

Introduction

The unprecedented situation due to COVID-19 lockdown necessitates the need for tele-consultation with caregivers of children with disabilities. However, tele-consultation involves observing a child on a live screen without actually touching and interacting with the caregivers off-site. The question is, does that suffice? What do the caregivers feel about this? The objective of this study was to explore the acceptability, satisfaction, perceived relevance and barriers to tele-consultation from a caregiver's perspective.

Methodology



A descriptive qualitative study involving in-depth telephonic interviews (IDIs) with the caregivers of children with developmental disabilities who received tele-consultation as part of the routine care offered by the institute during the lockdown. The interviews were audio recorded. Manual content analysis of transcripts of IDI was done.

Results

CODING & CONTENT ANALYSIS



Eight IDIs were conducted with the caregivers of children with Cerebral Palsy, Autism, Specific Learning Disorder and Developmental Delay.

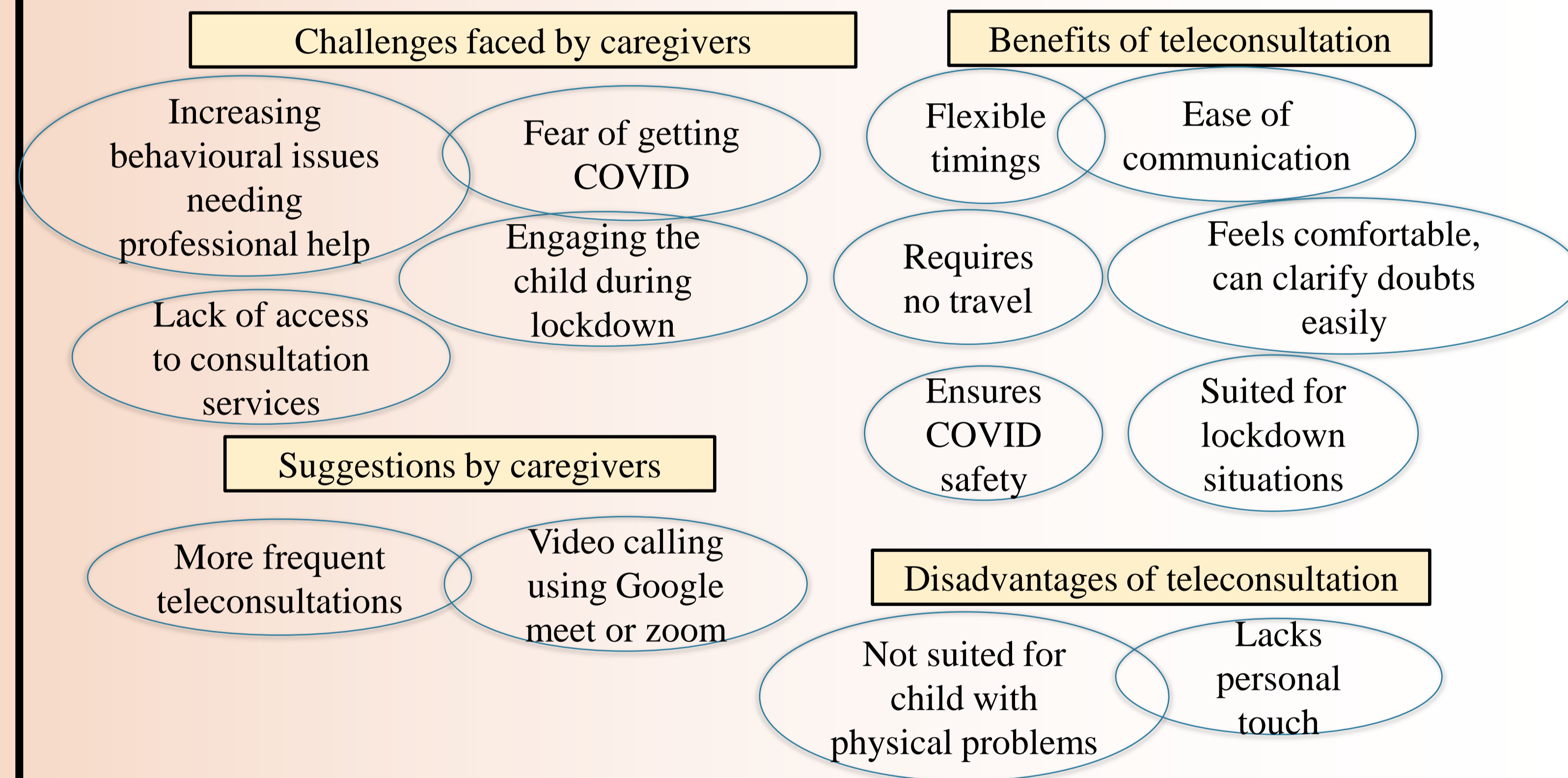
Challenges: Caregivers expressed challenges in managing the child at home during lockdown. *"It is not possible as a parent to keep him engaged all the time and that is very challenging"*

They also expressed the need for professional consultation and at the same time difficulty in accessing professional help during the pandemic due to poor health care access and fear of getting Covid-19. *"For almost a year we couldn't take her for the therapy" "We were unable to take him to therapy which resulted in increase in tightness of his limbs, he became more irritable". "I could have visited a hospital....but we were scared of getting COVID"*

Benefits: The respondents preferred teleconsultation during lockdown due to **flexible timings, ease of communication, COVID safety and required no travel**. Caregivers felt that they could communicate effectively via telephonic call rather than direct consultation. *"don't know in direct consultation I can't express my doubt that freely, I can express better telephonically"*

Barriers and suggestions: Caregivers of children with physical ailments preferred direct consultation. On the contrary the caregiver of child with Autism mentioned *"I can benefit from tele-consultation because she does not have any physical problem"* A caregiver also suggested video calling using zoom or google meet to give more personal touch and address physical issues.

Figure 1. Caregivers perspectives on benefits and barriers to teleconsultation



Conclusion

Teleconsultation was found to effectively support the treatment and rehabilitation of children with disabilities during the COVID-19 lockdown, although direct face-to-face consultation was preferred by children with physical ailments. The use of modern mobile/digital technologies creates new opportunities to improve the quality and accessibility of such services and could be considered for scale up during lockdown situations.