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ONLINE THERAPY: NEW GENERATION PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Annotation. *Mental health care has undergone a significant transformation in recent years. Online therapy is the process of receiving psychological support from specialized therapists via internet, video or written communication. Online therapy, also known as e-therapy or teletherapy, has become increasingly popular, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper explores the effectiveness, accessibility, and limitations of online therapy, drawing upon recent research studies. In this context is conducted a literature review.*

Key Words: Online therapy, therapist, psychological counseling, ethics in online psychotherapy.

Research Type: Review.

Анотація. За останні роки догляд за психічним здоров'ям зазнав значної трансформації. Онлайн-терапія – це процес отримання психологічної підтримки від спеціалізованих терапевтів через інтернет, відео- або письмове спілкування. Онлайн-терапія, також відома як електронна терапія або телетерапія, стає дедалі популярнішою, особливо після пандемії COVID-19. У цій статті досліджується ефективність, доступність та обмеження онлайн-терапії, спираючись на нещодавні дослідження. У цьому контексті проводиться огляд літератури.

Introduction. With technological advancements and the global shift toward remote communication, online therapy has emerged as a vital component of mental health services. Online therapy involves the delivery of psychological support via digital platforms such as video conferencing, email, or text messaging. Its growing prevalence demands a closer look at its benefits and challenges. Online therapy is more accessible and practical as we do not need to plan and spare time to go to the therapist's office in online therapy. In rural areas, we may have difficulties in reaching competent psychotherapists. This can prevent us from getting enough benefit from psychotherapy. In such a case, online therapy is more sustainable both financially and in terms of time. We may not be able to get out of where we are due to our physical ailments, and for this very reason, we may need psychological support. Due to the quarantine experienced during the pandemic period, many people's working system and relations with their social environment had to change. Adding to this the concerns about the COVID-19 virus and the problems in getting used to the new order, we have become more disadvantaged in terms of psychological disorders. In such a period, we can reach psychotherapy services in order to increase our psychological resilience without risking our physical health with online therapy. 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. Establishing this relationship may take time and it may be more difficult to establish a therapeutic relationship, especially since face-to-face communication cannot be established in online therapy.

The Aim of The Study. Use of online therapy is rising in Turkey and it is necessary for mental health professionals to follow the development of this method nowadays.

Literature Review.

What is Online Therapy? Online therapy is the provision of psychotherapy services over the internet in cases where the therapist and client cannot conduct face-to-face meetings for different reasons. Also called e-therapy, teletherapy, or virtual counseling. It is a form of mental health support delivered through the internet. Conducted via video calls, chat, emails, or apps. Online psychotherapy is a treatment process between the therapist and the client through technological communication channels. Online psychotherapy and counseling, in our rapidly developing digital world, refer to the types of therapies which can use internet, and which are applied via smartphones, computers and similar communication gadgets. In addition to the fact that online therapies have gained the popularity with the increasing usage of the digital world and the internet, they also have some advantages against the classic psychotherapy such as lower cost, higher privacy and conveniences about time and place that is provided even from homes or vacations; therefore, they are widely preferred and they grow in both application and diversity (Tuzgöl, 2020: 67) [17]. Online therapy covers different mental health services such as psychotherapy, counseling, coaching and support groups

 (https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/features/amp.pdf) [2].

History of Online Therapy. The first online therapy applications started to emerge in the late 1990's. Although initially limited to email or text-based chats, today video conferencing, mobile applications and even virtual reality-assisted therapies are used. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this method gained momentum and gained global acceptance. It can be personalized according to the needs of individuals. Since the 1980's, the widespread use of technology and internet all over the world has caused some life practices to change and transform. Accessing many services over the internet has enabled us not only to be limited to the facilities where we live, but also to not waste time. Since the beginning of 2020, every service that can be used over the internet has started to be of vital importance due to the pandemic experienced all over the world.

Types of Online Therapy:

➢ Video conferencing (Zoom, Skype, etc.);

➢ Text-based therapy (messaging platforms);

➢ Phone calls;

➢ Therapy apps (e.g., BetterHelp, Talkspace)

Accessibility and Convenience. Online therapy offers significant advantages in terms of accessibility. It breaks down geographic barriers, allowing individuals in rural or underserved areas to access qualified mental health professionals (Naslund et al., 2017) [9]. Moreover, it provides greater scheduling flexibility, which is especially beneficial for individuals with demanding jobs, caregiving responsibilities, or mobility challenges. For individuals who might feel stigma associated with seeking mental health support, online platforms can provide a sense of privacy and anonymity (Richards & Viganó, 2013) [14]. One of the leading advantages of online therapy is that it makes the service easily accessible by eliminating the necessity for the client and psychologist to meet face-to-face (Özdemir & Barut, 2020) [11]. Online therapies are very advantageous by being economically more affordable, easily accessible, eliminating the distance between the client and the therapist, and saving time for both parties. As well as face-to-face therapy, online psychotherapies can be used with different groups such as adults, children, adolescents, and families (Oktay, Merdan-Yıldız, Karaca-Dinç & Erden, 2021: 304; Smith, Moller, Cooper, Gabriel, Roddy & Sheehy, 2021) [10; 13].

Challenges and Limitations. Despite its benefits, online therapy is not without challenges. Technical issues such as unstable internet connections and lack of privacy at home can hinder the therapeutic process (S.G. Simpson, 2014) [15]. Moreover, the absence of physical presence may limit non-verbal communication cues, which are crucial for building therapeutic rapport. Concerns have also been raised about the appropriateness of online therapy for clients with severe psychiatric conditions, such as psychosis or acute suicidality, where immediate in-person intervention may be necessary. During online therapy, technological problems such as freezing of the

image, inability to reach the sound, and dropping the call may disrupt the flow of the conversation (Lustgarten & Elhai, 2018) [8]. According to Acar (2022) [1] , online therapy has also some inherent disadvantages. For instance, the client's facial expressions and gestures may not be understood clearly by the therapist, or the therapist may have difficulty empathizing with the client. Since face-to-face communication cannot be established in online therapy, the therapist may have difficulty observing clues that can provide information about the client's mood and thoughts, such as body language, gestures and facial expressions. Online therapy may not be suitable for every client (such as suicidal thoughts, psychosis, etc.) (Andersson, 2018) [3].

Popular Platforms:

➢ Better Help

➢ Talkspace;

➢ 7 Cups;

➢ Amwell;

➢ Platforms with licensed therapists and secure communication;

➢ Zoom, Google Meet, WhatsApp, Skype, etc.;

➢ Safe client platforms (Therapy, Hiwell, etc.).

Who is it suitable for Online Therapy?

➢ Those who are short on time;

➢ Those who live in the countryside;

➢ Those with social anxiety disorder;

➢ Those who are transitioning after the pandemic.

Future of Online Therapy and Trends. Integration with AI and digital mental health tools. More personalized and data-driven approaches. AI-powered therapy bots, virtual reality applications and personalized therapy approaches have an important place in the future of online therapy. With the advancement of technology, more inclusive and effective solutions are being developed. Especially after the pandemic, the demand for digital health services has increased significantly. While

these developments increase access to therapy, they also have the potential to improve the quality of therapy (Wampold & Imel, 2015) [18].

Conclusions. Studies show similar effectiveness to face-to-face therapy for many conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety). Especially effective with CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy). Increasingly accepted by professionals and patients. Numerous studies have demonstrated that online therapy can be as effective as traditional face-to-face therapy, particularly for common mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. A meta-analysis conducted by Barak et al. (2008) [5] found that online therapy has comparable outcomes to in-person interventions, with a strong effect size across various treatment modalities. Additionally, a randomized controlled trial by Andersson et al. (2014) [4] showed that internet-delivered cognitive behavioral therapy (iCBT) produced significant improvements in individuals with generalized anxiety disorder, with outcomes maintained at a one-year follow-up. Studies on the effectiveness of online psychotherapy in the treatment of depression indicated a significant decrease in depressive symptoms (Berryhill et al., 2019; Roman et al., 2020), and similar improvement rates in standard CBT and i-CBT conditions (Thase et al., 2018) [16]. 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 (Furber et al., 2014; Ruwaard et al., 2012). Online therapy applications for insomnia treatment are effective in reducing symptoms and severity of insomnia and decreasing depressive symptoms (Lorenz et al., 2018; Van der Zweerde et al., 2019; cited in Oktay, Merdan-Yıldız, Karaca-Dinç ve Erden, 2021: 317; Zereyalp, Kurtoğlu, Boz, 2024) [19]. According to the findings of the study conducted by Cuijpers et al., (2009) [7]; Rooksby et al., (2015) [12]; Thase et al., (2018) online therapy applications in different groups could be as effective as face-to-face therapies. Although online therapies are not practiced as frequently as face-to-face therapies, they have become popular today as a result of their many advantages and the current widespread use of the internet and technology (Tuzgöl, 2020: 83) [17]. Online therapy is transforming mental health care. Offers

many benefits, but also has unique challenges. Online therapy is a powerful alternative to traditional therapies. Access to mental health is becoming easier thanks to technology. Online therapy is cementing its place as a revolutionary, accessible and flexible method in psychological support services. With its advantages and technical developments, it is expected to become more widespread and effective in the future. Paying attention to ethical and safety issues will improve the quality of the therapy process and increase client satisfaction. Although online therapy was applied before the pandemic period, it has become a more important option during the pandemic period (Simpson & Corinne, 2014) [15]. Online therapy represents a promising advancement in mental health care, offering effective treatment options and increased accessibility. While challenges remain, particularly concerning ethical and clinical appropriateness, the continued evolution of digital platforms and therapeutic techniques is likely to enhance its viability and acceptance. Through online therapy, psychotherapy service can reach a wider population. Delivering therapy online introduces new ethical dilemmas related to confidentiality, informed consent, and cross-jurisdictional practice. Therapists must ensure compliance with data protection laws, such as HIPAA in the U.S., and be licensed to practice in the jurisdiction where the client resides (Barnett, 2011) [6].

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