

# Example of alternative therapy via electronic channels research paper

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



In today's fast-paced world, therapy and counseling sessions are becoming a commonly sought after thing by the everyday individuals. From high school adolescents to retired businessmen and everybody in-between, more and more people are finding that they can benefit from what therapy and counseling can offer. However, the world is only become busier and more fast-paced and the population is faced with the problem of time. Where do they find the time to seek these services? It can take weeks just to find a counselor, let alone carving out the weekly hours driving to an office, sitting for a session, and driving home again. This feat in itself can prove problematic. Problems such as these have enticed therapists and counselors to begin offering sessions electronically, via the internet and telephone meetings. While some believe this approach to be ethically irresponsible there are many benefits to this approach.

The concept of electronic therapy and counseling sessions is relatively new. Emerging in the 90's, the public was skeptical. The concept was originated to save the public time. Commuting, working, caring for one's family and miscellaneous errands often leaves little time for mental health. It was thought that electronic therapy sessions would make it easier to schedule time into an individual's day for such a thing. Many studies were held to test the validity of therapy and counseling sessions held over the phone or online video sessions versus traditional face-to-face sessions in order to test whether this method would work or not. An article titled " Working Alliance in Online Therapy As Compared to Face-to-Face Therapy: Preliminary Results" published in CyberPsychology and Behavior cited the efforts of Jonathan Cook and Carol Doyle in this field. Basically, Cook and Doyle set out to

understand whether or not geography played a part in the counselor or therapist building a relationship with the patient (2004). They used a small sample of female subjects for the online test group versus a controlled group for traditional testing. Over a period of six months they monitored counseling and therapy sessions over video counseling sessions as well as traditional counseling sessions (2004). At the end of the study they were able to discern that geography played no part in relationship building. Therapists and counselors were able to build a solid working alliance with patients both present in their office as well as through a computer screen. In fact, some of their studies showed that stronger bonds may have formed with patients seeking counsel electronically (2004).

There was still more testing to be done in order to prove the validity of this form of therapy; the public was still unsure of whether or not to trust this new technology. In an article published in *Computer-Mediated Counseling*, titled "An Empirical Study of a New Mental Health Treatment", researchers Gary E. Cohen and Barbara A. Kerr sought to discover if this new form of therapy had any impact on individuals seeking therapy and counseling for specific reasons. Their results yielded hope for those suffering from a few different psychological afflictions, anxiety in particular (1999). Many people suffering from issues such as anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, or fear of crowds may find it more troublesome than others to make it out of the house for traditional therapy sessions that could benefit them. Social anxiety and fear of crowds prevents many from being around people; they will go to great lengths to stay indoors. Obsessive compulsive disorder can become overwhelming, especially in public places, and sometimes the individual feels

it is easier to stay at home. Often people suffering from these and other disorders even feel as if it is less embarrassing for them to just stay indoors, rather than bear their disorder to the public. Kerr and Cohen discovered that electronic counseling was capable of benefiting all patients who received this service but was of particular use to people who suffered from these disorders (1999). It allowed the individuals to feel comfortable in their own environment while receiving help. The added stress of leaving the house to seek help vanished, adding benefits that traditional therapy would have otherwise eliminated. Cohen and Kerr also postulated that individuals suffering from disfigurements, or disorders such as Bodily Dismorphic Disorder, may profit more from electronic therapy sessions (1999).

Despite these and other advantages to electronic therapy sessions, there is still skepticism within the medical community. Ethical questions have been raised. Studies published in *Journal of Clinical Psychology* in an article titled "Online Therapy: Review of Relevant Definitions, Debate, and Current Empirical Support" asks whether or not it is appropriate to counsel an individual without being able to observe their behavior firsthand. The researchers hypothesized that without being able to really observe a patient's behaviors it would be easy to miss suicidal or homicidal markers. If the therapist or counselor were only judging the patient's mental health through a screen or over the phone, the patient could more easily fake their behavior and hide things that may help the therapist more efficiently diagnose the patient (2004). The researchers also suggested that electronic therapy sessions would be a good way for patients to seek drugs without actually having mental health issues. It would be easy to have a list of

symptoms, actions, and even a script in front of you when discussing your issues with a therapist over the phone. Essentially, electronic therapy sessions could make drug-seeking behavior easier for those who want to abuse the system. The therapist would also have no way of knowing if another person was in the room with the patient. This would make it easy for the patient to be coached when they are talking, making a script or a list of symptoms unnecessary (2004).

In conclusion, there are still many issues to debate concerning electronic therapy sessions. Seeking counseling online or via telephone could potentially make drug-seeking behavior harder to detect. It could also make certain harmful behaviors more difficult to notice. However there are many benefits to this technology. There was no significant difference in working alliance between groups who sought therapy face-to-face and those who received therapy electronically. There is also research to suggest that electronic therapy sessions may allow patients to open up more and create a stronger bond with their counselors. There is also research showing that electronic therapy sessions could greatly help those suffering from mental afflictions that make leaving the house or going in public very difficult. Though there are certain issues that prove problematic for therapy via online and telephone sessions the pros outweigh the cons.

## References

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