

Online Tele Counselling: Challenges, Benefits and Ethics Issues

Dr. Samira Khalifa^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Our lives are becoming more and more digitalized as a result of computer technologies. Due to the difficulties and dynamics of modern society, people are facing complicated issues that call for a variety of counseling approaches in order to maximize their quality of life. It is important for counselors to be aware of the advantages as well as limitations of online counseling services that are readily available and technologically enhanced. It is intended to provide individuals with the opportunity to learn more about online counseling and how it works. The present Study aims to review Online Tele Counseling: Challenges, Benefits and Ethics Issues. Online teletherapy counselling has expanded, offering mental health services through various platforms like emails, voice chats, audio platforms, and video calls. This is reviewing based paper on secondary data from various national and international journals, government and non-government public reports and websites. It is important to note, however, that online teletherapy (tele counseling) also presents significant challenges. Sessions can be disrupted and therapeutic rapport compromised by technical glitches, such as poor internet connectivity. In addition, it may be difficult to assess and intervene accurately via virtual communication without non-verbal cues. A number of issues are associated with online tele counseling ethically, including confidentiality, informed consent, competence, and boundaries. Data security and privacy are at risk due to technology that facilitates remote communication. As the article concludes, it emphasizes the importance of addressing ethical issues through strong legal frameworks, technological protections, and equal access programs in order to maximize the potential advantages of online teleconferencing while reducing the hazards associated with it.

Keywords: *Online, tele-counselling, challenges, benefits, ethics issues, counselor, client, communication, security*

With the increasing number of people using the Internet worldwide, an increasing number of resources are becoming available online. There are countless services that may be made available online. Nowadays, anyone can obtain expert mental health treatments, like counseling, online as opposed to through a conventional in-person counseling service. This is a time of great change and transformation; unlike anything the world has ever witnessed.

¹Former Research Scholar, Sardar Patel University, V.V.Nagar, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: March 18, 2025; Revision Received: March 25, 2025; Accepted: March 30, 2025

Increase in India's Online Tele Counselling (tele -Therapy) Sector

In recent years, the online teleconsulting therapy industry has experienced rapid growth due to the COVID-19 pandemic and increased mental health awareness. The earth is being overtaken by the tremendous floods caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, making it difficult for many people to see the bright side of life. Every human being has experienced extreme stress during the post-Covid period. Many people are worried about the moral conundrums that come with internet counseling. Determining the potential benefits and drawbacks of virtual counseling is crucial. The industry aims to address the growing need for mental health services in India.

The Indian Council of Medical Research reported that the country has just about 2,000 clinical psychologists and 5,000 psychiatrists. Online therapy platforms are filling this gap by offering conveniently accessible and reasonably priced mental health services. The lack of mental health experts has resulted in an unmet need for mental health services.

According to Prof. Satya Pal Singh Baghel, **Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare**, 3,372 clinical psychologists were registered with the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) as of July 2023.

The pandemic has exacerbated mental illness, leading to increased pain and isolation. Internet therapists in India are attempting to act as superheroes to save the suffering of those affected by the pandemic.

In India, online therapy platforms have become a viable way to bridge the gap between the supply and demand for mental health treatments.

Aim: With the present study, we aim to investigate perceived online Tele counselling benefits challenges and ethical issues and to identify how these challenges shaped during counselling.

What is online counselling?

Online counseling is the delivery of therapeutic interventions via the **World Wide Web**, wherein a client and a licensed professional counselor communicate using computer-mediated communication technology.

The definition of "online counseling" is often contentious and a topic of ongoing discussion due to numerous definitions in the literature, indicating the existence of various types of internet counseling.

According to Bloom (1998), online counseling is defined as "the practice of professional counseling that occurs when client and counselor are in separate or remote locations and communicate with each other through electronic means."

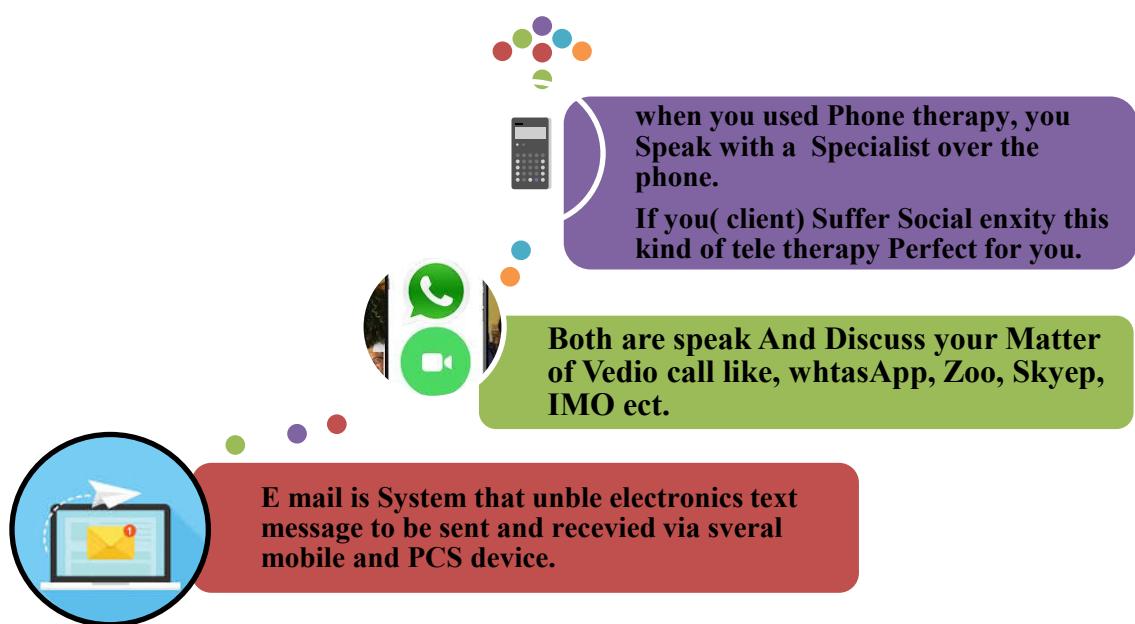
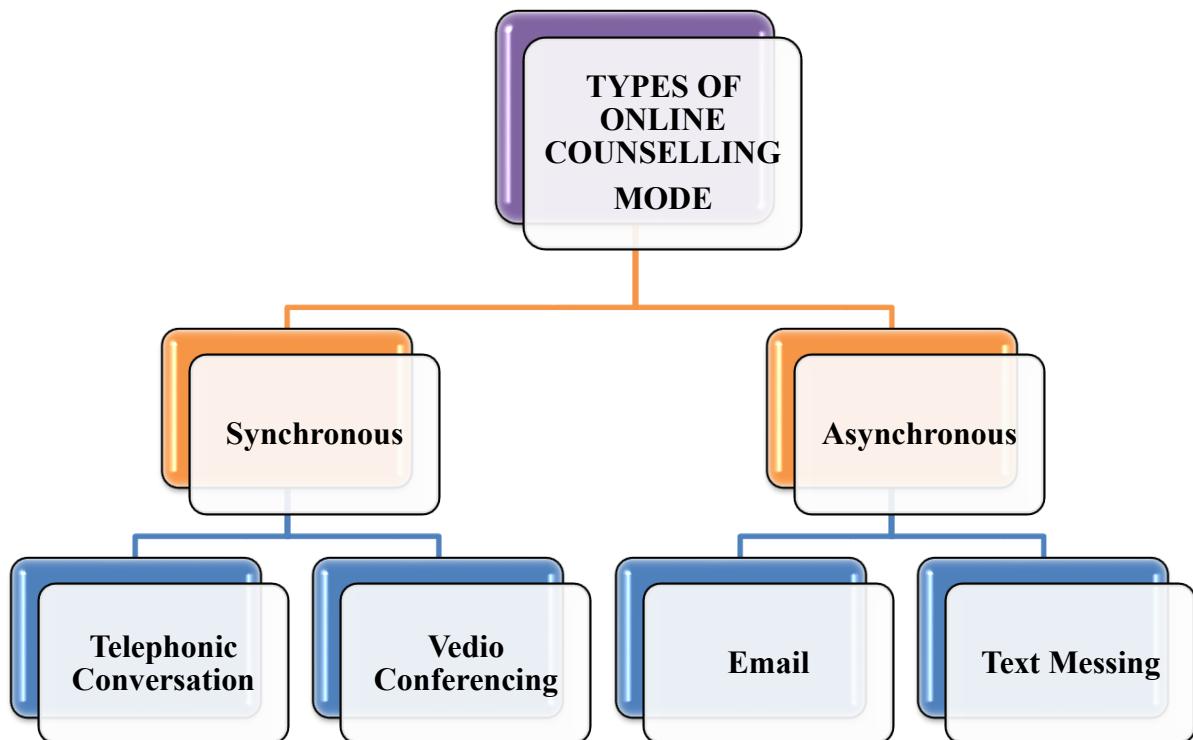
Nature and scope of Counselling

Counselling aids individuals in resolving existing issues, preventing future problems, and enhancing personal, social, emotional, educational, and vocational development, encompassing remedial, preventive, and developmental aspects.

The term "telehealth" simply refers to online counseling as well as online healthcare. Most often, video calls or phone calls are used to provide it.

While in-person consultations may feel more comfortable, they might not be practical for many of us at this time, particularly for individuals with underlying health conditions, hectic schedules, families, limited mobility, remote living, or a long commute to high-quality healthcare facilities.

Types of Online Counseling:



METHOD

In the Present study researcher conducted a systematic review was conducted using collect Web of Science, Advance search, Google Scholar, IJIP, Sage, act. More than 69 Research Paper which included as a sample from national as well as internationally. All article (research Paper) identified this search term were reviewed.

Challenges for the Online Tele Counselling

Internet Connectivity

Online counseling services must be able to access and use reliable internet connectivity in order to operate. Internet access, particularly in rural regions, remains a significant concern in India. A client's experience in therapy may suffer as a result of interruptions caused by poor internet connectivity. To overcome this difficulty, online therapy platforms must devise plans to continue offering services in places with inadequate internet access.

Access to a laptop or tablet for conducting an online session, as well as sufficient broadband, may not always be available. Power outages, issues with websites, and disruptions in internet access can all cause obstacles.

Absence of Nonverbal Cues: Therapists use nonverbal clues like body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions to gauge their clients' feelings and responses during in-person counseling sessions. However, due to issues like low video quality or camera angles, these indicators may be restricted or distorted in online counseling, making it difficult to effectively assess clients' emotional states.

Developing a Good Relationship: Successful treatment depends on the counselor and client developing a solid therapeutic partnership and mutual trust. Because of the virtual distance and potential for technology-related distractions, building rapport can be more difficult in online settings. Counselors must use certain techniques to engage clients and foster a supportive environment.

Security and Privacy Issues: It's critical for counseling to protect client privacy and data security. Online platforms carry the danger of security breaches, which could result in data breaches, inappropriate access to session recordings, or communication interception. To solve these issues, it is crucial to provide encrypted and secure communication systems.

Handling Emergency Situations and Crises: It's critical to offer prompt support and action in emergency situations or crises, such as suicidal ideation or extreme emotional suffering. To effectively handle crisis circumstances remotely, online counselors need to have procedures in place for risk assessment, emergency service coordination, and client safety assurance.

Digital Divide: Some people do not have access to the internet or the equipment needed to avail online counseling services. Age, disability, location, and socioeconomic status are some of the variables that can affect how equally people can access internet counseling services, which may keep some people from getting the help they need.

Benefit of Online Tele counseling

Flexibility: Online counseling provides more flexible scheduling options than traditional in-person therapy, making it beneficial for busy individuals or those with irregular work hours.

Privacy: In a virtual environment where they can maintain their anonymity, some people might feel more at ease talking about delicate topics or sharing intimate details. Frequently, private and secure communication channels are offered by online counseling services.

Convenience: With the convenience of online counseling, people may attend therapy sessions from the comfort of their own home or any location with internet access. This lowers barriers to treatment access and saves time by doing away with the need to travel to a physical location.

Cost-Effectiveness: Online counseling may be more cost-effective than traditional therapy due to its flexibility and elimination of travel expenses.

Consistent Support: Online counseling offers continuous support through regular sessions, messaging, and other communication methods, ensuring individuals maintain consistent progress in their mental health journey. Specialized Services.

A wide variety of therapists with expertise in different fields may be found on online counseling platforms, making it possible for anyone to select a counselor who specializes in their particular needs or worries.

Accessibility: Online therapy can offer access to mental health services that may not otherwise be available to people who live in rural places or have limited mobility.

Decreased Stigma: Since internet counseling is sometimes seen as less stigmatizing than traditional therapy, some people might feel more at ease seeking assistance for mental health concerns through this medium.

All things considered, online tele counselling can be a helpful tool for people looking for mental health care since it provides comfort, accessibility, and flexibility in a private and encouraging setting. Nonetheless, it's critical to pick an online counseling provider that is trustworthy and licensed and to confirm that the therapist you select is licensed and knowledgeable in handling your particular requirements.

Ethical Issues

Professional associations like NBCC have established ethical guidelines for telehealth, ensuring strict standards for distance counselors.

The American Psychological Association (APA) publishes the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct¹ which outlines aspirational principles as well as enforceable standards that psychologists should use when making decisions.

In 1948, *APA president Nicholas Hobbs said*, [The APA Code of Ethics] should be of palpable aid to the ethical psychologist in making daily decisions.

The APA's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct provides ethical standards for psychologists to follow when making decisions.

The APA first published its ethics code in 1953 and has been continuously evolving the code ever since.

The APA's ethics committee only scrutinizes work-related professional activities like research, teaching, counseling, psychotherapy, and consulting, and does not review private conduct.

Fisher and Fried (2003) analyzed the applicability of the American Psychological Association's ethical codes to online counseling and assessment. It seems that the APA's Codes emphasize competence in the use of new technologies, an issue that ACA touched just slightly (Fisher & Fried, 2003).

The APA code of ethics is a set of fundamental principles and ethical standards.

- **Principles:** Whether a psychologist works in mental health, research, or business, these principles should serve as a roadmap to motivate and encourage them in their career.
- **Standards:** The standards delineate expected behavior. There may be negative effects on one's career and legal status if any of these are broken.

Depending on whether institution or professional group offers them, there may be a different number of ethical norms or guidelines for online tele counseling. Nonetheless, the following basic ethical guidelines and factors are usually included.

There are 10 APA ethical codes or standards. The ten standards are *Resolving Ethical Issues, Competence, Human Relations, Privacy and Confidentiality, Advertising & Other Public Statements, Record Keeping & Fees, Education & Training, Research & Publication, Assessment, and Therapy*.

There are five ethical principles in the American Psychological Association (APA) Code of ethics. The five principles are- *Beneficence & Nonmaleficence, Fidelity & Responsibility, Integrity, Justice, and Respect for People's Rights & Dignity*.

Addressing these ethical issues requires careful consideration, adherence to professional guidelines and standards, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure the delivery of ethical, effective, and high-quality tele counseling services

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the importance of timely assistance for clients with suicidal thoughts or personal traumatic situations. It also highlights the potential anxiety and worry experienced by new online therapists due to network connection glitches and lack of preparation. It also emphasizes the need to consider body language and interpretation when using online counseling. Therefore, mental health professionals should be aware of the pros and cons before implementing online counseling. Online tele-counseling offers accessibility, convenience, and cost-effectiveness, but also presents challenges and ethical considerations. Therapists should be mindful of these factors and take proactive steps to mitigate risks and uphold ethical standards in their online counseling practice.

Online psychotherapy offers comfort and emotional resolution for clients, facilitated through video sessions. However, risks include privacy concerns, data leakage, and ethical concerns, especially when held in online settings.

Overall, online counseling has both advantages and disadvantages and a number of legal and ethical considerations surrounding its offering and provision. Research in the area of Internet

therapy or online counseling focuses primarily on self-help interventions with little therapist involvement and there is limited certain empirical evidence with respect to the efficacy of online counseling between therapist and client.

REFERENCES

American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA Code of Ethics*.

American Psychological Association. (2017). *Record Keeping Guidelines*.

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology*.

Backhaus, A., Agha, Z., Maglione, M. L., Repp, A., Ross, B., Zuest, D., ... & Thorp, S. R. (2012). *Videoconferencing psychotherapy: A systematic review*. *Psychological Services*, 9(2), 111–131.

Barak, A., Hen, L., Boniel-Nissim, M., & Shapira, N. (2008). *A comprehensive review and a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of internet-based psychotherapeutic interventions*. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 26(2-4), 109-160.

Barnett, J. E., & Kolmes, K. (2016). *The practice of tele-mental health: Ethical, legal, and clinical issues for practitioners*. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 47(3), 167–173.

Luxton, D. D., Nelson, E. L., & Maheu, M. M. (2016). *A practitioner's guide to tele mental health: How to conduct legal, ethical, and evidence-based tele practice*. American Psychological Association.

Recupero, P. R., & Rainey, S. E. (2006). *Informed consent to e-therapy*. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 60(3), 281–293.

Rees, C. S., & Stone, S. (2005). *Therapist experience of delivering cognitive-behavioral therapy via videoconference*. *Clinical Psychologist*, 9(1), 37–43.

Sampaio, M., Haro, M. V., de Sousa, B., Melo, W. V., & Rocha, A. (2021). *Online psychotherapy: Challenges and possibilities*. *Trends in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, 43(Suppl 1), 14–20.

Shore, J. H., Yellowlees, P., Caudill, R., Johnston, B., Turvey, C., Mishkind, M., ... & Hilty, D. (2018). *Best practices in videoconferencing-based telemental health*. *Telemedicine and e-Health*, 24(11), 827–832.

Simpson, S., & Reid, C. (2014). *Therapeutic alliance in videoconferencing psychotherapy: A review*. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 22(6), 280–299.

Zur, O. (2011). *Telepsychology or telehealth: Legal and ethical considerations*. *California Psychologist*, 44(1), 24–27.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Khalifa, S. (2025). Online Tele Counselling: Challenges, Benefits and Ethics Issues. *International Journal of Social Impact*, 10(1), 274-280. DIP: 18.02.025/20251001, DOI: 10.25215/2455/1001025