

Communication skills assessment during online BST exam Qualitative study of trainees and examiners' perspectives

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Introduction:

Effective doctor-patient communication is a core competency for healthcare professionals. With the pivot to online clinical education and assessment due to Covid-19 pandemic, there was a need to evaluate this domain.

Research question

What do the trainees and the examiners think on the assessment of communication skills during online examinations in psychiatry.

Methods

- This study was designed as interpretive descriptive qualitative research.
- All candidates and examiners of the online Irish Basic Specialist Training (BST) exam in September and November 2020 were recruited by the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland (CPsychI).
- The respondents were interviewed by Zoom which were transcribed verbatim.
- Data was analyzed by open coding using NVivo20 pro and various themes and subthemes were drawn by Braun and Clarke Thematic analysis (TA)
- Rigor was maintained by member checking, triangulation, audit trail and reflective diary

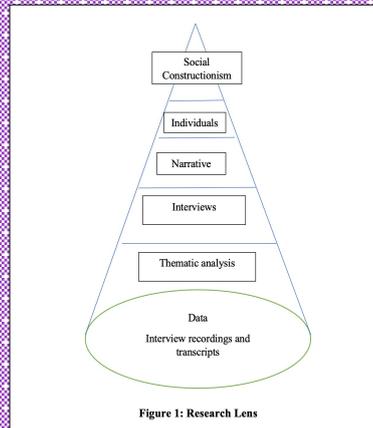
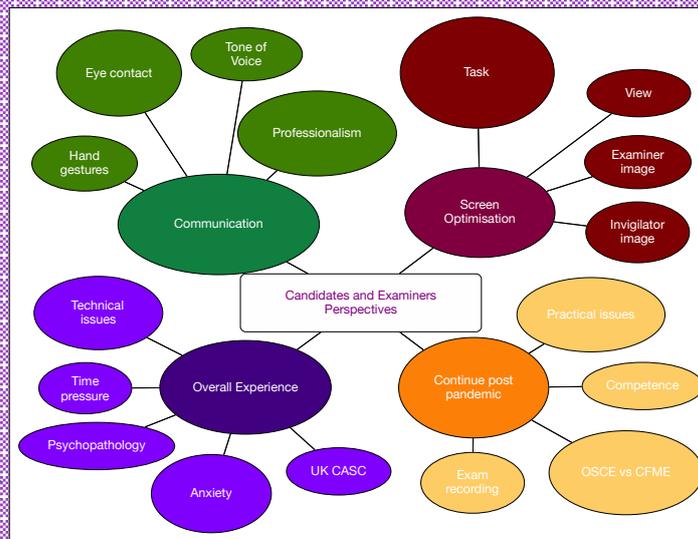


Figure 1: Research Lens

Results

- A total of seven candidates and seven examiners from different training deaneries and specialties were interviewed
- Average duration of 29m 45s for candidates and 24m 20s for examiners
- The participants were largely satisfied with the online examination but did not consider it equal to face-to-face for picking nonverbal cues.
- The candidates were very conscious of eye contact while examiners placed more emphasis on overall professional behavior and patient engagement.
- Candidates deemed the online exam as less anxiety provoking reported Overall minimal technical issues reported.
- The candidates recommended that the task instructions be available throughout the station.



Thematic Map with examples of quotations

"I think was a bit more difficult online, establishing the initial rapport because of the artificial nature of it" (Candidate 6).

"It was hard not to be able to see someone's entire body language" (Candidate 2)

"the entire day in person was, I suppose a bit more stressful and kind of anxiety provoking" (Candidate 1)

"I think you look at the camera to signal to the person that you're attending to them and you're listening to them and then you look at the face, because you're actually then attending to them and trying to pick up on subtle clues." (Examiner 7)

"I actually think it was pretty successful" (Examiner 6)

"There's something more authentic about seeing somebody face to face" (Examiner 3).

	Candidates	Examiners
Gender		
Male	5	4
Female	2	3
Age		
<30	1	
30-35	4	
36-40	1	
41-45	1	4
46-50		2
51-55		1
Level of Training		
BST2	1	
BST3	3	
BST4	3	

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Discussion

- All candidates preferred to continue online format post pandemic for practical reasons e.g., avoiding travel and overnight stay, while all examiners preferred to go back to in-person OSCE due to some limitations in assessing physical and cognitive examination.
- Continuation of online CFME was agreed by both groups.
- The perspectives of two important stakeholders triangulated the findings and can help to design similar exam in other specialties.
- Even though they did represent different deaneries, specialties, and age groups, we couldn't ascertain that data was saturated and it may be a possibility that we had other perspectives should more participants signed up for interview.
- Another limitation was that standardized patients were not included in study design. They can provide useful feedback on remote assessment.

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