

The Virtual Therapist: Understanding the Dynamics of Telepsychiatry on Therapeutic Relationships

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Abstract

Telepsychiatry has emerged as a promising approach to expanding access to mental health care and improving therapy outcomes through the use of digital technologies. As this modality grows in importance, it becomes increasingly important to examine its impact on therapeutic relationships, which form the basis of successful mental health interventions. The aim of this research project is to examine the dynamics of telepsychiatry on therapeutic relationships and to shed light on its implications for person-centered care. **Methods:** A mixed method approach was used, combining quantitative data collection and qualitative interviews. A diverse sample of patients with mental illness (n=200) seeking treatment through telepsychiatry platforms was recruited from different geographic regions and demographic backgrounds. Participants completed validated questionnaires to assess their perception of the therapeutic relationship and overall treatment satisfaction. In addition, a subset of participants (n=30) engaged in semi-structured interviews to provide detailed insights into their experiences of virtual therapy sessions. **Results:** A preliminary analysis of quantitative data revealed that the therapeutic relationship in telepsychiatry was generally perceived positively by patients. The majority of participants indicated that they felt heard, understood, and supported by their virtual therapists. The mean score on the Therapeutic Relationship Questionnaire (TRQ) was 4.72 out of 5, indicating a high level of perceived therapeutic alliance. In addition, there was a significant positive correlation between TRQ scores and treatment adherence ($r=0.67$, $p<0.001$), suggesting that a stronger therapeutic relationship was associated with better treatment engagement and continuity of care. Qualitative results provided differentiated insights into the dynamics of telepsychiatry. Participants expressed their appreciation for the convenience and flexibility of virtual therapy, which allows them to access medical care from the comfort of their own home and bypass potential barriers such as transportation and stigma. However, some patients also highlighted challenges related to technical problems and concerns about privacy and

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confidentiality. Despite these challenges, many participants emphasized the importance of the virtual therapist's ability to show empathy and emotional support, which fostered a sense of trust and connection in the therapeutic relationship.

This research provides valuable insight into the impact of telepsychiatry on therapeutic relationships and underscores its potential as an effective alternative to traditional face-to-face therapy. The positive perception of the therapeutic relationship in telepsychiatry underscores its importance for mental health care.

Keywords: telepsychiatry, dynamics, therapeutic relationship