

Electronic Psychological Counseling: Concepts and Theoretical Models

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Abstract:

The article discusses the challenges psychologists face due to rapid digitalization and the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring adaptation to digital tools while maintaining therapy quality and client privacy. It presents types of electronic counseling, such as video sessions, text messaging, and phone calls, and explains the psychological theories behind them, including cognitive-behavioral theory and dissociation theory. Telepsychology improves access for remote or disabled clients but raises concerns about replicating emotional depth in therapeutic relationships. The article also addresses risks and challenges, including limited training, lack of digital tools, ethical issues around confidentiality, and difficulties managing high-risk cases. Successful e-counseling depends on effective, understanding-based dialogue, which can be affected by technology gaps or practitioners' digital skills.

Keywords: Electronic Psychological Counseling, Online Psychological Counseling.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that rapid digital transformations and exceptional health conditions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have generated new challenges for psychologists, who are considered key actors in the therapeutic process. In addition to their traditional clinical skills, they are now required to adapt their professional practices to digital media, while ensuring the effectiveness of therapeutic communication, protecting clients' privacy, and maintaining the quality of the professional relationship. From this perspective, the need emerges to understand clinical psychologists' attitudes toward this practice, particularly with regard to the tools used, the challenges they face, and their perceived self-efficacy in performing their professional tasks remotely.

Remote psychological counseling (telepsychology) is defined by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) as the provision of psychological support through digital communication technologies, such as video conferencing and text messaging, either as a complement to face-to-face services or as a standalone service. Although this practice existed prior to the pandemic, the exceptional health circumstances have raised questions regarding its suitability for addressing emerging challenges.

From a theoretical perspective, the APA guidelines (2020) indicate that remote counseling offers opportunities to enhance access to psychological services, particularly in remote areas or for individuals with disabilities. This perspective has been supported by previous studies, such as Fitzgerald et al. (2010).

However, the rapid expansion in the use of this modality has raised concerns regarding the quality of therapeutic interaction. Bastemur

and Bastemur (2015) questioned whether digital platforms are capable of replicating the emotional depth required in the relationship between the practitioner and the client within this context.

Numerous studies have examined electronic psychological counseling, its acceptance, effectiveness, methods, and challenges, providing a foundation for understanding its potential and limitations. Al-Mutairi (2021) found that Students had positive attitudes toward electronic counseling, particularly those with social anxiety and shyness, which increased their preference for online sessions over traditional counseling. In addition, Albani (2015) revealed that remote counseling via phone, internet, or video is effective for populations with limited access, although challenges such as crisis management, ethical adherence, and counselor qualifications remain, while also supporting healthcare development in Libya. Park et al. (2024) reported that online counseling in Malaysia is flexible and reduces stigma, yet body language interpretation and relationship building are difficult, with CBT and ACT being preferred approaches. Mulungu et al. (2024) found limited effectiveness of online counseling in Zambia during COVID-19 due to low therapist readiness, high internet costs, technical problems, and low digital literacy. Moudatsou et al. (2024) indicated that online counseling generally improves access and saves time but faces non-verbal communication, privacy, tool, and training challenges, and should complement face-to-face therapy. Jeannette K. (2024) highlighted key themes in online counseling, including technical challenges, client benefits and difficulties, and practitioner challenges, noting varied attitudes toward video therapy. Java et al. (2021) emphasized the effectiveness of online platforms for video counseling, with benefits such as access, convenience, and privacy. Smith & Gillon (2021) reported that therapists overcame control, risk management, and technical challenges, finding online counseling empowering, accessible, and anti-discriminatory .Bacioğlu & Kocobiyik (2019) showed that counseling trainees value online



counseling for accessibility and convenience, though concerns about therapeutic relationships, emotion understanding, technology, and privacy persist. From a practical standpoint, studies such as Mansour (2016) indicate potential structural challenges, including a lack of field training and the unavailability of necessary psychological tools. On the other hand, recent research, such as Kiriakidis (2022), suggests that temporal and spatial flexibility may enhance service efficiency; however, it simultaneously raises ethical concerns regarding data confidentiality and the assessment of high-risk cases (APA, 2020). Al-Aboudi (2010) also observes that the success of psychological counseling depends on a “dialogue based on understanding,” which may be affected by technological gaps or differences in practitioners’ skills in handling digital tools.

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has significantly transformed the landscape of mental health services, leading to the widespread adoption of electronic psychological counseling. Despite the growing reliance on these digital interventions, particularly in recent years, the field still faces considerable challenges. These include conceptual ambiguity due to overlapping terminology and a proliferation of theoretical models that are often described rather than critically analyzed. Consequently, there is a distinct gap in the literature regarding a critical synthesis that not only defines these concepts clearly but also evaluates and compares the underlying theoretical models. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by answering the following primary research question: *What are the foundational concepts and theoretical models of electronic psychological counseling, and how do they critically compare in addressing clients' psychological needs?*

Sub-questions:

1. What are the precise conceptual boundaries distinguishing electronic psychological counseling from related terms (e.g., telepsychology, online counseling)?
2. What are the core theoretical models underpinning electronic psychological counseling?
3. What are the comparative strengths and limitations of these models in contemporary psychological practice?

2. Research Objectives: The present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To delineate the conceptual framework of electronic psychological counseling and resolve the existing terminological ambiguity in the literature.
2. To identify and systematically review the prominent theoretical models guiding electronic psychological interventions.
3. To provide a critical analysis and comparison of these models, moving beyond mere description to evaluate their practical applicability and efficacy.

3. Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study lies in both its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the existing psychological literature by organizing and clarifying the often-confusing terminology associated with remote mental health services. It also provides a much-needed critical synthesis of various theoretical models, transitioning the discourse from descriptive summaries to analytical comparisons. Practically, by evaluating the strengths and limitations of these models, this paper serves as a valuable resource

for mental health professionals and counselors, equipping them with the theoretical grounding necessary to select and implement the most effective electronic counseling strategies for their clients.

4. Conceptual Clarification:

To ensure conceptual clarity, it is imperative to distinguish between the overlapping terms frequently used in the literature. Telepsychology is a broad, overarching term defined by the APA as the provision of psychological services using telecommunication technologies, encompassing both counseling and psychiatric evaluations. Remote Psychological Counseling refers to any counseling process occurring when the counselor and client are in different physical locations, which can include traditional telephone calls. Online Counseling (or Internet-based counseling) specifically narrows this down to services delivered via the internet (e.g., video conferencing, emails, or chat). Finally, Electronic Psychological Counseling—the primary focus of this study—serves as an inclusive operational term that integrates all forms of psychological support mediated by electronic devices and digital platforms, emphasizing the medium of delivery rather than just the internet connection.

5. Remote Psychological Practice:

The *Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology* issued by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) define remote psychological practice as the provision of healthcare services by a psychologist, which may include psychotherapy, supervision of qualified personnel, and psychological counseling.

The communication technologies used include, but are not limited to, telephone, mobile devices, interactive video conferencing, email, chat,

text messaging, and the internet (such as self-help websites, blogs, and social media).

These technologies may complement traditional face-to-face services (e.g., providing online psychoeducational materials following an in-person therapy session) or be used as standalone services (e.g., psychotherapy or leadership skills development via video conferencing) (APA, 2020).

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), remote psychotherapy witnessed remarkable growth during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 96% of psychologists reporting that they provided remote therapy services during this period, reflecting a widespread shift in mental health care delivery. The online therapy market reached over \$2.6 billion in 2021, indicating rapid growth and increasing interest in this treatment modality.

Digital platforms such as *Headspace Health*, *Uplift*, and *Headway* connect patients with licensed providers while considering patients' cultural and linguistic diversity, thereby improving access to psychological support for individuals from various backgrounds. However, mental health experts emphasize the importance of practitioners being aware of the ethical and legal aspects associated with using these platforms, particularly regarding patient confidentiality and compliance with data protection standards such as HIPAA. The presence of mental health professionals within the administrative structures of these platforms is also considered crucial to ensure ethical clinical practice.

Additionally, these digital models offer the potential to reduce workload and professional burnout by minimizing administrative demands, provided that these services are integrated into a stepped-



care model based on scientific principles that balance clinical quality with accessibility (APA Monitor on Psychology, March 2023, p. 68).

Despite the rapid growth of remote therapy services, it is essential for psychologists to evaluate each platform based on ethical values, professional autonomy, legal safeguards, and privacy standards to ensure the provision of effective and safe treatment for both the therapist and the client.

6. Remote Psychological Counseling:

Remote counseling and guidance are defined as “the process through which counseling services are delivered using communication technologies, whether via telephone or the Internet, from the client to the counselor, providing psychological and health services or behavioral modification” (Maliki, 2021, p. 310).

This practice encompasses educational and psychological consultations provided by qualified professionals and can be delivered either directly or indirectly, without face-to-face meetings, through technological communication methods. Remote counseling can serve multiple purposes, such as maintaining anonymity and presenting issues without direct personal interaction with the counselor. Thus, remote counseling is considered a modern counseling approach, allowing clients to present their problems to a psychologist via the Internet without fear or hesitation. Some individuals may avoid visiting a counselor in person due to apprehension or shyness in expressing their issues openly; through remote counseling, clients can disclose their problems candidly without revealing their identity (Maliki, 2021).

According to Al-Aboudi (2010), “*psychological counseling involves dialogue with a person trained in the art of listening; speaking and being listened to by someone who demonstrates understanding and acceptance may help you discover the issues that disturb you.*” This process aims to enable individuals to express their feelings freely, which helps them identify sources of distress and develop plans to overcome them. The counselor demonstrates understanding and acceptance, thereby enhancing the client’s insight into their thoughts and behaviors.

Psychological counseling is available through several channels, including:

- Public services affiliated with health institutions.
- Private and voluntary organizations.(Al-Aboudi, 2010, pp. 305–306)

6.1) Definition of Online Psychological Counseling (Online Counseling):

Bastemur and Bastemur (2015) define online psychological counseling as one of the modern applications in the field of psychological services, used to facilitate the provision of counseling and therapeutic interventions through digital platforms. This approach encompasses a wide range of electronic services, such as chat sessions, specialized websites, online discussion forums, webinars, newsletters, virtual communities, email, as well as sessions based on video technology (Bastemur & Bastemur, 2015).

Online psychological counseling is one of the fields of study within cyber psychology (Online Counseling). It is also referred to by terms such as electronic therapy (e-Therapy), electronic counseling (e-Counseling), or cyber therapy (Cyber Therapy).

Online psychological counseling is defined as "any form of professional therapeutic interaction that uses the Internet to connect qualified mental health professionals with their clients" (Rochlen, Zack, & Spyer, 2004).

Online psychological counseling is defined " as the delivery of therapeutic interventions in cyberspace where the communication between a trained professional counselor and client(s) is facilitated using computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies, provided as a stand-alone service or as an adjunct to other therapeutic interventions. " (Richards & Viganó, 2012).

It is also defined as a complementary tool to face-to-face counseling, and it is often emphasized that it is preferable for it to be optional rather than a substitute for face-to-face counseling (Mubaid, 2015, p. 31).

6.2) Development of Remote Psychological Counseling:

Witters and Speyer (2009) note that a review of contemporary psychological literature in the field of e-counseling shows that psychological counseling via computer began in the early 1960s with the therapist Eliza, who became most famous for the computer program designed to develop self-helping skills in clinical psychology. This was initially done through support via e-mail and chat rooms, which have existed since 1980, as well as the "Ask Uncle Ezra" counseling service. Additionally, Ivan Goldberg is considered the first to initiate virtual practice or Internet-based inquiries for the treatment of clinical depression in the early 1990s (Al-Abbani, 2015, p. 110).

According to Grohol (2004), the first online therapeutic interventions began between 1970 and 1980, coinciding with the spread of personal computer use, and were conducted through online support groups. Later, email-based counseling emerged in the mid-1990s (Kiriakaki et al., 2022).

According to Harry and Issack (2013), David Sommers developed e-therapy methods between 1995 and 1998 (Al-Abbani, 2015, p. 110).

According to Shaw and Shaw (2006), at that time, there were only twelve websites offering individual online counseling services. Since then, the number of online psychological counseling sites has increased significantly. Shaw and Shaw (2006) conducted a study evaluating 166 online counseling websites, which is considered a small sample compared to the total number of available sites. Their study results showed that California had the highest number of online counselors with nine sites, followed by New York with eight sites, Texas with five, and Arizona with four sites (Kenison-Severson, 2008).

Remote psychological counseling evolved during the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought numerous changes to people's daily lives and affected the practice of various professional activities, such as providing psychological support and counseling. Professional, social, economic, and emotional relationships expanded and adapted to cyberspace at a faster pace than usual. Mental health professionals quickly sought a safe solution during the pandemic: online counseling. This solution already existed prior to the outbreak but was not as widespread in Greece as in other countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. A study involving psychologists from Portugal indicated that most therapists did not offer online sessions or had very limited experience in this field before the pandemic. However, during COVID-19, these professionals began providing

online sessions with very high engagement, and most of their clients participated (Kiriakaki et al., 2022).

6.3. Theories of Remote Psychological Counseling

6.3.1. Individual Psychology Theory: Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology theory serves as a foundational explanatory framework for understanding the mechanisms of remote psychological counseling. This theory postulates that human behavior is inherently goal-directed, driven by the fundamental desire to achieve a sense of competence and overcome feelings of inferiority. In the context of remote counseling, an individual's decision to utilize this therapeutic modality can be interpreted as a purposeful strategy to compensate for psychosocial difficulties, particularly when face-to-face therapy is inaccessible. Furthermore, Adlerian theory underscores the critical need for social interaction and belonging. Remote counseling platforms fulfill this need by providing individuals with a safe, supportive digital environment to express themselves and interact with a therapist, thereby fostering psychological equilibrium (Mustafa & Samir, 2023, p. 259).

6.3.2. Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT): Cognitive Behavioral Theory is among the most universally applied therapeutic approaches in mental health. It is grounded in the premise that thoughts dictate emotions and behaviors; consequently, cognitive restructuring directly enhances psychological well-being. When adapted to remote settings, particularly as Internet-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (I-CBT), it has demonstrated remarkable efficacy. The inherent structure of CBT makes it highly translatable to digital formats, utilizing tools such as digital cognitive restructuring worksheets, automated homework assignments, and digital mood logging. Extensive research confirms that the outcomes of online CBT are virtually comparable to

face-to-face interventions for various psychological conditions, including depression and anxiety (Andersson & Titov, 2014, pp. 4–11).

6.3.3. Therapeutic Alliance Theory: This conceptual approach posits that the relationship between the mental health professional and the client is the most critical determinant of therapeutic success. The therapeutic alliance relies on three core components: the emotional bond, agreement on therapeutic goals, and consensus on the tasks employed. Historically, skepticism existed regarding the viability of establishing a robust alliance through digital media. However, contemporary research indicates that an effective, empathetic therapeutic relationship can indeed be cultivated via video or audio modalities. This success, however, is heavily contingent upon the practitioner's communication proficiency and their clinical acuity in interpreting subtle verbal and non-verbal cues through a screen (Norwood et al., 2018).

6.3.4. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): Rooted in social psychology, the Technology Acceptance Model explains users' behavioral intentions toward adopting new technologies. TAM posits that the intention to use technology is influenced by expected performance, expected effort, social influence, and facilitating conditions (Al-Shahrani, 2023; Al-Ghamdi, 2024, p. 791). The primary constructs are defined as follows:

- **Performance Expectancy:** The degree to which a user believes the technology will enhance their functioning or well-being (Al-Gahtani et al., 2007, p. 18).
- **Effort Expectancy:** The perceived ease of use associated with the digital platform (Venkatesh et al., 2003, p. 450).



- **Social Influence:** The degree to which a user perceives that significant others endorse their use of the system (Venkatesh et al., 2003, p. 451).
- **Facilitating Conditions:** The availability of technical infrastructure and support required to use the system effectively (Zhou et al., 2010, p. 762). In remote counseling, TAM is invaluable for diagnosing why certain clients or practitioners embrace or resist digital interventions, thereby guiding the optimization of user-friendly mental health platforms (Davis, 1989).

6.3.5. Uses and Gratifications Theory: Originating from media and communication studies, this theory posits that individuals actively select media to fulfill specific intrinsic or extrinsic needs, be they psychological, social, or cognitive. Applied to remote therapy, this framework explains the client-driven demand for e-counseling. Clients actively choose digital platforms because they directly gratify distinct needs that traditional therapy may not, such as heightened privacy, anonymity, immediate accessibility, and spatial-temporal flexibility. It is particularly relevant in explaining the continuity of care during mobility restrictions, such as pandemics or geographic isolation (Ruggiero, 2000, pp. 3–37).

6.3.6. Critical Synthesis and Comparative Analysis of Theoretical Models

While the aforementioned models provide valuable perspectives on remote counseling, a critical comparison reveals that they address fundamentally different dimensions of the digital therapeutic process. CBT and Individual Psychology focus on the *clinical mechanics* of human behavior and change. CBT thrives in the digital space due to its structured, goal-oriented nature, making it highly suitable for

asynchronous and synchronous tools. In contrast, Adlerian theory emphasizes the *relational need* for connection, which digital platforms must strive to replicate.

However, clinical theories alone are insufficient to explain the success or failure of remote counseling without accounting for the medium itself. This is where **TAM and Uses & Gratifications Theory** intersect. While U&G focuses on the *motivational pull* (why clients actively seek out digital therapy for privacy and convenience), TAM explains the *structural push and barriers* (how usability and technical support dictate adoption). Finally, **Therapeutic Alliance Theory** acts as the bridge between clinical efficacy and technological adoption, demonstrating that the medium (technology) does not inherently compromise the message (therapy) if the practitioner is highly skilled.

Ultimately, no single theory comprehensively captures the complexity of electronic counseling. A robust theoretical framework for digital mental health must be integrative: combining the structured clinical efficacy of models like CBT, the user-centric design principles of TAM, and the relational focus of the Therapeutic Alliance to ensure holistic and accessible patient care.

6.4 Tools for Remote Psychological Counseling:

6.4.1 Telephone Calls: Telephone counseling is defined as a form of therapy conducted via phone instead of face-to-face meetings. It is used to provide psychological support and guidance to individuals in need of assistance and/or direction. Telephone counseling is particularly appealing to those who prefer the convenience of not having to leave their homes or workplaces to meet with a mental health professional (Kline, 2010).



6.4.2 Video Calls: Video communication allows the recording of both verbal and non-verbal cues (such as body posture, facial expressions, etc.), contributing to a level of effectiveness comparable to face-to-face counseling (Papanis & Balasa, 2011). These factors collectively enhance communication between the therapist and the client.

6.4.3 Internet-Based Platforms, Websites, and Applications:

Online psychological counseling can produce satisfactory therapeutic outcomes, incorporating both positive and negative elements (Li, Lau et al., 2013). Its main advantage is being the only available solution for individuals who cannot access mental health services. Specifically, it provides mental health services to those living in remote areas far from supportive centers, to individuals in regions with limited counselors, and to those facing mobility difficulties or general health issues. Online counseling services are accessible to anyone, anytime, and anywhere, provided there is internet access, offering greater flexibility and freedom (Maples & Han, 2008; Sussman, 2004).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of online counseling sessions, as it became necessary to reduce or even suspend traditional face-to-face practices to ensure public health (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). Regarding service costs, online counseling has been observed to be more affordable compared to face-to-face counseling. Therapists typically offer online services at lower costs than in-person sessions, facilitating access for individuals with lower socio-economic status. Equally important, online counseling enables clients to connect with therapists from different countries, which is particularly beneficial for those not currently residing in their home countries, such as international students, migrants, and visiting researchers. This allows them to receive psychological support in their native language, enhancing the effectiveness of therapy and psychological comfort (Suler, 2011).

6.4.5 AI-Supported Psychological Counseling: Artificial intelligence applications, such as digital psychological counseling or smart chatbots, are effective tools for providing psychological support. These applications can offer emotional support, strategies to cope with anxiety and depression, and assistance in stress management. In some cases, AI is used to guide clients to specialized counselors if needed (Al-Balqasi, 2025, p. 261).

6.5 Psychological Disorders Amenable to Remote Psychological Counseling:

1. **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD):** Can be effectively managed through Internet-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) (Andrews et al., 2018).
2. **Mild to Moderate Depression:** Online interventions have shown outcomes comparable to face-to-face therapy, particularly using CBT or positive behavioral therapy (Karyotaki et al., 2017).
3. **Social Anxiety Disorder:** Remote cognitive-behavioral therapy is effective, especially through gradual exposure and guidance (Hedman et al., 2011).
4. **Sleep Disorders (e.g., Insomnia):** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) is among the most successful digital psychological applications (van Straten et al., 2018).
5. **Adjustment Disorders:** When resulting from life changes or minor traumas, individuals can be effectively supported remotely (Wagner & Maercker, 2007).

6.6 Cases Unsuitable for Remote Psychological Counseling: According to Continental Hospital, several situations are unsuitable for remote counseling based on their experiences with various patients:



- **Crisis Situations:** If an individual is in crisis or poses a danger to themselves or others, immediate in-person intervention is crucial.
- **Severe Mental Health Conditions:** Some severe cases may require more intensive treatment that remote services cannot provide.
- **Lack of Motivation:** For some individuals, personal structure and accountability are critical; if a person struggles with motivation, they may benefit more from face-to-face sessions.

6.7 Advantages of Remote Psychological Counseling:

- **Access to Psychological Services:** Online counseling provides an effective solution for individuals who face difficulties accessing psychological support, such as those living in remote areas or experiencing mobility or health issues that impede visits to in-person clinics (Fitzgerald et al., 2010).
- **Flexibility in Time and Place:** Individuals can benefit from services anytime and anywhere with an internet connection, granting them greater freedom in scheduling sessions (Kiriakaki et al., 2022).
- **Asynchronous Communication (Store-and-Forward):** Communication via email, for example, allows both the therapist and client more time to process thoughts, express themselves accurately, and plan responses (Court & Beel, 2000).
- **Reducing Social Stigma:** Remote counseling provides an opportunity to receive support confidentially, encouraging hesitant individuals—particularly in small communities—to seek help without fear of judgment (Sherazi, 2025).
- **Cost-Effectiveness and Affordability:** Online sessions are often less expensive than traditional face-to-face sessions, making mental health services more accessible to individuals with limited income (Court & Beel, 2000).

- Cross-Border Communication:** These services allow individuals living outside their home countries, such as international students and migrants, to receive counseling in their native language by connecting with therapists from different countries (Kiriakaki et al., 2022).
- Documentation and Effective Follow-Up:** Text-based or video sessions can be recorded, facilitating later review to enhance therapeutic follow-up and ensure service quality.
- Improved Efficiency for Therapists:** Remote counseling provides therapists greater flexibility in managing schedules and reducing cancellations, helping them achieve a better work-life balance.
- Possibility of Group Counseling:** This technology allows therapists to work with groups of clients simultaneously, enhancing the effectiveness of group sessions while saving time and effort.
- Safety and Risk Reduction:** These methods provide a level of protection for both parties, reducing the risk of malpractice or unprofessional interactions, and minimizing hazards posed by clients who may be a danger to themselves or others.
- Increased Depth of Disclosure:** Clients may disclose themselves in greater detail when interacting via computer compared to face-to-face therapy. They have a greater sense of control over what to reveal and the direction in which they want their narrative to develop. During the Annual Conference of the Australian Psychological Society (Hobart, 1999), a session on telephone and online counseling included observations by King, based on extensive therapeutic experience using these modalities, noting that the depth of disclosure and emotional exploration exceeded expectations (Court & Beel, 2000).

6.8 Challenges and Risks in Remote Psychological Counseling:

Remote psychological counseling faces a number of challenges and risks that must be considered before adopting it as a suitable option.



Lindsey (2008), in his book *Remote Psychological Counseling: Risks, Benefits, and Future Development*, listed the challenges practitioners may encounter during remote counseling as follows:

- **Confidentiality:** Confidentiality is a fundamental element of the therapeutic relationship; however, online counseling exposes information to risks of hacking or misdelivery. A client's privacy may also be compromised by individuals within the home or office. Clients may also harbor doubts regarding the counselor's handling of confidential information. While data encryption is important, no security guarantees are absolute.
- **Informed Consent:** Ensuring full informed consent online is challenging, and an initial face-to-face meeting is preferable if possible. All information related to the therapeutic process should be clearly explained. The American Counseling Association sets standards that include disclosure of confidentiality limits, counselor background, emergency intervention capabilities, and referral procedures for inappropriate cases.
- **Client Safety:** Immediate intervention in emergencies, such as suicidal tendencies, is difficult, particularly when accurate client information is unavailable. Clients may also be in unsafe environments, such as situations of domestic violence, increasing the risks associated with online counseling. The duty to warn can also be challenging to implement.
- **Counselor Credibility:** Verifying the qualifications of online counselors is difficult, allowing unqualified individuals to potentially exploit clients psychologically or financially. The absence of effective verification tools underscores the need for reliable means to confirm professional credentials.
- **Professional Licensing:** Counselors must be licensed in all regions where their clients reside and ensure their professional insurance covers those areas. They should also be aware of legal differences

across jurisdictions and adhere to general ethical principles to navigate conflicts of law.

• **Loss of Face-to-Face Communication:** Online counseling limits many non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and tone of voice, which constrains accurate understanding of emotions. Emojis are not sufficient substitutes and messages may be misinterpreted, as in cases of “flaming” (emotionally charged messages). Additionally, therapists may find it difficult to respond to moment-to-moment emotional cues due to the absence of direct interaction. (Lindsey, 2008)

• **Difficulty Translating Skills:** A major challenge for mental health professionals providing remote services is translating skills used in face-to-face therapy into text-based formats. Many therapists rely on verbal and non-verbal cues, making it difficult to assess clients through text alone. Conversely, therapists who view their role as educators, motivators, or collaborators rather than traditional therapists may find adapting to this format easier (Chechele & Stofle, 2003).

7. Remote Psychological Counseling Platforms in the Arab World

The utilization of remote psychological counseling is rapidly expanding within Arab societies, driven by the need for accessible, confidential, and culturally sensitive mental health care. While global platforms like “7 Cups” and “BetterHelp” set the initial precedent, the Arab world has successfully developed its own tailored digital solutions, beginning with Shezlong, the first Arabic online therapy platform. Today, a wide array of specialized regional applications—including “Labayh”, “Nosghy”, “Tetaman”, “Estenarh”, “Your Mind Insight”, “Ayadi”, and Famcare—actively provide Arab users with secure access to licensed psychological and family counselors. These platforms play a crucial role in Arab communities by ensuring privacy and overcoming traditional social and geographical barriers to seeking mental health support.



8 Conclusion

Remote psychological counseling has emerged as an effective and necessary modality in response to digital transformation and global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The reviewed theoretical models and empirical studies indicate that online counseling can enhance access, flexibility, and continuity of psychological services when ethical and professional standards are respected. Despite its advantages, challenges related to confidentiality, therapeutic alliance, and practitioner preparedness remain significant. The effectiveness of remote counseling largely depends on counselors' technological competence, adherence to ethical guidelines, and appropriate case selection. Therefore, remote psychological counseling should be integrated as a complementary approach to face-to-face services within a structured and well-regulated framework.

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