

EVALUATION OF VIRTUAL CARE IN YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES: CLIENT AND CLINICIAN EXPERIENCES DURING THE PANDEMIC



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BACKGROUND

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health services rapidly transitioned to providing virtual care in order to maintain services and to offer care safely to youth.
- Due to familiarity with technology, virtual approaches are thought to be promising for reaching youth.¹ However, research is needed to establish best practices for delivery of virtual services to youth.²
- This evaluation was conducted to examine the youth clients, families and clinicians experiences with virtual delivery of mental health services.
- The objectives of the presentation are to:
 - Describe perceived benefits and challenges experienced by youth and families with virtual mental health care.
 - Provide recommendations about how to improve virtual care.

METHODS

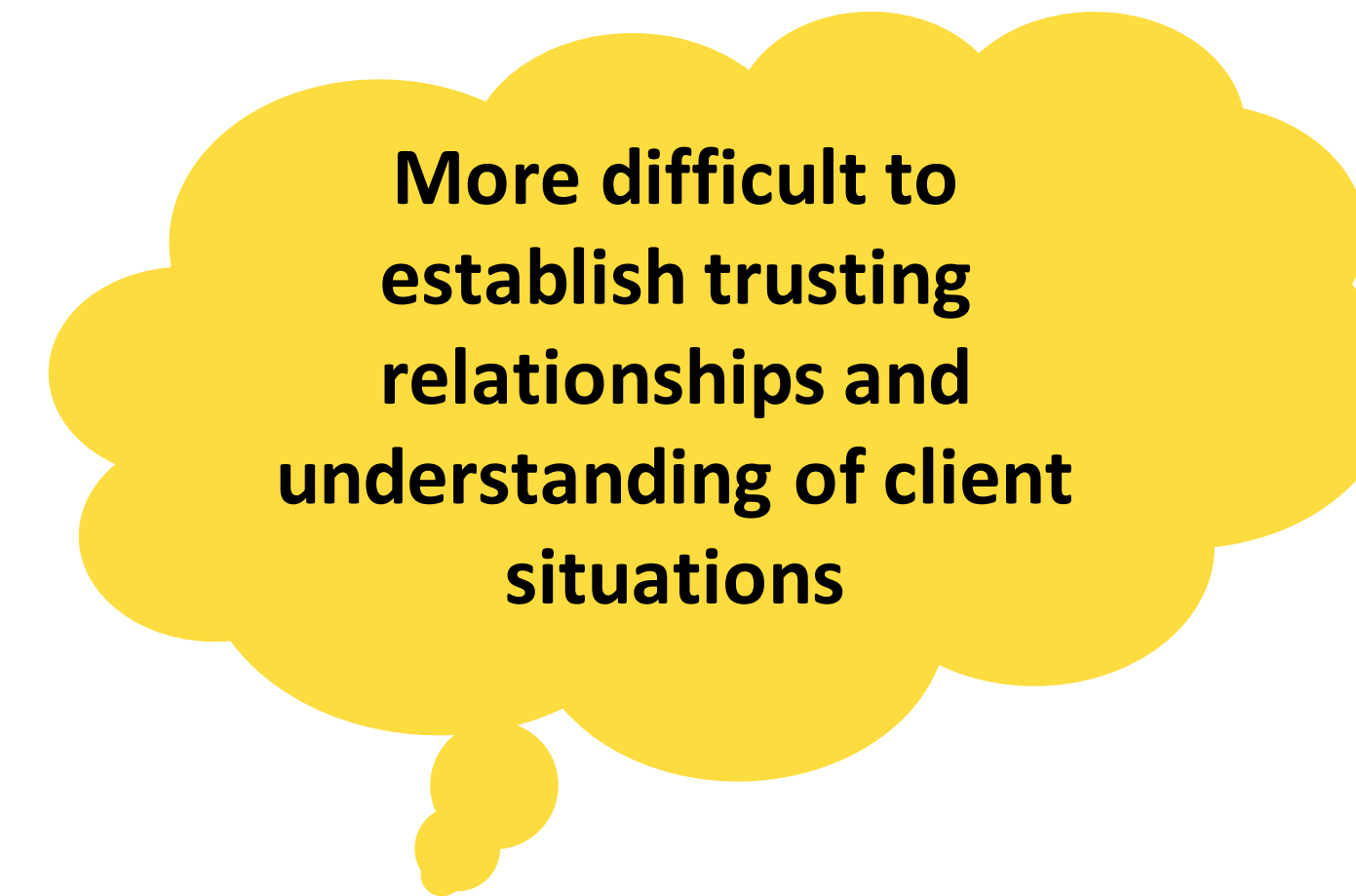
- A sequential mixed method design integrated clinician interviews (n=11) and youth and family focus groups (n=4) with an online youth client survey (n=116).
- Qualitative data from the first phase informed survey development in the second phase.
- Qualitative and survey data were mixed during the interpretation to understand when virtual care fosters or hinders therapeutic processes and outcomes.³

RESULTS

Perceived benefits of virtual care (Themes)



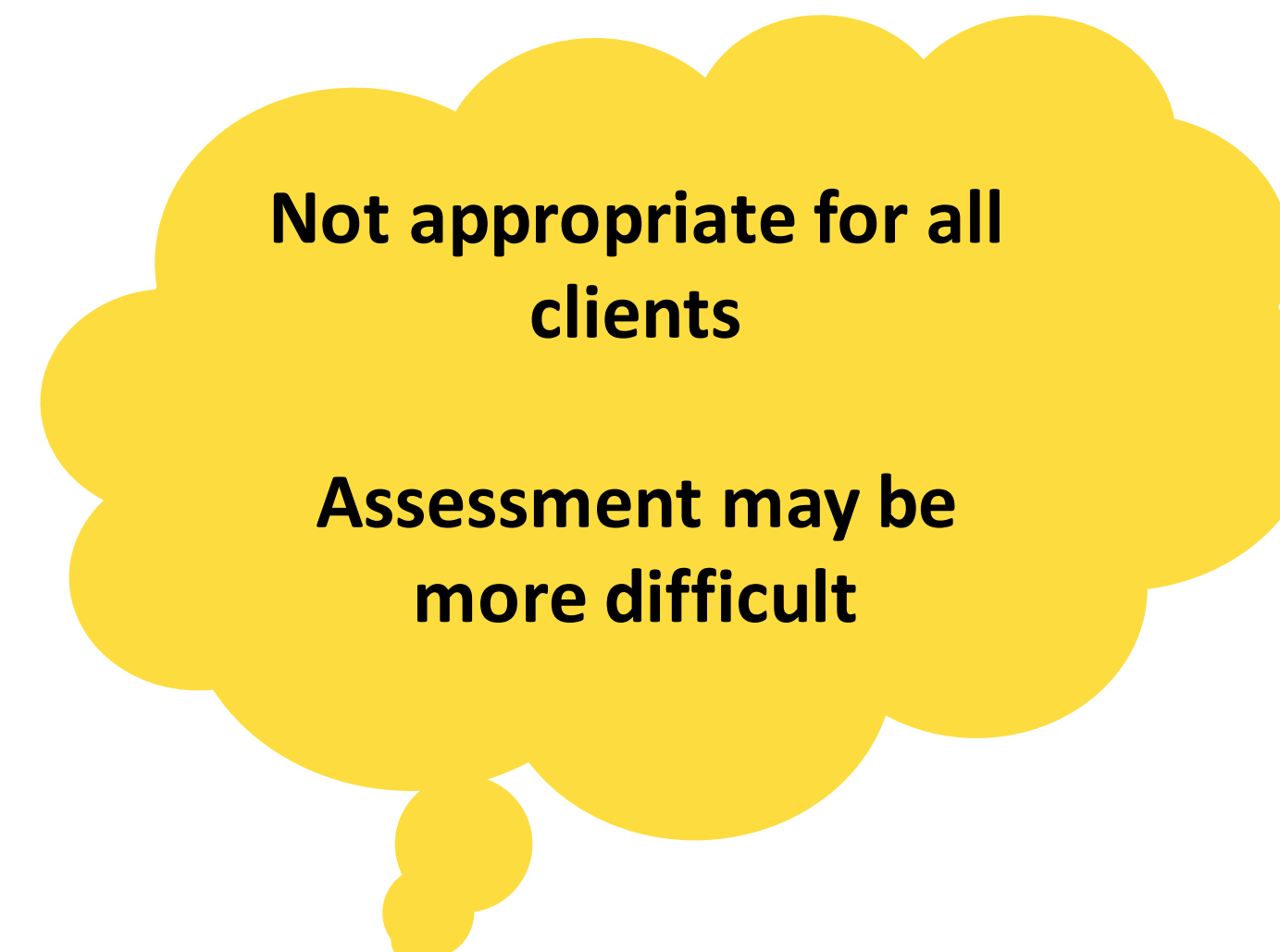
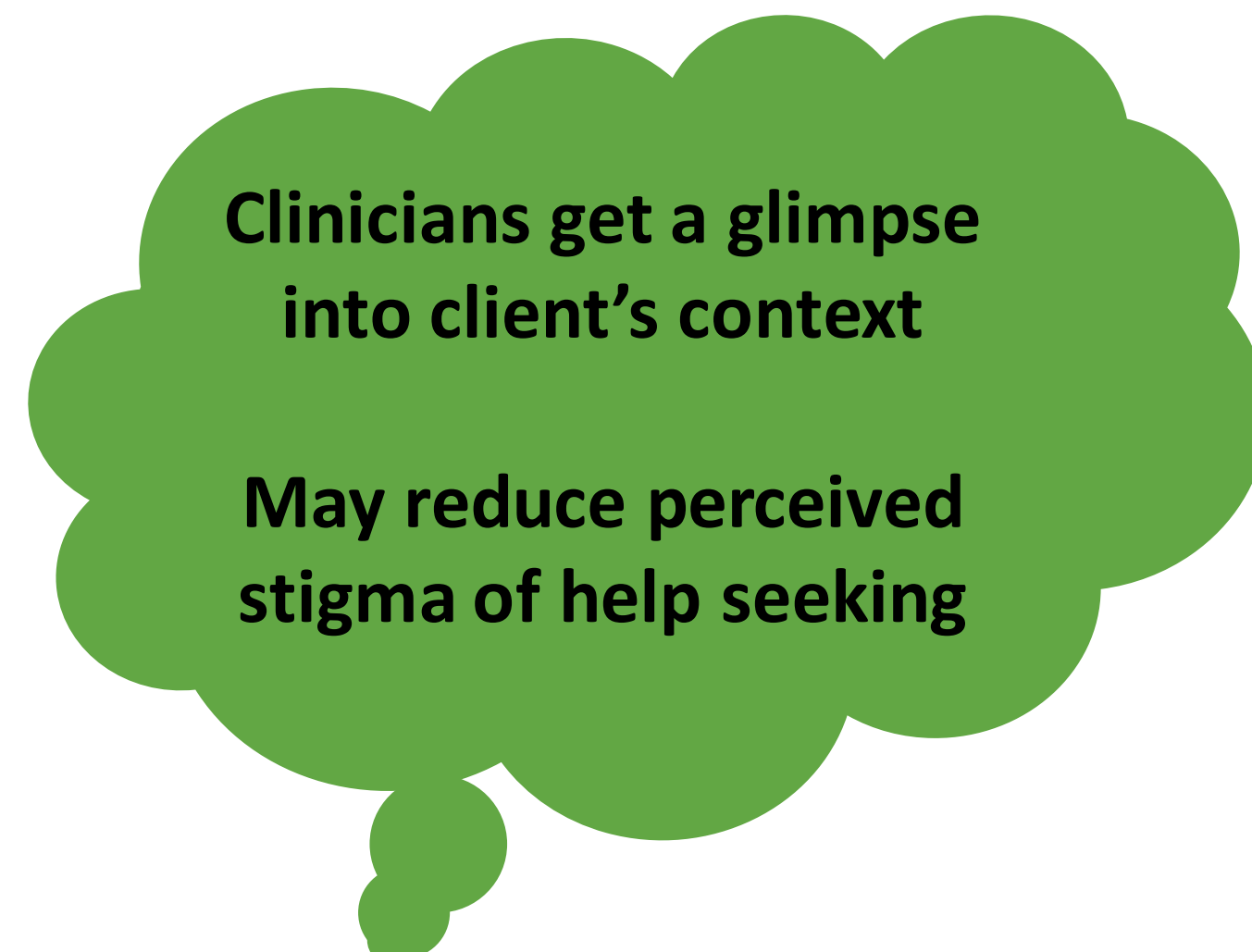
Perceived challenges of virtual care (Themes)



Survey responses (% of clients reporting)



Despite positive experiences, virtual care was perceived as less effective than in-person care



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use a client-centered approach to guide selection of therapy formats that best meet client needs and preferences.
- Adopt a platform that is easy to use and provides reliable audio-visual connections to facilitate positive therapeutic interactions.
- Increase clinician training to support virtual delivery of specific therapies.
- Consider at least one in-person visit to help with building rapport.
- Acknowledge and discuss the challenges of virtual care with clients and families and address problems early on.
- Increase access to technological equipment and private spaces for vulnerable and outreach youth who continue to underutilize virtual care services.

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