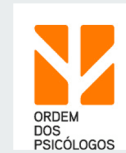


## Teleconsultations in clinical psychology: A brief overview for an adequate practice

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## Introduction



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## Teleconsultations

- Remote consultations – client and professional are located in different geographical spaces, (they are not physically present)
- Digital tools
  - Videoconferencing
  - Phone
  - Email
  - Chat
  - Virtual worlds
  - ...
- Currently, the prototypical case are consultations through videoconference

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## Teleconsultations: Where were we at the beginning of the pandemic?

E-health group study (headed by Tom van Daele) on "Online consultations"

- Data collection: between March 18 and May 5, 2020

N= 2082 individuals

Austria (N = 65), Belgium (N = 250), Cyprus (N = 45), France (N = 250), Germany (N = 168), Italy (N = 250), Lebanon (N = 73), Lithuania (N = 119), the Netherlands (N = 81), Norway (N = 250), Portugal (N = 250), Spain (N = 31), and Sweden (N = 250)

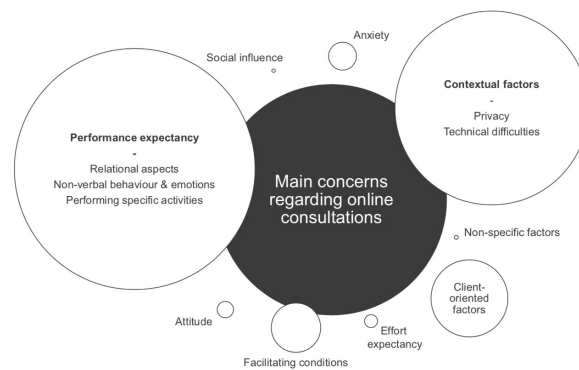
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## Main Results

- Previous experience of online consultations: 38% (aprox 1/3)
- 62% provided recently online consultations + 18% intended to so (aprox 80%)
- Training: 11% (n=226) had previous training, but a large number with a reduced number of hours (less than 4 hours, n=55)

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## Main concerns (2020)



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## In sum, at May, 2020, we had...

High uptake of online consultations during the COVID-19 pandemic

Limited previous training

Varied concerns about the performance of online consultations in a mental health context

- Relational aspects
- Privacy
- Technical difficulties
- Ethical issues and responsibilities
- Payments, price of platform, and other practical issues

Source: Witte et al (2021). Online consultations in mental healthcare during the COVID-19 outbreak: An international survey study on professionals' motivations and perceived barriers. *Internet Interventions*, 25, 100405

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## One thing we know



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**It works**

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**Key competences for an  
adequate practice**

—

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## Main competences

- All the skills that are mandatory for an adequate in-presence (face-to-face) practice PLUS adaptation to the specific medium
- Main domains of competence\*
  - Intake, assessment procedures, and delivery of treatment
  - Virtual environment, telepresence, and therapeutic presence
  - (Informed) technological choices
  - Legal and regulatory issues
  - Collection of digital information
  - Ethical issues

\*Inspired in CTiBS interprofessional framework for telebehavioral health competencies

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## A quick overview of some basic competences

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## **Intake, assessment procedures and delivery of treatment**

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## **Intake and assessment procedures**

- Review with the client carefully, beforehand, the appropriateness of teleconsultations
- Adapting in-person requirements and procedures to the teleconsultations
- Monitor the real engagement with teleconsultations

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## Initial screening



Initial in-person session?



Assess initial preferences and needs of the client



Systematically review any potential obstacle to teleconsultations

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## Accepting a new client (screening)



The technology is appropriate for this client and for the treatment



The available physical settings are appropriate



When possible, verify contact info (address, phone, email)



Develop an emergency plan



Explain and sign an informed consent form

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## Exclusions, when possible

- Teleconsultations are not a good choice for clients with the following symptoms
  - Psychotic
  - Severe depressive or anxiety symptoms
  - Substance dependence
  - Impulsive

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## Assessment and treatment procedures

- As thorough as an in-person consultation
- Adapt all the materials and prepare all the situations beforehand (assessment or treatment)
  - Potential aided by "teleassistants"
    - people who can assist the person in loco
    - people that are remotely preparing the client for the sessions

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## Safety plans

- Create a safety plan for potential emergencies
- It implies knowledge about the local regulations and emergency contacts/resources + potential collaborators

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## Virtual environment, telepresence and therapeutic presence

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## Telepresence (TPr)

- Using technologies that allow users to feel as if they were present – or to have a remote effect
- Haddouk (2015): “remote presence”
  - Cinemas?
  - Phone
  - Videoconference
  - VR/AR
- Bouchard et al. (2020):
  - A key element for good results: TPr is associated with the development of the therapeutic alliance, moderating its effect on outcome

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## What is wrong here?



- Backlight effect

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What is wrong here?



- Distracting and messy background
- Strange light effect above the head

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What is wrong here?



- Looking from above

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## What is wrong here?



- The background is ok
- 1/3 of the screen is ok
- Looking to the camera (as if)
- Face with no shades
- BUT... There is a reflex on the glasses



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## Some tips for a good Telepresence?

- Adopt an adequate posture. Avoid too much gestures. Lean slightly forward.
- Be a little more expressive (slightly more)
- Make eye contact, as if looking to the person
  - Working in a laptop? Put something below.
  - <https://personcenteredtech.com/2016/11/02/making-eye-contact-over-video-in-telemental-health-services/>


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## TPr Tips (2)

- Light
  - Avoid shades. Good lighting.
  - Avoid distracting backgrounds (shelves, paintings, ...)
  - Avoid clothes with distracting patterns
  - Test reflex in glasses
- Sound: Use appropriate audio devices; check for privacy
- TEST everything beforehand

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## (Informed) Technological choices

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## Technological choices

- The psychologist is responsible for the technological choices (but not entirely for their operation)
- Give preference to digital means who follow GDPR (usually claiming to be GDPR “compliant”)
- Opt for end-to-end encryption
- Check your signed agreements with software providers and look for privacy, security, and safety issues.
- A simple rule (even if potentially fallible) : “if it is cheap, it probably is not safe enough”
- Mention the potential risks in the informed consent by the client

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**Some notes on...**  
**Legal and regulatory issues**  
**Ethical issues**

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## **Regarding teleconsultations, we need to master...**

- National and transnational regulations of professional practice of teleconsultations
- Laws regulating international provision of services
  - Regulation (EC) No 593/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 on the law applicable to contractual obligations (Rome I) – State it in the informed consent
- Master the national and transnational ethical codes regulating the profession, and teleconsultations, in particular

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**Thank you!**

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