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WHAT IS ONLINE COUNSELLING?

Annotation. *Online therapy involves the delivery of psychological support via digital platforms such as video conferencing, email, or text messaging. The therapeutic relationship is a unique relationship that is based on mutual trust between the therapist and the client, where the goals and course of therapy are agreed together and increases the benefit in therapy. Increasingly, contemporary literature records good evidence on online practices suggesting that outcomes may be similar to their face-to-face equivalents. Online media has become a promising medium in meeting the growing demand for mental health services. In this context is conducted a literature review.*

Key words: *online therapy, therapist, online psychological counseling.*

Research Type: *Review.*

Анотація. *Онлайн-терапія передбачає надання психологічної підтримки через цифрові платформи, такі як відеоконференції, електронна пошта або текстові повідомлення. Терапевтичні стосунки – це унікальні стосунки, що базуються на взаємній довірі між терапевтом і клієнтом, де цілі та курс терапії узгоджуються спільно, що збільшує користь від терапії. Сучасна література все частіше фіксує вагомі докази онлайн-практик, які свідчать про те, що результати можуть бути подібними до їхніх еквівалентів віч-на-віч. Онлайн-медіа стали перспективним засобом для задоволення зростаючого*

попиту на послуги психічного здоров'я. У цьому контексті проводиться огляд літератури.

Ключові слова: онлайн-терапія, терапевт, онлайн-психологічне консультування.

Тип дослідження: огляд.

Introduction. Across the world, various types of support have been on offer to those individuals who present with psycho-social, health, and mental health issues (Cuijpers, Marks, Cavanagh & Gega, 2009) [12]. The number of online services has not only increased but is also starting to branch out through specialising in different means of communication, creating an «e-spectrum of interventions» (Rickwood, 2012) [23]. These include instant messaging, texting, videogames, smart phone applications and online meetings on both individual and group levels (Barak & Grohol, 2011) [6]. Despite some concerns, the dramatic increase in usage statistics of computer and internet technology in recent years has attracted professionals of all sorts to utilise the medium for various therapeutic purposes. Inevitably, a parallel growth has been observed in available online mental health services (Barak, Hen, Boniel-Nissim & Shapira, 2008) [5]. Regardless of the differences on their theoretical underpinnings, all therapeutic approaches mostly agree on the collaborative nature of goals work (<https://psycnet.apa.org>) [28].

The Aim of The Study. Increasing the studies about the efficacy of online psychotherapies in the literature is essential for the improvement of applications in this field.

Literature Review. Online Counselling. Within the literature, various terms are used for online counselling: « ... including e-therapy (Manhal-Baugus, 2001) [17], cybertherapy (Suler, 2000) [25], online or internet therapy (Rochlen, Zack, & Speyer, 2004) [17], e-mail therapy (Shapiro & Schulman, 1996), e-counselling (Erşahin, 2015; Yüksel, 2022) [13]; [27] internet counselling (Pollock, 2006) [17], web counselling (Erşahin, 2015; Yüksel, 2022) [13]; [27]. cybercounselling (Maples

& Han, 2008), and therapy-e-mail (Shiller, 2009) [17]». As the literature suggests, online counselling can take many forms, and so can its definition. A recent definition by Richard and Viganò (2013) [22] «Online counseling is the delivery of therapeutic interventions in cyberspace where the communication between a trained professional counselor and client(s) is facilitated using computer-mediated communication Technologies» (<https://www.semanticscholar.org>) [31].

Therapy Goals. Therapeutic goals are conceptualized as the outcomes individuals hope to achieve by means of psychotherapy (Chan et al., 1997) [10]. In common language, a goal is often understood as a purpose of an action, conceptualised with ambition, intention and objective. In the therapy world, goals are viewed as an important component of any therapeutic work, in the way it informs the course of therapy. One useful definition is that they are «internal representations of desired states» (Austin & Vancouver, 1996) [4]. Goals can be viewed as different to needs and wants. For instance, at the bottom-line of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs, basic needs start with food, sleep, and warmth; while higher order needs for safety, sociality, and esteem arise due to deprivation. Goals estimate where possible options fall on the spectrum and what could/should be prioritised within the dimensions we see to be most important, and make a move forwards. In the current context, a goal therefore is thought to add equilibrium to needs and wants, a cost and benefit analysis to our choices, and a pathway to chart our priorities. Discussions around the importance of goals in therapy have pervaded numerous therapeutic approaches. They have been present within the humanistic/existential view of therapy (Schneider & Krug, 2010) [20] within the cognitive and behaviourist approach in the integrative approach and within the pluralistic approach (Cooper & McLeod, 2011) [11] to therapy. Indeed, goals constitute one of the three major elements of Bordin's (1979) [9] pan-theoretical concept of working alliance alongside tasks and bond. He identifies these concepts as; Bordin's (1979) [9] conceptualisation, goal setting as well as the shared commitment to these goals could be seen one of the essential

means through which client change occurs. The agreement between the client and therapist about the goals of the therapeutic course:

- The agreement about the tasks of the therapeutic course will address the issues the client brings to therapy and target the set goals.

- The quality of the interpersonal bond between the client and therapist.

Thus for the pluralist therapist, engaging with goals in a collaborative manner could help clients in a number of ways, including:

- Providing a direction related to the therapeutic work/client's future life.

- Negotiation of goals on a regular manner has been seen as crucial to the process, before the client loses their hopes when they stumble over a barrier or a fall.

- Helping to develop a hopeful attitude towards therapy/client's future life with a sensitive attitude, in the knowledge of clients' vulnerabilities and already self-defeating concepts.

- Helping to develop a collaborative working relationship between the therapist and client where clients' personal goals do match with the therapists' preconceived goals set for the client (Mackrill, 2010) [16].

Tryon and Winograd's (2001) [26], definition of goal consensus does justice to the current use of goals, as follows:

- Patient-therapist agreement on goals.

- The extent to which a therapist explains the nature and expectations of therapy, and the patient's understanding of this information.

- The extent to which goals are discussed, and the patient's belief that goals are clearly specified.

- Patient commitment to goals.

- Patient-therapist congruence on the origin of the patient's problem, and congruence on who or what is responsible for problem solution (<https://eric.ed.gov>) [30].

One of the most comprehensive taxonomies of treatment goal themes is the Bern Inventory of Therapeutic Goals (BIT-T), devised by Grosse-Holtforth and Grawe in

2002. The taxonomy was initially developed after analysing 1,031 treatment goals of 298 psychotherapy outpatients at a university clinic, and has been updated since with various applications in clinical practice. The five major goal categories of BIT-T are:

- Coping with specific symptoms and problems;
- Inter-personal goals;
- Well-being and functioning;
- Existential issues;
- Personal growth goals.

Conclusions. Research shows online services to be comparable in many ways to human-to-human interaction. As in the therapeutic alliance, the effectiveness of such interventions are found to be strong enough with a medium effect size (0,53) in a review of 92 studies (client n=9,764), mostly with regard to the treatment of anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders (Barak et al., 2008) [5]. Kooth has accommodated the significant changes observed in adolescent web interactions, moving from email and chat-forums to instant messaging (Boneva et al., 2006) [8]. Given the half a century of research findings showing the therapeutic relationship to be an essential ingredient of the therapeutic process and of good outcomes. These concerns have found voice within the guidelines of the regulatory organisations, such as BACP's first edition of the Guidelines for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy (Goss et al., 2001) [14]. At present, it is not possible to assert that written communication over the internet should, or should not, be considered as an adequate replacement for, or equivalent to, face-to-face provision. Research now reveals that meaningful relationships can also be formed through computer mediated interactions (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Hanley, 2009) [15]. Conducted on extensive populations, studies conclude that real time-text based virtual worlds allow and promote the formation of on-going personal relationships at friendship, buddy-like and romantic levels. More interestingly, results reveal approximate similarities with off-line relationships in depth, interdependence, breadth, and commitment variables. The accumulating evidence and societal inclination towards online media also led BACP authorities to

modify their attitude towards such work, and observe in latter editions, as: «Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that it is not only possible to create deep, emotional relationships online but that, while not replicating them, these can closely resemble relationships formed in face-to-face therapy” (Anthony & Jamieson, 2005) [3]. Studies suggest that guided Internet treatments can be as effective as face-to-face treatments, lead to sustained improvements, work in clinically representative conditions, and probably are cost-effective. Despite these research findings, Internet treatment is not yet disseminated in most places, and clinical psychologists should consider using modern information technology and evidence-based treatment programs as a complement to their other services, even though there will always be clients for whom face-to-face treatment is the best option (Andersson, 2016) [1]. Studies on the effectiveness of online psychotherapy in the treatment of depression indicated a significant decrease in depressive symptoms and similar improvement rates in standard CBT and i-CBT conditions. There have also been significant decreases in psychological effects in online applications for situational and emotional crises, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Online therapy applications for insomnia treatment are effective in reducing symptoms and severity of insomnia and decreasing depressive symptoms (Erşahin, 2015; Yüksel, 2022; APA, 2013; <https://psycnet.apa.org>; <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih>) [2; 13; 27 - 29].

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