

Online Psychotherapy for Mental Disorders

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Abstract: This paper explores the rise of online psychotherapy as a new approach to addressing mental health disorders. The purpose is to examine its historical development, main treatment modalities, and evidence of effectiveness. The study adopts a narrative review methodology, analyzing existing literature and highlighting the instruments commonly used, such as standardized self-report measures and digital therapeutic modules. The key findings indicate that online psychotherapy improves accessibility, flexibility, and cost-effectiveness, while also reducing stigma associated with seeking help. However, limitations include concerns about data security, challenges in building strong therapeutic alliances, and restrictions in treating severe cases. Future directions suggest integrating artificial intelligence, mobile health applications, and blended care models to enhance personalization and global access. The study concludes that online psychotherapy is a complementary form of treatment that expands the reach of mental health care without replacing traditional approaches.

Keywords: Online psychotherapy; Telepsychology; Digital mental health; E-therapy; Cognitive behavioral therapy

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1 – Introduction

In recent years, online psychotherapy has become a vital and practical way to deliver mental health care. With the growth of the internet and digital tools, professionals can now reach people who might otherwise have no access to support. This approach, often called e-therapy or telepsychology, uses secure digital platforms to provide evidence-based psychological help through video calls, chat sessions, or mobile applications. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly accelerated its use, showing that therapy can be effective even without face-to-face contact. As a result, online psychotherapy is now seen not only as an alternative but also as a strong complement to traditional care. It helps reduce barriers such as distance, lack of professionals, and social stigma. Therefore, understanding how it works, how it has grown, and what challenges it faces is essential for improving mental health services in the digital age.

1.1- Historical Background

The roots of online psychotherapy can be traced back to the 1990s, when the internet first began to be used as a medium for psychological support. Early initiatives included email-based counseling and supportive chatrooms, which offered basic psychoeducation and emotional assistance (Barak et al., 2008). Over the following decades, advancements in technology and the increasing availability of high-speed internet facilitated the expansion of structured, evidence-based online interventions. By the early 2000s, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) protocols were being delivered through web-based platforms with demonstrated effectiveness (Andersson, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the integration of digital tools into mainstream clinical practice, with many practitioners shifting rapidly to video conferencing and mobile-based applications (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Professional organizations, such as the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), have since issued formal guidelines for the ethical and effective use of telepsychology.

1.2- Review of Online Psychotherapy

Numerous reviews and empirical studies have supported the efficacy of online psychotherapy. Richards and Viganó (2013) reviewed 123 studies on e-therapy and concluded that online modalities can replicate many of the facilitative conditions found in face-to-face therapy, although stronger empirical evidence is still required. In a narrative review of ethical concerns, Stoll et al. (2020) discussed the advantages of accessibility, flexibility, and cost-effectiveness, while also highlighting issues related to privacy, confidentiality, and technology.

Moghim et al. (2023) tested an online cognitive-behavioral therapy (e-CBT) program for depression and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic and reported significant reductions in symptoms after a nine-week intervention. Similarly, Baker et al. (2025) found that remotely delivered CBT for eating disorders improved depressive and anxiety symptoms, although the absence of a control group limited the findings. Murphy et al. (2024) also piloted a digital CBT program for binge eating and observed positive outcomes, though the generalizability of the results remained limited. Together, these studies suggest that online psychotherapy is both feasible and beneficial across a variety of psychological disorders, despite some inconsistencies in the strength of the evidence.

In a related study, Raouane and Saud (2021) examined the *Attitudes of Psychologists Towards Online Psychotherapy and Counselling* to explore how clinical psychologists perceive digital platforms in therapy. Conducted with 47 clinical psychologists in the state of Djelfa, the study adopted a descriptive approach. The findings revealed that participants held neutral attitudes toward online psychotherapy and counselling. They had moderate knowledge and training regarding this approach and possessed some of the necessary resources to implement it. Moreover, they recognized both positive and negative aspects of online therapy, with no significant differences in their opinions. Overall, the study concluded that clinical psychologists demonstrate a basic understanding of the concepts, ethics, and potential risks associated with online psychotherapy, though their acceptance remains cautious

1.3- Research Problem

Although many studies have shown that online psychotherapy can improve mental health outcomes, questions remain about how and why these effects occur. Research by Andersson et al. (2019) and Carlbring et al. (2018) suggests that internet-based therapy can be as effective as traditional face-to-face treatment, especially for anxiety and depression. However, other studies, such as Linardon et al. (2022), note that the quality and consistency of these digital interventions vary widely. This raises important issues about what factors—such as the type of therapy, patient engagement, and technological design—most influence success. Therefore, the central problem of this research is to understand **to what extent online psychotherapy produces reliable and lasting improvements in mental health and what conditions determine its effectiveness.**

1.4- Research Gap

Although the literature demonstrates clear progress in online psychotherapy, several gaps remain. Most studies focus on online cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), leaving other therapeutic approaches—such as psychodynamic and humanistic therapies—largely unexplored (Andersson et al., 2019; Linardon et al., 2022). Moreover, research has been concentrated in high-income countries, with little investigation in low- and middle-income regions where digital access and cultural norms may affect therapy outcomes (Naslund et al., 2020). Additionally, evidence on long-term treatment adherence, relapse prevention, and therapist competence in digital settings is still limited (Carlbring et al., 2018). Ethical concerns about confidentiality, informed consent, and data security also persist (Stoll et al., 2020). Finally, a need exists for integrative frameworks that combine technological innovation with established psychotherapeutic theory. Addressing these issues could strengthen the evidence base and promote equitable, effective digital mental health services across diverse contexts

2- Definition of Online Psychotherapy

Online **psychotherapy**, also known as **e-therapy** or **telepsychology**, refers to the delivery of psychological services through digital communication technologies such as video conferencing, email, chat platforms, or mobile applications. According to the *American Psychological Association* (2013), telepsychology is “the provision of psychological services using telecommunication technologies.” In this sense, therapy can

take place even when the client and therapist are not physically present in the same location.

Aaron, B. Rochlen (2004) defines online therapy as any type of professional therapeutic interaction that makes use of the Internet to connect qualified mental health professionals and their clients (Raouane & al, 2021).

However, Andersson and Titov (2014) describe online psychotherapy as a structured and evidence-based approach that uses internet tools to deliver psychological interventions, often based on cognitive-behavioral principles. Similarly, Barak, Klein, and Proudfoot (2008) define it as a professional mental health counselling process performed through the internet, emphasizing that it preserves the essential principles of traditional therapy—confidentiality, empathy, and professional ethics—while improving accessibility for people who face geographical or social barriers.

Furthermore, Perle, Langsam, and Nierenberg (2013) highlight that telepsychology aims not to replace face-to-face therapy but to extend its reach and ensure continuity of care. Likewise, Rochlen, Zack, and Speyer (2004) note that online counseling allows both synchronous and asynchronous communication between therapist and client, offering flexibility, anonymity, and convenience while maintaining a therapeutic alliance.

In summary, online psychotherapy represents a modern extension of traditional psychological care that uses technology to enhance accessibility, flexibility, and patient engagement while maintaining ethical and clinical standards.

2.1- Growth of Online Psychotherapy

The expansion of online psychotherapy has accelerated over the past decade, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the American Psychological Association (2021), many therapists adopted telepsychology during the pandemic, and most continued using it afterward, recognizing it as a permanent part of clinical practice. O'Dea et al. (2023) reported that implementing a national digital CBT service in Ireland led to increased referrals and improved outcomes in depression and anxiety. Moreover, Torous et al. (2025) described how digital mental health evolved from basic video sessions to complex ecosystems that include apps, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality tools. These patterns indicate that online psychotherapy is no longer viewed as a temporary substitute but as a transformative mode of delivering psychological care worldwide

2.3- Types of Online Psychotherapy

Online psychotherapy encompasses a variety of modalities that differ in terms of structure, interaction, and therapeutic orientation:

1. **Synchronous Video Therapy:** Real-time sessions conducted via secure video platforms, closely mimicking traditional face-to-face psychotherapy (APA, 2020).
2. **Asynchronous Therapy:** Written communication, such as email or text messaging, allows flexibility for both clients and therapists (Barak et al., 2008).
3. **Guided Self-Help:** Structured online modules, often based on CBT, supplemented with minimal therapist support (Carlbring et al., 2018).
4. **Fully Automated Interventions:** Digital mental health applications and AI-driven

platforms that deliver psychoeducation and therapeutic exercises without direct human involvement (Andersson, 2018).

2.4- Effectiveness and Evidence

A substantial body of research demonstrates the effectiveness of online psychotherapy for a range of mental health conditions, particularly depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Meta-analyses consistently report that internet-based CBT is as effective as face-to-face interventions (Carlbring et al., 2018). Furthermore, adherence and patient satisfaction tend to be high, especially when therapist support is included (Andersson, 2018). Nevertheless, the effectiveness may vary depending on the level of therapist involvement, treatment duration, and individual differences among clients (Barak et al., 2008).

2.5- Advantages, Limitations, and Future Directions of Online Psychotherapy

Online psychotherapy presents a range of advantages that make it an increasingly valuable component of modern mental health care. It enhances **accessibility** by reaching individuals in remote or underserved areas and offers **flexibility**, allowing sessions to be scheduled beyond traditional office hours. Moreover, it contributes to reducing **stigma**, as many individuals feel more comfortable seeking psychological help online (WHO, 2021). The approach is also **cost-effective**, minimizing travel and infrastructure expenses, and provides **personalized care**, as digital tools can adapt interventions to meet individual needs.

However, despite these benefits, online psychotherapy still faces several challenges. **Technological barriers**, such as limited internet access or insufficient digital literacy, can hinder participation. **Ethical concerns** remain central, particularly those related to data security, privacy, and confidentiality (APA, 2020). Another issue involves the **therapeutic alliance**, since establishing a strong emotional connection online may be difficult (Barak et al., 2008). Additionally, this form of therapy may not be **suitable** for all patients, especially those experiencing severe mental health crises.

Looking ahead, the **future of online psychotherapy** is shaped by rapid technological advancements and evolving care models. The integration of **artificial intelligence (AI)** may enhance diagnosis, personalization, and progress monitoring. **Mobile health (mHealth)** applications and wearable devices could enable continuous assessment and feedback, supporting clients between sessions. Furthermore, **blended care models**, which combine online modules with in-person therapy, show promise for maximizing effectiveness (Carlbring et al., 2018). Finally, the global expansion of online psychotherapy represents a key opportunity for improving **mental health equity** by increasing access for underserved populations worldwide (WHO, 2021).

2.6- Challenges and Trends in Online Psychotherapy

Despite its progress, online psychotherapy faces several ongoing challenges. Simpson et al. (2021) noted that both therapists and clients encounter barriers related to technology access, confidentiality, and the loss of nonverbal cues. Similarly, Connolly et al. (2022) emphasized that many practitioners lack formal training in digital communication, which may affect treatment quality. Moreover, Probst et al. (2024) found

that clients sometimes experience reduced emotional connection and engagement during online sessions, especially when using text-based formats. Nevertheless, emerging trends continue to reshape the field. Lindegaard et al. (2023) highlighted that hybrid therapy models—combining in-person and online sessions—offer flexibility and enhance patient satisfaction. Furthermore, the integration of AI and virtual platforms, as discussed by Torous et al. (2025), promises more personalized care in the future. Therefore, while online psychotherapy continues to expand, addressing these challenges is key to ensuring its ethical and clinical effectiveness.

3- Method and Tools:

This study relied on a narrative literature review as the most appropriate approach for the topic under investigation. The first step consisted of identifying relevant scientific articles from reputable international databases, namely **PubMed**, **PsycINFO**, **Scopus** and **Asjp**. The inclusion criteria covered studies published between 2015 and 2023 that examined internet-based psychotherapeutic interventions, particularly those targeting common disorders such as anxiety and depression in adult populations. Studies that were not peer-reviewed, not published in English, or that failed to report psychological outcomes were excluded.

Once the relevant studies were selected, they were analyzed according to three main dimensions: the type of intervention (e.g., internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy, psychodynamic therapy, or mindfulness-based therapy), the mode of delivery (videoconferencing, text-based chat, or blended formats), and the reported outcomes of each study.

The information was synthesized using thematic analysis in order to identify recurring patterns and general trends across the literature. This work did not involve original data collection, hypothesis testing, or the use of statistical software, as it was based on a literature review rather than an empirical design. Nonetheless, this method allowed for a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of online psychotherapy by integrating the evidence provided in previous studies.

4- Proposed Treatment Plan for Major Depressive Disorder

Table 1: represents the Treatment Plan for Major Depressive Disorder

Treatment Phase	Objectives	Procedures / Techniques Used	Duration	Tools Used	References
Initial Assessment	Identify symptom severity and contributing factors	Semi-structured clinical interview (SCID-5) Administer Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II)	Week 1	SCID-5 form, BDI-II scale	American Psychiatric Association (2013); Beck et al. (1996)

Setting Therapeutic Goals	Develop a realistic and measurable treatment plan	Discuss patient expectations Define short- and long-term goals	Week 2	Goal-setting form	Beck (2011)
Therapeutic Techniques	Reduce symptoms and enhance cognitive and behavioral skills	Psychoeducation about depression Identification of negative automatic thoughts Cognitive restructuring Behavioral activation Relapse prevention	Sessions 3–16 (12–16 weekly sessions, 45–60 minutes each)	Worksheets, thought and behavior records	Beck (2011); Cuijpers et al. (2013)
Follow-up and Evaluation	Assess improvement and maintain treatment gains	Re-administer BDI-II every 4 weeks Conduct monthly follow-up sessions for 3–6 months	After program completion	BDI-II scale	NICE (2022)

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the previously mentioned references.



Figure (1):Flowchart of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Treatment Plan for Major Depressive Disorder

4- Conclusion

The emergence and rapid growth of online psychotherapy represent a significant transformation in mental health care. By tracing its historical development, examining its various modalities, and reviewing evidence of its effectiveness, it is clear that online interventions have established themselves as valuable tools in clinical practice. Online psychotherapy offers unique advantages, such as increased accessibility, flexibility, and cost-effectiveness, which make psychological support more widely available across diverse populations.

Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly concerning data security, the need for strong therapeutic alliances, and the importance of adapting interventions to cultural and individual differences. These limitations highlight the necessity for continued innovation and rigorous evaluation.

Looking forward, the integration of artificial intelligence, mobile health technologies, and blended models of care offers promising opportunities to strengthen and personalize treatment. At the same time, ensuring equity and ethical safeguards will be critical in shaping the responsible expansion of digital mental health services worldwide.

In conclusion, online psychotherapy is not a substitute for traditional approaches but a complementary avenue that broadens the reach and potential impact of psychological care. Its future success depends on balancing technological progress with the enduring human values of empathy, trust, and individualized support.

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