safeguarding duties within their roles.

Moreover, psychologists and other allied health services have continued to support their clients throughout the pandemic. They have, for example, made a conscious effort to ensure clients' basic psychological needs are met (Carter, 2020) and have contributed to exposing and addressing inequalities which may have been exacerbated by the pandemic, such as digital, financial or mental poverty. In order to maintain effective delivery of statutory and commissioned work, psychologists have been required to adapt their practice, working more creatively and flexibly. Flexible working did, however, result in psychologists working outside of their usual hours. Time constraints and deadlines may have been imposed on psychologists (British Psychological Society, 2020c), prompting them to schedule meetings outside of working hours to ensure legal deadlines were met.

Lastly, psychologists have increased the use of online tools and platforms, becoming increasingly involved with virtual interviews, multi-disciplinary meetings and consulta-

tions. They have also conducted an increased number of remote sessions including assessment work with their clients, due to social distancing rules (Dores et al., 2020; Pierce et al., 2021).

Challenges for Psychologists Working Remotely

The increase in remote working over the last eighteen months has ultimately led to psychologists facing a variety of challenges. Firstly, the inevitable reliance on technology has increased the associated risk for technological difficulties whilst undertaking their work, such as internet connection issues and verbal communication (via microphone) problems. The potential anxiety caused by having to manage technological issues negatively affected the wellbeing of psychologists, with Aafjes-van Doorn et al. (2020) identifying that therapists had technical and logistical concerns regarding the use of online video therapy, for instance. Psychologists also had difficulties creating suitable working environments, such as ensuring they and their clients had a private space where confidential information could be shared safely. This added a layer of pressure and was also identified as increasing the stress levels of psychologists (British Psychological Society, 2020c).

Additionally, the nature of working remotely (i.e., working from home) in this instance may have blurred the boundaries between home time and work mindset. As previously identified, some psychologists have had to work evenings and weekends to manage increased work demands around other responsibilities, which may have detrimentally affected their work-life balance (British Psychological Society, 2020c).

Furthermore, the loss of informal and face-to-face contact with colleagues has resulted in some psychologists feeling isolated. Working in isolation may have lowered psychologists' confidence levels and motivation (British Psychological Society, 2020c). Psychologists also feared losing "connection" (both physically and emotionally) with clients as virtual delivery made it more difficult for empathy and emotions to be communicated (Aafjes-van Doorn et al., 2020; Carter, 2020; Dores et al., 2020).

Psychologists have been cited as having difficulties accessing appropriate resources (Marasca et al., 2020). In addition to this, there have been concerns raised by some psychologists regarding the standardisation of some assessment tools that psychologists would ordinarily use in their practice. Partly due to psychologists having limited training delivering online assessment tools and partly due to the initial limited publisher's information regarding the appropriateness of using tools remotely, concerns have been raised regarding the validity and reliability of virtual assessments (Marasca et al., 2020). Furthermore, digital poverty may have resulted in some clients accessing the psychological services on a small mobile phone screen, or in some cases

having no access to remote psychological services.

Finally, remote working raised ethical issues and concerns as “all of the principles and standards in the current APA ethics code apply in one way or another to psychologists’ response to COVID-19” (Chenneville & Schwartz-Mette, 2020, p. 653). Confidentiality and privacy are some of the main ethical dilemmas around remote working, with there being some concerns of others being present during virtual sessions with clients. There may also be a lack of secure internet connections, and psychologists may not have had access to a private working space at home, making it more difficult to keep clients safe (Dores et al., 2020).

Positive Experiences of Remote Working Which Could Inform Future Practice

Some of the literature provided information on how EPs can incorporate adaptations into future practice. Farmer et al. (2021) identified a lack of empirical evidence on whether cognitive tests administered remotely bear equivalent results to the same tests administered in person. Recent research has already started exploring the possible standardisation of tools traditionally administered in person, which could result in an increase in the use of online testing for the profession. Online technologies may also improve the accuracy of some assessments by recording reaction times and time sensitivity (Marasca et al., 2020).

To ensure services are engaging in ethical practice, current policies should be reviewed to reflect the challenges of remote working. Psychologists working in group practices in the USA introduced new policies and guidance which overcame the common barriers of remote working, such as lack of training surrounding ethical concerns (e.g., privacy and security regulations). Introducing new policies resulted in the psychologists having a perceived smoother transition to online working (Farmer et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2021).

Increased online working may have led to heightened confidence in this way of working. Aafjes-van Doorn et al. (2020) found that therapists reported feeling less confident and competent about their skills using virtual sessions, with younger and less experienced therapists being cited as having the highest levels of moderate self-doubt. This suggests that having more opportunities to engage in virtual work may increase therapists’ confidence in delivering therapy online. Furthermore, trainee psychologists that increase their use of online working may gain new skills in the delivery of online interventions and assessments (Goghari et al., 2020).

Dual delivery (i.e., the combination of online and in-person delivery) may also be an adaptation for future EP practice. Studies have found that some professionals felt positive towards online working and did not perceive virtual work to affect relationships with clients. Aafjes-van Doorn et al. (2020), for example, identified that therapists reported having similar levels of authentic relationships with clients,

when comparing virtual and in-person sessions. Despite feeling as though online delivery was less effective, therapists still felt positively towards its use. There has been an increase in the use of virtual delivery methods during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic times. Psychologists were also found to be motivated to continue to incorporate remote delivery after the pandemic (Pierce et al., 2021), suggesting a positive shift in attitudes towards remote delivery.

Psychologists have identified a number of positive factors in the use of technology, including “easy accessibility, high adaptability, flexibility and convenience, evolution at the client’s pace, easy adherence and treatment monitoring, privacy and possibility of anonymity, cultural adaptability, low cost, and high potential for dissemination” (Dores et al., 2020, p. 3).

Summary of Findings From the Literature

In summary, the literature indicated that psychologists have played an important role during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing support to their clients. Psychologists made a number of adaptations to their work practices to adjust to remote delivery. However, some challenges were faced by psychologists, such as the technical and logistical difficulties of working remotely, as well as potential ethical considerations and wellbeing concerns. Overall, the literature highlighted some adaptations that could be used to inform future practice and how remote working could be integrated into the psychologist’s role.

Rationale for the Study

The literature review and its analysis identified several gaps in the knowledge around EPs’ experiences of working during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, and, as such, research on the topic has been limited and is still relevant to the current situation. Some of the most salient topics still requiring investigation and, explored within the current study, include EPs’ perspectives of remote working, the positive experiences of EPs working remotely and implications for future practice.

An ontological position of relativism and social constructionism was adopted, as the authors aimed to understand the subjective experiences of the EPs. Within this, the study attempted to answer the question: *What positive adaptations and skills have EPs utilised and developed whilst working remotely, and which of these would be useful to continue applying after the pandemic?*

Methods

Participants and Data Collection

In total, eleven EPs were recruited from within an educational psychology service (EPS) in London. An email

was sent to all the EPs within the EPS, after obtaining consent from the EPS leadership, inviting potential participants to anonymously complete an online questionnaire. Demographic information (such as age and gender) was not collected for the purposes of this study.

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions, presented online via SmartSurvey:

1. *How would you rate your confidence of working virtually and using technology, both before the pandemic and currently (between 1 and 10, where 1 is not at all confident and 10 is extremely confident)?*
2. *To what extent do you feel the role of the Educational Psychologist has changed during the pandemic? (between 1 and 10, where 1 is “the role has not changed at all” and 10 is “the role has changed entirely”)?*
3. *If applicable, in what ways do you feel the role of the Educational Psychologist has changed during the pandemic?*
4. *What have been the most useful tools to use whilst conducting online assessments? And if applicable, please state why these tools have been useful.*
5. *How have you positively/creatively adapted your practice to successfully engage with children, families and schools whilst working virtually?*
6. *What new skills have you developed/enhanced since working remotely?*
7. *Which areas of your work as an EP would be most useful to continue to deliver virtually following the pandemic?*
8. *Are there any professional successes that you have achieved during the pandemic that you are particularly proud of?*

This questionnaire contained both quantitative questions with rating scales (questions 1 and 2) and open-ended qualitative questions (questions 3 to 8).

Procedure

The invitation email sent to EPs contained information about the study and a link to access the questionnaire. The first page of the questionnaire consisted of a participant information sheet containing detailed information about the study and contact details of the researchers. The second page contained a consent form that participants were asked to complete if they wished to take part in the study, before being

able to access the rest of the questionnaire. Participants were then asked to fill out the eight main questions and submit their answers.

Data Analysis

In summary, questions 1 and 2 were analysed with descriptive and nonparametric statistics, and questions 3 to 8 were analysed with qualitative content analyses. For question 1, a pre and post measure was used to compare participants' confidence of working virtually and using technology before the pandemic compared to the time of taking the questionnaire. The median scores and standard deviations were analysed for both measures, and a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted to test for significance between them. For question 2, the median, mode and standard deviation were analysed. For the remaining questions (3 to 8), qualitative content analyses were conducted.

Ethical Considerations

Before the study commenced, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university ethics committee. The principles and ethical standards outlined in the BPS' *Code of Human Research Ethics* (British Psychological Society, 2021) and *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (British Psychological Society, 2018), in the HCPC's *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics* (Health and Care Professions Council, 2018), and in the University of East London's *Code of Practice for Research Ethics* (University of East London, 2020) were adhered to at all stages of this research.

Presentation of Results

This section provides a brief presentation of the analysis pertinent to the online questionnaire, as described above. The results from the quantitative analyses will be presented first (questions 1 and 2), followed by the results from the qualitative analyses (questions 3 to 8).

Quantitative Information

Question 1: How would you rate your confidence of working virtually and using technology (between 1 and 10, where 1 is not at all confident and 10 is extremely confident)?

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated a significant increase in the confidence of participants working virtually and using technology at the time of the questionnaire (Mdn = 8, SD = 1.04) compared to before the pandemic (Mdn = 4, SD = 1.41), with a large effect size, $Z = -2.8451$, $p < .005$, $r = 0.86$.

Question 2: To what extent do you feel the role of the Educational Psychologist has changed during the pandemic? (between 1 and 10, where 1 is “the role has not changed at all” and 10 is “the role has changed entirely”)?

There was a wide and varied distribution amongst responses regarding the extent to which the role of the EP had changed during the pandemic (range = 1–8, SD = 2.5). Interestingly, there was quite a big difference between the median and mode results (Mdn = 4, Mode = 1), where a majority of participants indicated that the role of the EP had actually not changed at all.

Qualitative Information

Content analysis was used to find out the most common responses to each question (for questions 3 to 8), by looking at the percentage of participants who reported each response. Table 1 summarises the findings from the content analysis performed. Pertinent quotes from each of the questions are also presented.

Table 1*Results from the Qualitative Questions (Questions 3 to 8)*

Question	Content Analysis	Pertinent Quotes
<i>Question 3: If applicable, in what ways do you feel the role of the Educational Psychologist has changed during the pandemic?</i>	18.18% — Role hasn't changed 18.18% — Learning new tools 18.18% — Relying on a wider range of sources 13.64% — More reflective consultation 13.64% — Less access to CYP/reduced contact 9.09% — Role has become more therapeutic 9.09% — Less travel	"I would not say that the role itself has necessarily changed, but the way in which we are able to work has changed significantly." "Opportunity to provide more consultation based, reflective work with staff." "We are still trying to support CYP, schools and families, but have had to adapt to doing so in a (largely) remote way."
<i>Question 4: What have been the most useful tools to use whilst conducting online assessments? And if applicable, please state why these tools have been useful.</i>	34.78% — Online questionnaires/checklists 17.39% — Virtual consultation 17.39% — tools grounded in Personal Construct Psychology (e.g., drawing the "ideal self"; Moran, 2001) 17.39% — dynamic assessment techniques (e.g., 16-word memory test, complex figure drawing, etc.) 13.04% — Virtual observation	"I have made much more use of my consultation skills [...] when speaking to parents/carers and teachers to gain information that I would previously have used observation and one-to-one work to obtain." "I have found young people drawing their ideal school/self helpful; the young people could carry out an activity and not have to talk to a screen." "These [online tools] have allowed the key information to be gathered, but without the social proximity."
<i>Question 5: How have you positively/creatively adapted your practice to successfully engage with children, families and schools whilst working virtually?</i>	3.33% — More phone/virtual consultations 20.03% — Using more tools/adapting tools creatively 12.5% — Sharing more visuals/having more shared documents 12.5% — Delivering virtual trainings/drop-in sessions 12.5% — Creating introductory videos/letters 8.3% — Online observations	"I have adapted some materials to gain students views [and] made increased use of questionnaires." "I started to offer higher number of phone consultations, including three-way consultations with parents/foster carers and CYP." "More emphasis on preparing CYP for the assessment session (e.g., introductory letters) and more meetings with parents (video or phone call) making me more accessible to them."

Question	Content Analysis	Pertinent Quotes
<i>Question 6: What new skills have you developed/enhanced since working remotely?</i>	42.86% — IT skills 21.43% — Consultation skills 21.43% — Creativity/more able to adapt tools 7.14% — Peer supervision 7.14% — Problem solving	“Further enhanced my consultation and peer supervision skills.” “Thinking more creatively about use of assessment tools, also have developed skills in problem-solving consultations.” “More confidence in using technology and virtual means of assessment”
<i>Question 7: Which areas of your work as an EP would be most useful to continue to deliver virtually following the pandemic?</i>	43.75% — Virtual consultations 37.50% — Virtual meetings with professionals/parents/carers 12.5% — Virtual meetings with CYP 6.25% — Video and written feedback	“Online consultations for parents/carers who are harder to reach or struggle to access the usual settings. This applies to CYP who may not be able to attend nursery/school for a range of reasons.” “Offering schools and families a blended approach depending on circumstances.” “Giving families and parents the option to meet online if they work and can’t come to school.”
<i>Question 8: Are there any professional successes that you have achieved during the pandemic that you are particularly proud of?</i>	19.23% — Assessments 15.38% — Successful engagement/maintaining positive relationships with professionals 11.54% — Flexibility 11.54% — Successful engagement with CYP and families 7.69% — Training 7.69% — Able to deliver commissioned time 3.85% — Supporting schools (e.g., wellbeing) 3.85% — Able to contribute to statutory work 3.85% — Extension of 1:1 work 3.85% — Attending more meetings 3.85% — Successful thesis interviews 3.85% — Creating online surveys to gain pupil voice 3.85% — Q&A sessions for professionals	“Adapting to deliver online training, successful engagement with families and school staff over Microsoft Teams and thinking creatively and ‘outside the box’ to assess children.” “Proud of the team’s support for wellbeing to schools.” “Being able to complete complex statutory assessments with no direct access to the YP being assessed, and being able to do so with some detail.”

Discussion of Results

This study explored how a small group within a specific local authority EPS have positively adapted their practice whilst working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The EPs that participated in the study reflected on how their practice had changed, with a particular focus on what has worked well and the implications for future EP practice. In addition to exploring their own personal experiences of working remotely, EPs also had the opportunity to reflect on their personal successes and consider the skills they developed during this period.

Existing research indicates that remote working has many advantages for psychologists, including easier access to clients, increased flexibility, convenience, low costs and greater scope for clients to maintain their anonymity (Dores et al., 2020). Interestingly, participants within this study identified very similar benefits when reflecting on their professional role, engagement with schools and future practice. For example, having greater access to parents and less travel were cited within responses. There appeared to be conflicting evidence regarding the impact of remote working on work–life balance. Research indicates that some psychologists have had to work outside of their normal working hours (e.g., evenings and weekends), making it more difficult to maintain a good work–life balance (British Psychological Society, 2020b).

Although there are some very clear benefits to remote working, many questions remain regarding its ethics and morality. The safety of clients has been a particular area of concern, with some arguing that it is more difficult to ensure that clients are kept safe during virtual sessions (Dores et al., 2020). Issues surrounding privacy and confidentiality have also been discussed within the literature, with psychologists reported as having some difficulty creating suitable working environments (British Psychological Society, 2020c) and not being able to definitively ascertain whether a client is alone or in the presence of others during a meeting. There is no guarantee that the information discussed during a meeting is not being heard, recorded or observed by others who are not visible on-screen, and this can create discomfort for both the psychologist and, potentially, the client. Additionally, psychologists cannot identify whether a child is being coached or coerced by someone off-screen, which may have significant consequences for the accuracy of the assessment performed. In-person sessions arguably enable psychologists to see more of the external environment, possibly ensuring that sessions occur in a safe and private space.

This said, psychologists have a professional duty to their clients and the wider public, and are required to adhere to a range of professional standards, as outlined in the BPS *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (2018) and HCPC *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics* (2018). These standards guide and expect psychologists to engage in ethical and responsible

practice. The knowledge, skills, and expertise of psychologists combined with their responsibility to clients arguably present them as being suitably placed to support individuals during the pandemic.

Psychologists have already adapted their roles to meet the needs of their clients, relevant stakeholders and the wider community. During the pandemic, psychologists have provided additional support to vulnerable groups (Dores et al., 2020; Song et al., 2020), made relevant referrals to support the mental health and wellbeing of stakeholders (Clay, 2020), created support hubs to aid professional transitions to remote working (Clay, 2020) and have contributed to ensuring that their clients' psychological needs are met. The pandemic caused many psychologists to adopt a virtual model of working, which resulted in a change of communication methods with clients.

The current study identified a variety of EP responses to their changing professional role during the pandemic. Participants generally felt that the role itself had not changed, though the way in which EPs delivered their service became noticeably different. Although EPs had shifted to a fully remote way of working at some point, they were still able to fulfil key aspects of their role, with some indicating that the standard and quality of their work had not been negatively impacted.

The EPs identified a range of ways in which they had adapted their practice, where online and telephone consultations, virtual observations, training and drop-in sessions were cited by over half of the participants as changes in their work. Additionally, adapting tools and using different techniques (e.g., the use of questionnaires and visuals) to engage with CYP were other changes mentioned by some. Others also perceived their role as becoming more therapeutic during the pandemic.

Despite working virtually, EPs participating in this study appreciated that they continued to engage with stakeholders and maintain good service delivery. The success of online working has prompted many professionals and services to review and reflect on pre-pandemic practices and ways of working. Despite having no in-person contact with stakeholders, the participants in the study felt they were still able to maintain their positive relationships with schools. Similarly, Aafjes-van Doorn et al. (2020) found that therapists were able to develop and maintain authentic relationships with clients whilst working virtually. The therapists did, however, report finding online sessions less effective.

As part of their practice, EPs may be required to use standardised tools with CYP. Assessments primarily designed to be completed in person may lose value and/or validity when completed online. At the start of the pandemic, there was very limited information available to confirm whether cognitive tests delivered remotely are equivalent to in-person tests (Farmer et al., 2021). There is, however, an increase in pub-

lishers' efforts to adapt standardised tests for online use and this may continue in the future. Although there seems to be some debate regarding the ethics and future use of online tests, there also appears to be some scope for IT systems to improve the accuracy of assessments (Marasca et al., 2020). For example, online tests may be able to accurately record response times (Marasca et al., 2020). Online assessments may also be favoured by some as they can be considered more cost-effective and have the potential to reduce the risk of human error in recording. This suggests that online assessments could potentially mirror the validity of in-person assessments and enhance validity, rather than reduce it.

This study indicates that the participants were receptive to continue incorporating virtual ways of working in their future practice. Virtual consultations and meetings appear to provide a more convenient way of accessing clients and engaging with stakeholders. Psychologists more broadly are also motivated to continue to use remote delivery (Pierce et al., 2021). To increase the safety of online working, services may need to update their policies, if they have not already done so, and identify ways to overcome the challenges and ethical issues surrounding remote working. Services in the UK may choose to follow the lead of the psychologists that introduced new policies and guidance in the USA to manage the challenges of remote working (Farmer et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2021).

Strengths

At the time of the present study, the literature review identified an absence of research that explored EPs' experiences of working remotely during the pandemic. The current study addressed this gap in the literature, and its findings can be used to help to inform future research in this area.

Some of the literature focused on the challenges associated with remote working. A strengths-based stance was used in the present study to focus specifically on EPs' positive experiences of remote working, personal successes and positive adaptations to their practice.

Finally, an ontological position of relativism and social constructionism was taken to understand the subjective experiences of the EPs in the study. This approach enabled researchers to gain an insight into how EPs conceptualised their roles and how they had personally adapted their practice during the pandemic.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is a small-scale one, with all participants working within one local authority in an inner-London borough. The experiences of the participating EPs may be markedly different to EPs in other areas of the country. EPSs across England are not the same; every service has different priorities and models of service delivery. It may, therefore, be difficult to generalise the findings of the study to all EPSs.

Future studies may choose to explore the remote working experiences of EPs working locally and nationally. This could help to address issues surrounding generalisability and help to develop a national picture of how EPs have adapted their practice during the COVID-19 pandemic and what can be learnt for EP practice from such a significant global event.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Practice

Virtual working led EPs in the current study to adapt their practice in response to professional challenges brought by the pandemic restrictions. This enabled them to develop new skills and increase their confidence in using technology and working remotely. Many EPs reported that it would be useful to continue delivering some of their practice virtually following the pandemic (in particular, consultations and meetings). Although many EPs did not feel the role had changed, the way in which they delivered their role had to be adapted to remote working. EPs were often able to creatively adapt their practice in response to the challenges of remote working, and many personal and professional successes were reported over the pandemic. Despite this shift, EPs were still able to successfully engage with stakeholders, maintain positive relationships with schools, support colleagues and fulfil key aspects of their role.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many psychologists may not have conceived of virtual working as a viable option. The success of virtual working during the pandemic has, however, demonstrated that EPs can continue to fulfil key aspects of their role whilst working remotely. Many EPSs may be inclined to undertake a full review and evaluation of their experiences of remote working during the pandemic, with a particular focus on what has been gained during the pandemic, remaining challenges to overcome and how practice may look in the future. EPSs may be more receptive to adopting a dual delivery model in the future, as this provides CYP, families and other relevant stakeholders with greater choice and enables EPs to work more flexibly.

It is still not currently clear whether the most effective approach to EP work is in-person, virtual or dual delivery. It may therefore be useful to investigate this further so that EPSs can be more informed as to the best model of service delivery. It may also be helpful to gain the views of relevant stakeholders (e.g., CYP, parents, schools) and obtain their experiences of remote delivery. Stakeholder views should be used to help inform a reviewed service delivery model that encompasses a collaborative and shared vision of how remote working can be incorporated into future practice.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that this study was a small-scale, geographically limited project (within one London local authority). That said, the findings may still bear relevance and be helpful to education, health and social care professionals across the UK and internationally, at least as a starting point in the exploration of practice delivery methods

and the use of virtual technological tools, which will likely continue to expand in the future.

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