**Literature Review: The Use of Telehealth in Counseling**

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The advent of telehealth has transformed the delivery of healthcare services, offering unprecedented access to care for diverse populations. As a counselor, making evidence-based decisions on telehealth interventions is crucial for providing effective and equitable care. This literature review focuses on socioeconomic and technology barriers in telehealth and the use of telehealth with children, adults, and older adults. It includes six peer-reviewed research articles published within the last five years, providing insights into current findings, methodologies, and implications for professional counseling practice.

**Review of Major Qualitative and Quantitative Findings**

The selected articles provide a comprehensive overview of telehealth services' findings, challenges, and benefits. Barney et al. (2023) conducted a mixed-methods study examining the implementation and impact of telemedicine in an adolescent and young adult medicine clinic. Their findings revealed high satisfaction rates among patients and clinicians, highlighting the convenience and accessibility of telemedicine. However, concerns regarding the lack of physical examination and the necessity of digital literacy among patients were also noted.

Casemiro et al. (2022) carried out a scoping review protocol to assess the use of telehealth in outpatient care for children and adolescents with chronic conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The review underscored telehealth's effectiveness in maintaining continuity of care while identifying barriers such as limited internet access and the need for tailored communication strategies.

In exploring socioeconomic disparities, Darrat et al. (2021) found that patients from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were less likely to utilize telehealth services during the COVID-19 surge. Their qualitative analysis highlighted challenges like limited access to technology and digital literacy, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address these disparities.

Haimi (2023) conducted a narrative review that combined quantitative data on telehealth adoption rates with qualitative analyses of patient experiences. The review revealed paradoxical effects, with telemedicine increasing access to care for some while exacerbating disparities for others due to technology access and socioeconomic status. The study advocates for policies ensuring equitable access to telehealth services.

The systematic review by Snoswell et al. (2021) evaluated the clinical effectiveness of telehealth through multiple meta-analyses. Findings indicated that telehealth is as effective as in-person care for various conditions. However, gaps in the literature were identified, such as the need for more research on long-term outcomes and effectiveness in diverse populations.

Finally, Wilson et al. (2021) investigated barriers and facilitators to e-health use among older adults. Their review highlighted the importance of user-friendly technology and support systems, noting significant variability in e-health adoption rates. The study emphasized the necessity of age-appropriate interventions to enhance telehealth utilization.

**Methods Used to Collect and Analyze Findings**

The methodologies used in these studies vary, offering a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Wilson et al. (2021) used a scoping review to identify barriers and facilitators to e-health use among older adults for qualitative research. The strengths of this method include a comprehensive understanding of user experiences, while limitations include potential biases in the selection of studies. Barney et al. (2023) employed mixed methods, including interviews and surveys, to explore telemedicine experiences in an adolescent and young adult clinic. This approach provides rich, contextual data but may be limited by sample size and response bias. Casemiro et al. (2022) outlines a scoping review protocol to assess telehealth for children and adolescents. The protocol ensures a systematic approach, but the actual review's comprehensiveness will depend on the execution.

For quantitative research, Darrat et al. (2021) analyzed data on telehealth use during the COVID-19 pandemic, employing statistical methods to identify disparities. The study’s strength lies in its large dataset, though self-reported data may limit it. Haimi (2023), while primarily a narrative review, includes quantitative insights on telemedicine’s impact on healthcare disparities. The narrative approach provides a broad overview but may lack depth in specific areas. Snoswell et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of meta-analyses, providing robust evidence of telehealth’s clinical effectiveness. The strength of this method is its comprehensive analysis, though the quality of included studies may limit it.

**Objective Analysis and Implications for Counseling Practice**

The reviewed literature offers valuable insights into the use of telehealth in counseling, highlighting both its potential and challenges. Telehealth can bridge gaps in healthcare access, particularly for rural and underserved populations (Snoswell et al., 2021). It offers convenience for clients, reducing the need for travel and allowing for more flexible scheduling (Barney et al., 2023). Evidence supports the efficacy of telehealth interventions for various mental health conditions (Snoswell et al., 2021). However, socioeconomic barriers, such as lack of access to technology and internet, can hinder the use of telehealth services (Darrat et al., 2021). Older adults and individuals with low digital literacy may struggle to navigate telehealth platforms, and ensuring client confidentiality and data security remains critical (Wilson et al., 2021).

The findings from these studies inform the ongoing development of the counseling profession by emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address the digital divide and improve digital literacy among clients (Wilson et al., 2021). Ensuring ethical practices in telehealth, particularly related to privacy and informed consent, is also crucial (Haimi, 2023). Advocating for policies that promote equitable access to telehealth services for all populations is essential (Darrat et al., 2021). A critical area highlighted in the literature is the need for targeted interventions to improve digital literacy and access to technology. Wilson et al. (2021) emphasize that older adults often face significant challenges in adopting telehealth due to limited technological skills and access. Training and support for these populations can help bridge the digital divide and ensure they can benefit from telehealth services.

Furthermore, the ethical considerations surrounding telehealth practice are paramount. Haimi (2023) discusses the importance of maintaining patient confidentiality and ensuring secure data handling in telehealth services. As telehealth continues to evolve, counselors must stay informed about best practices and ethical guidelines to protect client privacy and build trust in telehealth interventions. Another critical aspect of telehealth highlighted in the literature is its potential to enhance accessibility and reduce barriers to care for underserved populations. Darrat et al. (2021) found that telehealth can mitigate some challenges low-income and uninsured individuals face in accessing healthcare. However, the study also underscores the need for ongoing efforts to address systemic disparities and ensure that telehealth services are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status.

In addition to addressing barriers, telehealth has been shown to improve the quality of care for various mental health conditions. Snoswell et al. (2021) provide evidence of the clinical effectiveness of telehealth interventions, demonstrating positive outcomes for clients. These findings support the integration of telehealth into counseling practices as a viable and effective option for delivering mental health services.

**Conclusion**

Telehealth has become integral to modern healthcare, offering numerous benefits and presenting significant challenges. By understanding the socioeconomic and technology barriers and the unique needs of different age groups, counselors can make informed decisions to provide effective and equitable care. The reviewed literature highlights the importance of addressing these barriers and continuously evolving counseling practices to meet clients' diverse needs in telehealth. According to Balkin and Kleist (2022), counselors must adopt a practitioner-scholar approach to remain informed about current research and best practices, which is essential for integrating telehealth effectively into their practice. Integrating telehealth into counseling practice requires a multifaceted approach that includes addressing technological and socioeconomic barriers, maintaining ethical standards, and tailoring interventions to meet the needs of diverse client populations. By staying informed about current research and best practices, counselors can enhance their ability to provide high-quality care through telehealth and contribute to the ongoing development of the counseling profession (Balkin & Kleist, 2022).

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