



AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

# COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGISTS' VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF E-THERAPY IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

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# COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

- An emergent scope of practice in the field of psychology in New Zealand
- Curiously engaged in a holistic view of human experience, phenomenology
- Emphasis on context and culture
- The therapeutic relationship is the central value
- The scientist-practitioner model is the foundation for training and education

# E-THERAPY

- Health and mental health modalities that are technology-based.
- Can provide psychological therapy, support, assistance, and information/education and help with treatment, prevention, and aftercare.
- E-therapy can consist of:
  - Stand-alone internet programmes administered by the client without direction of a clinician
  - Client-clinician therapeutic communications via technology
  - Use of technological tools as an addition to routine therapy

(Van Kessel, 2016)

# METHOD

- Participants

- Six women, one man
- Registered counselling psychologists currently working within Aotearoa/ NZ

- Recruitment

- AUT counselling psychology register
- Snowball sampling

- Methodology

- Qualitative Descriptive within a Post-Positivist framework.

- Interviews

- Semi-structured

- Analysis

- Thematic analysis

# RESULTS

- Five main themes
  - Limitations of e-therapy
  - Benefits of e-therapy
  - E-therapy fit with Counselling Psychology
  - E-therapy as an adjunct
  - Training needs

# LIMITATIONS OF E-THERAPY

## ETHICAL AND TECHNICAL ISSUES DIFFERENT THERAPEUTIC CONTEXT

*"If we were talking ... anyone who is high risk or emotionally volatile ... any ... personality disorder I would probably stem away from Skype."*

*"I couldn't get skype working last time so we did a phone therapy session"*

*"It feels quite removed when you are not in the same room as the person ... things might be misinterpreted.... It's not as easy communicating with someone through Skype"*

(Skype examples)

# BENEFITS OF E-THERAPY

## FLEXIBILITY

That flexibility is a really good benefit...For the younger generation ... That's going to be really important to be well versed in technology and different forms of e-therapy to help them relate"

## RESPONSIVE TO CLIENTS NEEDS

"I decided to offer a skype therapy to my longer-term clients' ... so we did skype while I was overseas"

## INCREASED ACCESS

"I think that therapy should be accessible to everybody and if it's not possible to do that in person then I think there's nothing better than e-therapy. Access to health services is one of the biggest barriers"

## WORKS AS A SUPPORT

"It helps them to become their own therapist"



# E-THERAPY FIT WITH COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

PARADOXICAL VIEWS AROSE UNIVERSALLY AMONG PARTICIPANTS

## HOLISTIC, RESPONSIVE, PREVENTATIVE

“I think it can fit in the context of counselling psychology quite well as we do take that holistic whole-person approach and are responsive to the person and their situation”

“I think it fits well into the preventative focus ... for instance mindfulness... online resources and apps ... enables them to really take it in their lives and run with it and I think ultimately that can really help to prevent further struggle in people's lives”

## THE SCREEN IS A BARRIER

“In terms of ... the therapeutic relationship...I do find the screen a ... barrier”

## A TIME AND A PLACE FOR E-THERAPY

“I wouldn't do it with a new client because I don't feel that I know them well enough and it's not something that I wish to offer someone long-term as a therapeutic modality... When I'm out of town ...and the client doesn't want to miss a session.... in terms of face-to-face therapy Skype is only ever going to be a backup for me personally ... I'm the alongside face-to-face therapy person”.



# E-THERAPY AS AN ADJUNCT

AN OUTCOME OF THE PARADOXICAL RELATIONSHIP EMERGED FROM THE DATASET

## CAN STRENGTHEN THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

“E-therapy always has its benefits but ultimately if we rely completely on that there’s always going to be something missing in terms of that person-to-person therapeutic relationship...but we can ... use them both together wisely. So in that sense, we can use it to add value to the therapeutic relationship ... to strengthen it

## NEEDS TO FIT WITH THE CLIENT

“I think there are probably clients that wouldn’t like it at all. I think it would be good to provide it as an option rather than the only way”

## NEED FOR HUMAN CONNECTION

“We have to keep that therapeutic relationship that human-to-human relationship at the front of everything we do”

## NOT A QUICK FIX

“I think it should be an adjunct rather than a be all end all. I think policy makers might potentially see it as a quick-fix solution”

# TRAINING NEEDS

- Practice and ethical guidelines
- Evidence-based e-therapy training
- Practical and technical skills training
- Opportunities to share peer experiences
- E-therapy training for specific clients

# IMPLICATIONS

- There are limitations and benefits of using e-therapy in clinical practice from a counselling psychology perspective.
- Most participants do integrate e-therapy into their clinical practice and see it as useful as an adjunct.
- They believe training in e-therapy would benefit all CPs and they have clarified their training needs.
- Most participants have difficulty with tele-conferencing and are apprehensive to administer it, however, some are still attempting to use it despite a lack of competence in this area.
- A lack training in this area of the field: Action needs to be taken to implement rigorous e-therapy training into graduate programmes and ongoing training for registered psychologists in New Zealand.
- Counselling psychologists are concerned that policy makers and organisations could latch onto e-therapy as it is cost-effective and roll it out as a panacea when it is not going to help everyone.