



Hanging by a Connectivity Cable: A Scoping Review on the Ethical Issues of Teletherapy

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Abstract

In response to the global COVID pandemic, teletherapy work emerged as a crucial stopgap solution, providing an augmentative lifeline for clients and mental health practitioners alike. This scoping review reflects the ever-changing field and practice of psychology, and reviews local and international contemporary literature on the ethical issues inherent in the area of teletherapy. Selected journal databases, such as Google Scholar, EBSCO Host Information Services, and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) were used as a search strategy to collect recent literature. A total of sixteen (16) relevant studies were included in this review. All of the emerging literature reiterated the need for a targeted engagement among interdisciplinary and interprofessional teams to promote policy reform agenda to develop common frameworks and guidelines for the sustainable practice of teletherapy, fortifying practitioners' mental health competencies, strategies, and decision-making capacities. The review notes a critical approach towards teletherapy emphasizing the unique ethics of teletherapy. Finally, this paper proposes that teletherapy work has expanded into research on new specializations and broader niche practices in response to the complex professional roles of mental health practitioners.

Keywords: *teletherapy, ethical issues, mental health practitioners, technology, policy reform*

Introduction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt in all areas of life, changing societal norms and work structures, influencing mental healthcare paradigms, and accelerating technological advancements. The crisis left an indelible mark on the global landscape, and its developments during that time have endured. For example, teletherapy has significantly increased as a remote alternative to traditional in-person psychotherapy/counselling sessions (Stoll et al. 2020). It emerged as a crucial stopgap solution during lockdowns, providing an augmentative lifeline for clients and mental health practitioners alike. Teletherapy was defined by the American Psychological Association (2023) as a form of psychological service that utilizes information and telecommunication technologies. It encompasses a wide range of communication methods, including telephone, mobile devices, email, chat, text, video conference, internet platforms, and web apps to provide both synchronous and asynchronous therapeutic interactions. Teletherapy involves the use of electrical, electromagnetic, electromechanical, electro-optical, and electronic means to prepare, transmit, communicate, or process psychological information (APA, 2023).

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Notwithstanding the fact that previous research has begun to outline both the benefits and drawbacks of teletherapy (Anil et al., 2023; Stoll et al. 2020), it is critical to identify and delve deeper into the current best practices of mental healthcare professionals integrating teletherapy as a standard mental healthcare service into their practice. These new technologies evidently become a driver for change and transformation in psychological and counselling work, albeit they also bring along a new set of challenges, necessitating a call for more evidence-based research into the ethical issues inherent in this growing field of teletherapy work (Stoll et al., 2020; Tajan et al., 2023). As teletherapy continues to be seen as a panacea for the continuity of providing mental health services, it also exposes digital divide – the vulnerabilities and limitations of the mental healthcare systems in low-income and developing countries (Hernani, 2022; Leochico et al., 2020), thereby underscoring the need for innovative solutions. This initiative may help in determining the most effective ways to promote and implement teletherapy, ascertain which specific groups or individuals benefit the most from this approach, and specifically its utilization in reaching the grassroots (Eguia & Capio, 2022; Gangamma et al., 2022; Leochico et al., 2022). The use of teletherapy clearly requires more substantial evidence to progressively triage the experiences of both clients and therapists/counsellors using this modality of mental healthcare service to support its application in countries with limited access to cutting-edge digital technology and where resources are stretched thin.

Notably, prior to the pandemic, the American Psychological Association (2023) established guidelines for teletherapy or telepsychology to address the growing need for online testing and assessment/psychotherapy/counselling, which were eventually accepted and adopted by numerous psychological and professional bodies worldwide. These guidelines provide a framework for mental health professionals to deliver effective and safe teletherapy services to their clients, however, irrespective of the acknowledgment of these landmark guidelines for teletherapy, there are still underexplored territories of teletherapy work, specifically on: competency and standards of care, maintaining confidentiality and data privacy, tele-assessment, and inter-jurisdictional practice (APA, 2023). As a result, there is a significant gap in understanding how ethical guidelines and professional mandates are efficiently enacted in the field of teletherapy practice, indicating that further research is warranted. Balancing technological advancements with ethical considerations when providing mental healthcare is essential. Reiterating further, ensuring secure platforms, maintaining confidentiality, and complying with ethical guidelines are vital since there is a life and a unique psychological circumstance that needs to be attended to thoroughly (Houser et al., 2023; Lustgarten et al., 2020). Subsequently, the lessons we learn and the changes we make in response to the untapped areas of the emerging phenomenon of teletherapy work shall potentially have a profound impact on the future of psychology and mental health on a global scale.

Anchoring this review with Andersen et al.'s (2011) behavioral model as its theoretical framework, it emphasizes the utilization of health services and recognizing factors that impact one's decision whether to use or not the available health services (Alkhawaldeh et al., 2023). This model has been used to investigate health services utilization, including mental health conditions and health systems, including different factors contributing to personal and circumstantial topics that are extensively accepted and used in first-world countries Andersen et al. (2011) as cited in Alkhawaldeh et al.

(2023). Andersen et al.'s (2011) model of health services was initially developed to investigate the determinants of health services utilization, assess inequality in access to health services, and facilitate policy-making for accessible care and health services (Chen & Gu, 2021). With the rise of technology, mental health practitioners and organizations are adapting to the new norms, utilizing teletherapy to cater to clients online.

Congruently, to generate a wide-range coverage of literature in this present scoping review, a research question was developed: What examples of ethical issues in teletherapy work specifically on the competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services, confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy, testing and assessment in teletherapy, and inter-jurisdictional practice in teletherapy exist in the recent local and international literature? This was adopted in line with the pronouncement of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) that constructing a research question for a scoping review is essential as it could inform the study's formulation of its objectives, search strategies, study selection, and data reporting. More so, the overarching aim of this scoping review was to capture and examine contemporary literature related to the inherent ethical issues and utilization of teletherapy work within the backdrop of the mental health field. More specifically, this paper covered the following four (4) underlying themes: (1) competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; (2) confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; (3) testing and assessment in teletherapy; and (4) inter-jurisdictional practice in teletherapy.

Following the above-mentioned objective, the study is expected to potentially benefit the: (1) academic/scientific population, mental health practitioners, policymakers, IT/web administrators, test developers and assessment companies, ethical and regulatory board committees, psychological associations, and the Filipino community by providing baseline information and bringing to attention the ethical issues and impact of technology towards the management and provision of teletherapy mental healthcare services; and (2) the developing field of cyberpsychology and teletherapy in clinical and counselling psychology research as the findings may provide evidences that confirm what are the current best practices in teletherapy work and further expand studies on the psychological phenomenon influenced by digital technology, particularly to have a larger body of knowledge and inform areas of future research on understanding the benefits, limitations, processes, and outcomes of teletherapy and produce results to guide practical considerations on policy and practice, and ethical decision-making in the delivery of teletherapy services in clinical and counselling psychology.

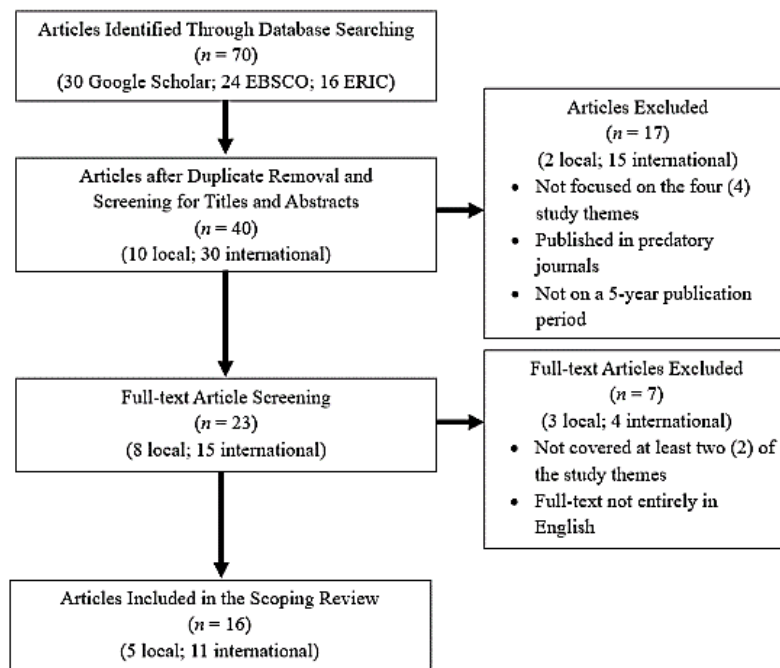
Method

This paper analyzed and reviewed various literature in order to aggregate new studies that emphasize the complexities of teletherapy work. Moreover, Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review framework was useful in this study's conceptualization. Consistent with their proposed framework and to strengthen the methodical rigor of the present scoping review, the following stages were followed: (1) identifying gaps in existing literature and research activities related to teletherapy work; (2) identifying the research question or study objective; (3) structuring the study selection; (4) charting of data; and (5) collating and reporting data gathered from the study. Munn et al. (2018) identified scoping reviews as an effective method of obtaining a breadth of

literature, including different study designs on a specific issue or topic of interest, and for the present scoping review's purpose, it serves as a useful approach to examine, summarize emerging evidence and identify knowledge gaps in teletherapy work research that would be potentially purposeful for researchers, policymakers, clinicians, and other academic practitioners. This scoping review tackles different ethical issues and considerations with the use of teletherapy including privacy and confidentiality Eguia and Capio (2022), competence and training (Stoll et al., 2020), understanding the risks and benefits of conducting teletherapy, as well as maintaining therapeutic relations among therapist and clients.

Consistent with the adopted scoping review framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005), the search strategy employed to collect relevant data for this literature review was electronically searching via journal databases such as Goggle Scholar, EBSCO Host Information Services, and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) from December 3, 2023, to December 14, 2023. This search included indexed and peer-reviewed materials by experts in psychotherapy, neuropsychiatry, and other mental health fields. For the purpose of increasing the depth and range of article database, the following search terms and key words were used: 'ethical issues in teletherapy competence and standards of care,' 'ethical issues in teletherapy confidentiality and data privacy,' 'ethical issues in tele-assessment,' and 'ethical issues in teletherapy inter-jurisdictional practice.' Inclusion criteria included reviewing peer-reviewed journal articles covering a 5-year period and only those that are written in the English language version. As Tajan et al. (2023) articulated, the recent emergence of teletherapy as a significant modality in mental health service delivery has resulted in a concentration of scholarly publications within the last five years. Therefore, this scoping review adopted a five-year validity limit for article inclusion to ensure topical relevance. Exclusion criteria of the study were: (a) not focused on the four (4) study themes; (b) not covered at least two (2) of the study themes; (c) full-text article is not entirely in English; and (d) published in predatory journals.

Using the key search terms, a total of seventy (70) records (14 local; 56 international) were retrieved for this review, with thirty (30) found in Google Scholar, twenty-four (24) in EBSCO, and sixteen (16) in ERIC. When some article duplicates were removed, forty (40) articles (10 local; 30 international) remained to proceed for title and abstract screening. From this first elimination, seventeen (17) articles (2 local; 15 international) were excluded since they were not focused on the four (4) themes of the study, not on a 5-year publication period, and were published in predatory journals. Full-text versions of the remaining twenty-three (23) articles (8 local; 15 international) were obtained, read, and went through another process of elimination that was driven by the study's selection criteria. Another seven (7) articles (3 local; 4 international) were removed from this elimination procedure when it appeared that the articles were unable to cover at least two (2) of the study themes and their full-texts were not entirely written in English. Finally, a total of sixteen (16) articles (5 local; 11 international) met all of the study criteria and were included in the present scoping review. Figure 1 below illustrates the study selection process.

Figure 1*Flowchart of the Study Selection Process***Results and Discussion**

As the goal of the study was to identify examples of both local and international articles on the ethical issues revolving around teletherapy work across the themes of: (1) competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; (2) confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; (3) testing and assessment in teletherapy; and (4) inter-jurisdictional practice in teletherapy, the reporting is then focused on the sixteen (16) articles that best demonstrate important background related to the current scoping review's research question and objective. Table 1 displays an overview of the articles in the current scoping review.

Table 1*Summary of Articles*

No.	Author	Year	Country	Themes	Study Design / Methods / Sample
1	Advincula and Sunga	2022	Philippines	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services, Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy, and Testing and assessment in teletherapy	Mixed-methods design; used self-developed online questionnaire, which also contained a section for open-ended questions and administered through Google Forms, quantitative responses were analyzed using SPSS, whereas the qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic analysis; participants

					consisted of ($n = 64$) Filipino licensed psychometricians
2	Anil et al.	2023	UK, Australia	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services and Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy	Scoping review; Population Concept Context framework and online databases: MEDLINE, CINAHL, PsychInfo, Cochrane, EMBASE, Web of Science, PEDro, United Kingdom Health Forum, WHO, Health Education England, and all UK and Australian AHP professional bodies; a total of ($n = 37$) articles reviewed
3	Békés et al.	2022	USA	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services and Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy	Qualitative design; self-developed semi-structured interview protocol and used consensual qualitative research method to analyze the transcribed semi-structured interviews; participants consisted of ($n = 31$) psychotherapists
4	Billote et al.	2021	Philippines	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; and Inter-jurisdictional practice in teletherapy	Qualitative design; employed the systematic procedure of document analysis; total number of studies reviewed were ($n = 10$)
5	Eguia and Capio	2022	Philippines	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; and Testing and assessment in teletherapy	Mixed-methods triangulation design-convergence model; quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and non-parametric inferential tests, while qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis; participants consisted of parents ($n = 47$) and therapists ($n = 102$) of children with developmental disorders who were receiving teletherapy during the lockdown

6	Gangamma et al.	2022	USA	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; and Testing and assessment in teletherapy	Quantitative Survey Study; Qualtrics survey posted on multiple listservs including the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, the American Counseling Association, as well as professional groups for social workers; participants consisted of parents ($n = 114$) licensed mental health professionals currently providing teletherapy
7	Hernani	2022	Philippines	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; Testing and assessment in teletherapy and Inter-jurisdictional practice in teletherapy	Book chapter; with ($n = 27$) articles reviewed
8	Houser et al.	2023	USA	Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy and Inter-jurisdictional practice in teletherapy	Systematic review; online search on six databases: PubMed, Science Direct, ProQuest, Embase, CINAHL, and the Cochrane Library; total number of studies reviewed were ($n = 18$)
9	Leochico et al.	2022	Philippines	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; and Testing and assessment in teletherapy	Quantitative cross-sectional online survey; online self-administered questionnaire originally developed by the authors with inputs from local experts in telehealth or telerehabilitation; participants consisted of ($n = 259$) local board-certified physiatrist of the Philippine Academy of Rehabilitation Medicine (PARM)
10	Lustgarten	2020	USA	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services and Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy	Literature review; online search with ($n = 75$) articles reviewed
11	MacMullin et al.	2020	Canada	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of	Descriptive design; concurrent analysis guided by the actor-network theory (ANT)

				telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; and Inter-jurisdictional practice in teletherapy	method; participants consisted of ($n = 5$) female psychotherapists residing in Alberta, Canada
12	Mahue et al.	2021	USA	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; Testing and assessment in teletherapy; and Inter-jurisdictional practice in teletherapy	Literature review; reviewed ($n = 2$) domains of the Coalition for Technology in Behavioral Science (CTiBS) Telebehavioral health (TBH) competency framework
13	Poletti et al.	2020	Italy	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services and Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy	Scoping review; online search on two databases: PubMed and Web of Science; total number of studies reviewed were ($n = 18$)
14	Sheperis and Smith	2021	USA	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; Testing and assessment in teletherapy; and Inter-jurisdictional practice in teletherapy	Literature review; online search with ($n = 31$) articles reviewed
15	Stoll et al.	2020	Switzerland	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; Testing and assessment in teletherapy; and Inter-jurisdictional	Narrative review; online search on three databases: PubMed, PsycINFO, and Web of Science; total number of studies reviewed were ($n = 259$)

				practice in teletherapy	
16	Tajan et al.	2023	Japan, France	Competence and standards of care in the delivery of telepsychology services; Confidentiality and data privacy in teletherapy; and Testing and assessment in teletherapy	Scoping review; online search in PubMed database; total number of studies reviewed were ($n = 46$)

Competence and Standard of Care in Telepsychology Delivery

The formation and rising popularity of teletherapy as an alternative mental health delivery system has challenged the thresholds of psychology, gradually bringing it into the spotlight to meet the specific needs of people with mental health concerns and progressively dispelling the perennial distrust of many individuals and mental health practitioners that teletherapy is less effective to in-person psychological interventions. Thus, the field and practice of psychology has become less siloed and is more open to a dynamic intervention system, including a focus on family-centered care, since digital mental health allows for the clients to be in the comfort of their homes and promotes more engagements within the family environment (Eguia & Capió, 2022; Maheu et al. 2021). Hence, all of this leads to a smoother passage of the deinstitutionalization-recovery process, as well as increased awareness and openness to accept, respect, empathize, and care for those suffering from mental disorders. Anil et al. (2023) made a compelling argument that teletherapy's prevalent benefits include: increased availability of mental healthcare services, improved accessibility and help-seeking behavior, and the highlight reduction of geographical-related constraints. As new health technologies emerge and existing ones improve, the capabilities of teletherapy services will also continue to evolve and drive greater adoption and integration into mainstream mental healthcare practices. This could encompass advancements in remote monitoring, virtual reality therapy, artificial intelligence-driven psychological diagnostics, and consequently, further expanding the possibilities for delivering effective mental healthcare remotely (Gangamma et al., 2022; Lustgarten et al., 2020; MacMullin et al., 2020; Stoll et al., 2020).

Conversely, Tajan et al. (2023) stressed the importance of a well-defined strategy in successfully implementing teletherapy, highlighting the need for clarity in delineating roles and responsibilities for both clients and therapists/counsellors. Keeping up with the pace of technological advancements requires both clients and mental health professionals to undergo new educational and training experiences. The landscape of psychology is morphing from the conventional model of service delivery, which is primarily focused on a profession-centric approach, to a more team-based strategy, with a strong need for identifying and integrating new competencies relevant across professions, along with family involvement in teletherapy work (Maheu et al., 2021). MacMullin et al. (2020) emphasized that teletherapy encourages interdisciplinary learning and the development of reflective mental health practitioners. This study also shed light on how cultivating self-awareness and self-knowledge practices could bolster mental health practitioners' confidence in using technologies in their teletherapy practice. By extension, Sheperis & Smith (2021) echoed the importance of taking a proactive approach towards teletherapy work, in particular,

reevaluating previous teletherapy guidelines and integrating more comprehensive teletherapy guidelines into clinical-counselling training programs could potentially provide mental health practitioners and their clients with better opportunities for positive teletherapy work outcomes and clinical/counselling improvements in the underexplored area of digital mental healthcare service provision. It was also mentioned that having these more specific teletherapy guidelines could greatly assist in structuring the specialized teletherapy competencies that are needed by therapists/counsellors, while additionally informing the licensing and quality assurance processes of professional associations in the field of psychology and mental health.

Relatedly, Poletti et al.'s (2020) scoping review revealed that when a mental health practitioner's perceived professional self-efficacy and self-confidence are threatened, psychotherapy/counselling session efficacy and the therapeutic alliance may be put at risk. Adding to this, the study expounded on the idea of virtual spaces creating an isolating and disconnecting barrier in the therapeutic interaction, pointing out how difficult it may be to recreate the secure, private, and intimate environment of in-person psychotherapy/counselling sessions. On the contrary, technical issues and unfamiliarity with the ins and outs of teletherapy apps appear to have a negative impact on teletherapy outcomes. On balance, Békés et al. (2022) stated that communicating telepresence, genuineness, and congruence are struggles in teletherapy, however, they could be mitigated by utilizing more directive, supportive techniques. Simply put, the mental health practitioners have an added responsibility to guide comprehensively their clients in all of the activities, decisions made during the teletherapy sessions since an evident shift in power dynamics exists in teletherapy work, wherein clients are now held more responsible for managing the therapeutic/counselling frame and remaining aware of the conversation nuances that occur during virtual psychotherapy/counselling sessions.

Offering another crucial insight, Leochico et al. (2021) identified that having a support system, receiving supervisory guidance from colleagues, and consulting various guidelines for best practices in teletherapy from reputable teletherapy websites and those released by psychological organizations all help to fill in the knowledge-experience gap with teletherapy delivery. The study also discovered that there is currently no publication databases or website archives that assess local teletherapy initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines, and it proposes this as a focus for further research. Advincula and Sunga (2022) dug up that there is a need for expanded continuing professional development (CPD) training programs focused on teletherapy, procurement of more online tele-assessment tools, as well as the establishment of clear-cut local teletherapy guidelines that are both effective and compliant with international standards. This, they argue, would enhance the proficiency skills and fitness of mental health practitioners to provide digital psychological services. In consonance, the primary and indispensable element in minimizing uncertainties and frustration during and after online psychotherapy/counselling is obtaining further specialized training in teletherapy – whether through self-directed learning or formal education/workshops (Billote et al., 2021). This is crucial to better prepare mental health practitioners to effectively, meaningfully address various situations involving ethical issues in teletherapy work. In addition, Eguia and Capio (2022) conveyed that the heightened physical and mental exertions involved in preparing for teletherapy sessions indicate the importance of mental health practitioners building their own self-care habits, routines to maintain competence and ethical conduct.

Subsumed from the evident improvements in mental health outcomes in the Philippines' healthcare system, persistent challenges still demand for policy-oriented and transformative interventions (Advincula & Sunga, 2022). Telehealth services, exemplified by online platforms and electronic applications, facilitate remote consultations and mental

health aid through technology. However, it is essential to note that while teletherapy holds promise, its application may be limited. Concerns regarding diagnostic accuracy due to the absence of physical observations and limited access to clients' significant non-verbal cues (Maheu et al., 2021; Sheperis & Smith, 2021), along with issues centering on traditional psychological testing tools and assessment procedures which are not transferable for an online setting, privacy issues, potential data breaches, and the risk of delaying urgent or emergency psychological support interventions due to weak internet connectivity must altogether be carefully weighed (Anil et al., 2023; Stoll et al., 2020; Tajan et al., 2023). Subsequently, the expansion of teletherapy services has indeed been significant, particularly in the mental health field. The convenience, accessibility, seamlessness and flexibility offered by telepsychology have made it increasingly attractive to both clients and mental healthcare providers. Additionally, this trend is likely to persist and even accelerate as technology continues to improve and regulatory barriers are addressed. On top of that, the integration of telehealth into regular in-person psychological/counselling practice enhances the overall quality and continuity of mental healthcare.

Confidentiality and Data Privacy in Teletherapy

In today's contemporary society, securing personal health data information is of utmost importance as this allows individuals to exercise adequate accountability and control over their own privacy access. Prioritizing data privacy in the therapeutic relationship, and using secure telecommunication channels, is a must in the practice of teletherapy in order to protect the quality of sensitive, confidential information exchanges between the client and the therapist/counselor, as well as to make certain that the delivery of mental health services in a digital sphere remains credible and safe (APA, 2023). Acknowledging this credo geared towards the preservation of data privacy in teletherapy work, Hernani (2022) noted that the Philippines' National Privacy Commission (NPC) advocates individual autonomy by recognizing people's right to keep hold of confidential details and be unbounded of continual surveillance. Governments are at the helm of overseeing citizens' data from unauthorized ingress, as exemplified by Republic Act No. 10173, typically referred to as the Data Privacy Act of 2012. This law represents a gaining ground toward an all-encompassing data shielding system, instilling greater trust in mental health practitioners' teletherapy work and how they upkeep the safety and soundness of their clients' personal information while also granting them more involvement, influence over the information they share.

Expanding on this groundwork, Stoll et al. (2020) stresses that mental health professionals must follow current guidelines for teletherapy confidentiality and digital data protection, irrespective of where they practice. The migration of data and other documents to digital bases has aggravated privacy problems, particularly on how to best safeguard private health records (Anil et al., 2023; Hernani, 2022). As a fundamental hallmark of being a proficient mental health provider, it is imperative to prioritize life-long learning, deep immersion with relevant literature, and the cultivation of networked assistance and support resources. These practices, including collaborative discourse with colleagues, participation in supervision, and membership in psychological associations, are crucial for adapting to the changing dynamics of psychology and teletherapy (Houser et al., 2023; Sheperis & Smith, 2021; Tajan et al., 2023). In the midst of technological advancements, reflexive cogitation on ethical standards appears pivotal for mental health professionals, highlighting the enduring purpose of portraying an ethically upright conduct in the ever-

evolving field of online mental healthcare provision (Hernani, 2022; Lustgarten et al., 2020).

Congruously, Eguia and Capio (2022) elucidated the potential ethical challenges regarding data confidentiality in telepsychology. These concerns range from the risk of intentional or unintended eavesdropping in household settings to equipment disruptions that may negatively impact the security of electronically stored data. Consequently, these issues disproportionately affect vulnerable populations without stable housing or access to top-grade technologies. This study also found that mental healthcare practitioners and even clients encounter difficulties in maintaining a private space specifically for teletherapy, which is critical for protecting patient privacy while keeping them aware of their surroundings. On the other hand, Billote et al. (2021) discovered that in the Philippines, clients in their late adulthood and members of indigenous groups are hesitant to pursue teletherapy due to ethical concerns about data theft and a lack of knowledge on how to troubleshoot teletherapy apps and devices.

More interestingly, Békés et al. (2022) uncovered that, despite the presence of malicious computer worms and technical glitches in their teletherapy work, psychotherapists still desire to incorporate it into their in-person practice. It emerged that a key factor in determining their user intention to engage in online mental healthcare services stems from their regular participation in software-web troubleshooting skills training and familiarity with the technologies used in teletherapy work, and subsequently, resulting in better prevention of privacy and security risks. In reality, envisaging a more secure teletherapy space for both clients and mental health practitioners entails the modification of core psychological skillsets and techniques, together with the ability to make the correct adjustments in handling the technical impacts induced by the new technologies involved in teletherapy practice. In the recent scoping review of Poletti et al. (2020), limited regulations governing the practice of teletherapy work within the mental health field was found to be a significant hindrance that dissuades both mental health practitioners and clients from embracing teletherapy. This study further revealed that clients frequently experience slow internet bandwidth and incompatible devices with the specific apps and audio-videoconferencing tools used in teletherapy, which increases their frustration and intensifies their decision to discontinue their teletherapy engagement. In this regard, the leveling of client and therapist/counsellor expectations about the structure of teletherapy must be discussed during the informed consent process, and it must be continually reviewed and revised to set forth clear and specific provisions regarding the potential confidentiality and data privacy threats associated with the tools and interventions used throughout the teletherapy process. This strategy could assist with easing clients' worries regarding teletherapy while also encouraging and empowering them about the assortment of advantages and pitfalls in teletherapy work.

Aligned with this, Sheperis and Smith (2021) conferred that it is important to thoroughly discuss emergency and non-emergency risk management when teletherapy tools malfunction, and be able to stay abreast with the recent developments in government-approved software products for teletherapy use, as well as invest in devices with double-factor authentication protection systems and software updates to mitigate tele-malpractice and ethical threats associated with data abuse, misuse, and breaches. To further corroborate these results, MacMullin et al. (2020) extrapolated that with a detailed stipulation of

teletherapy emergency plan, the unreliability of gadgets, confidentiality-related concerns, and communication-related issues in the practice of teletherapy could be counteracted consistently and urgently. As a proficient and responsible therapist/counselor practicing teletherapy, it is integral to design a virtual workspace or office that is supported by evidence-based research and compliance with various laws and regulations in teletherapy work (Maheu et al., 2021). Besides this, there are few studies on the ethical concerns related to confidentiality and online data storage and disposal faced by both mental health practitioners and clients, thus, it is now a prevailing challenge to capitalize on conducting more research on this topic area (Billote et al., 2021). On the whole, to enhance the technical infrastructure fueling the practice of teletherapy, improvements in policy frameworks and standardized guidelines for teletherapy tools, along with higher budget allocations for acquiring cutting-edge technologies and online data storage equipment are needed (Leochico et al., 2021).

Now more than ever, teletherapy is being practiced more extensively, and while it is wrought with unique limitations, ensuring confidentiality in the mental health profession is paramount for establishing a strong level of trust and therapeutic alliance with clients engaging in teletherapy. Tajan et al. (2023) argued that the legal and ethical principles of confidentiality should be conscientiously observed in the context of digital psychotherapy and counseling work, which in turn, could help maintain a good balance of fostering the clients' right to a private and professional relationship with their mental health specialists. This privileged relationship between client and therapist/counselor bears substantial moral, ethical, and legal values as it grants an exemption from the truth-seeking goal of judicial orders and court rulings (Advincula & Sunga, 2022). There is also a paucity of in-depth investigations focusing on data security issues linked with the integration of technology in teletherapy work, such as utilizing local hard drives or the current move to cloud-based storage to store documents/client notes across mental health professionals' own devices, and to know which domain poses more potential to minimize ethical threats in data privacy and security risks (Houser et al., 2023; Lustgarten et al., 2020; Sheperis & Smith, 2021). Principally, since the transition and trend of teletherapy keeps evolving as an auxiliary method for providing mental healthcare services, mental health professionals are expected to have greater understanding on using technologies (Advincula & Sunga, 2022). Above all, the degree of tension and irreducible difficulties that exists in the inward and outward processes of how technology is penetrating the field of psychology demonstrates the general relevance of upholding data confidentiality measures. Thereby, this necessitates a systematic attempt to create perdurable ethical-and-regulatory protocols that could effectively safeguard the privacy rights of both clients and therapists/counselors in our wired world.

Testing and Assessment in Teletherapy

The adoption of tele-assessment for psychological evaluations during the COVID-19 pandemic, and even now in our post-pandemic society, has stirred controversies regarding possible slip-up in both administering psychological tests and assessments virtually and reporting its outcomes. Sheperis and Smith (2021) recognized that online psychological testing and assessment have many inevitable flaws that may undermine the quality of findings, highlighting the critical role of standardizing tele-assessment guidelines to perhaps eliminate the occurrence of these mistakes. In different

circumstances, tele-assessment prompts novel considerations, including the demand for standard practices in computer-mediated testing and assessment (Gangama et al., 2022), as well as additional studies on client-led and therapist-led assessment techniques (Stoll et al., 2020).

Concurrently, one key feature of the rise in ethical misconduct in tele-assessment is a lack of empirical research on tele-assessment procedures, and vague tele-assessment guidelines that could have considerably directed revisions to protocols for psychological testing and assessment conducted through technologically-mediated mechanisms. Advincula and Sunga (2022) underscored that the scarcity of studies and literature on digital psychological testing and assessment is a major challenge for mental health practitioners shifting to tele-assessment methodologies and modalities. This study confirmed that while tele-assessment procedures hold a promising benefit to reach a lot more people with mental health concerns, low acceptance of tele-assessment still persists, and that this resistance emanates from the potential of committing more errors in conducting tele-assessment, specifically on scoring the test's various subtest substitutions, and the possibility of jeopardizing testing security, which in turn contributes to producing inaccurate clinical decisions of mental health practitioners. It was also revealed that psychological testing and assessment in the Philippines during the peak of the pandemic were delayed due to a dearth of psychometrically valid and standardized assessments, as well as funds, internet and technology availability, and sufficient training in administering tests for remote use. These discrepancies exacerbated the ambivalent attitude and low confidence levels of both mental health professionals and clients regarding tele-assessment services.

Furthermore, the lack of assessments tailored solely for teletherapy and tele-assessment work adds another layer of complexity to the procedure, possibly compromising the quality and precision of evaluations conducted online (Gangamma et al., 2022; Stoll et al., 2020; Tajan et al., 2023). Concretizing this difficulty, the mixed-methods study of Eguia and Capió (2022) in the Philippines brings into focus the real-life obstacles experienced by both parents of neurodevelopmentally challenged children and their therapists when engaging in synchronous and asynchronous online therapy sessions. Conflicts with time owing to parents' work schedule, lack of technological proficiency, and children's struggles transitioning to web-based resources all pose notable roadblocks to successful teletherapy implementation. For therapists, the loss of significant interactions and non-verbal cues as a result of decreased physical proximity profoundly impairs their ability to provide therapy session instructions, monitor client progress, and assure proper administration of therapeutic techniques by the client's primary caregivers. Additionally, extrinsic influences like unreliable internet connection and restricted access to computers, laptops, extra cameras and monitors, smartphones, tablets, and audio equipment compound the difficulties of conducting high-quality teletherapy and tele-assessment services. This result recognizes the technical aspects of teletherapy and tele-assessment work, and it is timely and relevant for developing countries like the Philippines to invest in upgrading our own information and communications technology. Having a faster and more stable source of internet service, as well as greater access to quality tools or gadgets for teletherapy activities are needed, since the application of new technologies into the practice of psychological testing and assessment demands a good amount of internet bandwidth to

function flexibly and aid the successful implementation of tele-assessment processes, and so that psychological testing and assessment could continue to flourish in the face of disasters, conflicts, or crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Carrying the same sentiment, Leochico et al. (2021) foregrounded that extensive training programs on conducting tele-assessment must be a top priority for psychological organizations and universities, as well as being more rigorous in approaching how this medium could cater to the mental health needs of various clients, and addressing which specific group of mental disorders might benefit or not from tele-assessment services (Gangamma et al., 2022). Mahue et al. (2021) also brought to the fore an essential point to consider in further studies: tele-assessment tools and apps must be modified to meet the specific needs of clients belonging to different age groups, particularly those with physical disabilities/deficits, in order for them to have greater trust and engage more easily in tele-assessment services. Even though there are already foreign guidelines for administering tele-assessment, crafting clear local protocols that are specifically well-suited for all levels and types of mental health practitioners may alleviate competency and efficacy concerns while preserving ethical standards of care and best practices in the use of tele-assessment (Advincula & Sunga, 2022). As contended by Sheperis and Smith (2021), assessing clients' technological capacity and being directive in guiding them for the virtual administration of testing and assessment procedures are essential contributors in bolstering clients' acceptance and proper engagement in tele-assessment, upholding the accuracy of test and assessment results, and improving client outcomes.

While tele-assessment is considered to be an acceptable practice in addressing the expanding demand of delivering mental healthcare services, there are still questions related to its standardization, administration, and adherence to copyright laws (Hernani, 2022). Unfortunately, as Maheu et al. (2021) pointed out, most of the test materials are adopted and shared without careful scrutiny. It was found that assessment tools being transported through the web and shared via clients' and therapists'/counselors' emails and other links or websites are at higher risk for hacking of digital footprints by unauthorized parties, data loss and breaches (Sheperis & Smith, 2021), as well as raises possible ethical and legal dilemmas as to the integrity of the source, the reliability and validity of information and accounted results (Advincula & Sunga, 2022; Stoll et al., 2020). Adding up to this circumstance, there is a heightened risk that the client may commit felonious conduct, such as using a proxy to take the tests, creating a copy of them, and reproducing the tests without the necessary permissions undertaken (Maheu et al., 2021; Tajan et al., 2023), and even autofill feature on shared mobile devices (Sheperis & Smith, 2021). Thus, such online improvisation reflects the complicated nature of online psychological testing and assessment as well as the effect of the crisis and uncertainties we are continually experiencing as an entire nation on mental health services. Within the broader enclaves of tele-assessment in teletherapy practice, a range of demands call for focused discussions to allocate appropriate attention, time, and effort to the development of new tele-assessment guidelines and assessments protocols appropriate for digital use, and to find new resolutions for the competency-related challenges confronted by both mental health providers and clients.

Inter-Jurisdictional Practice in Teletherapy

Information and telecommunications technology has revolutionized the field of psychology, advancing the delivery of mental healthcare services and facilitating cross-border teletherapy practice. This current transformational change in psychological practice structure, and the newfound eligibility of mental health practitioners to reach clients in different jurisdictions and nations, is reshaping the standards of many psychological organizations and even national and international laws (APA, 2023). With teletherapy, a new portal of opportunity has opened for mental health practitioners to transcend barriers and provide access to quality mental healthcare services, especially to clients living in remote geographical locations where there are little to no psychotherapy/counselling services available (Billote et al. 2021). However, this cross-border practice of teletherapy illuminates the convoluted nature of the national and international inter-jurisdictional regulations that governs the practice of teletherapy at present. The initialization of new teletherapy legal frameworks and policies, which might often generate confusion among therapists/counsellors due to variances throughout state territories, promote an ethical, homogenized method of providing teletherapy (Sheperis & Smith, 2021).

Given the multiplicity of laws and guidelines under inter-jurisdictional practice, mental health practitioners must have greater capacity to learn and apply the numerous inter-jurisdictional rules in teletherapy, not only for their own location, but also for the region or country of origin of their clients (APA, 2023). Following these regulatory guidelines is paramount to uphold professional accountability when delivering cross-border digital psychological services. It is important to understand not only the contextual, theoretical underpinnings of many inter-jurisdictional practice laws, but also their history and evolution over the last few decades, as this will help in addressing ambiguities and navigating difficult cases before they could lead to ethical violations that may harm both the client and the therapist/counsellor and escalate into malpractice. Maheu et al. (2021) asserted that teletherapy delivery requires all mental health practitioners to comprehend inter-jurisdictional requirements as they enter the inter-jurisdictional practice of teletherapy work, and that necessary documentation of compliance to state, federal, or local guidelines and laws when accommodating clients living in a different country must be made prudently and transparently to avoid ethical-legal complications.

In the Philippines, government legislation guides and regulates the operation of teletherapy services. Filipino and non-Filipino mental health practitioners delivering online mental health services in the country are mandated to fully adhere to the licensing criteria requirements of the Philippine Regulatory Commission (PRC) (Hernani, 2022). Illustrating the unique interplay of cross-border teletherapy regulations, Billote et al. (2021) reported that overseas-based Filipino mental health practitioners holding their Philippine citizenships and licenses are permitted to provide teletherapy to clients living in the Philippines, but can only arrange appointments and work with international clients if they have the appropriate credentials and an approved application for a cross-border license in the state or country where the potential client currently resides. Some minor changes have already been observed in teletherapy policy at the federal, state, and local levels, and legislation needs continued improvement to support the ethical and competent delivery of teletherapy services to cater for the demands of mental health issues around the globe (Houser et al. 2023).

Locally, Billote et al. (2021) acknowledged that the Philippines has yet to establish its own set of inter-jurisdictional teletherapy guidelines. Despite this limitation, Filipino mental health professionals continue to seek out and abide by the international guidelines established by various psychological organizations and comply with other state laws while serving clients of different nationalities and living on other continents. Along similar lines, MacMullin et al. (2020) found that existing international guidelines for cross-border teletherapy practice are still insufficient and in the early phases of development. This study also revealed the need for more systematically refined guidelines or standards on how to best manage both external and internal challenges related to the uncertainties, intricacies of federal-state requirements for mental health practitioners to implement teletherapy work. Building on Stoll et al.'s (2020) assertion, it is critical that additional research be conducted in designing and improving telepsychology laws and standards in various jurisdictions to better support best practice in teletherapy activities.

Certainly, growing research evidence on teletherapy work underscores the significance of having a more nuanced grasp on the manifold forms of cross-border mental healthcare guidelines in the evolving realm of telepsychology. There are overlapping guidelines and standards across states and jurisdictions which may create bias and expose potential confidentiality threats. Therefore, a coherent national and international approach towards the modulation of emergency and non-emergency protocols for inter-jurisdictional teletherapy practice is urgently needed (Maheu et al., 2021), as well as the formation of interdisciplinary alliances with lawyers and community workers to help write and interpret the changing policies and processes of inter-jurisdictional teletherapy (Sheperis & Smith, 2021). Practitioners providing inter-jurisdictional teletherapy will need guidance and instruction in the array of regulatory guidelines to ensure compliance and continued ethical, professional conduct. Thus, partnerships among psychological organizations, regulatory agencies, and legislators are critical for cultivating uniform standards to facilitate equitable, realistic, and multinational practice of teletherapy.

Synthesis and Conclusion

On the periphery of the innumerable threats and series of profound shifts that the global health crisis has brought to the field of psychology and mental health, it is an important delineation that telepsychology surfaced as a connectivity cable and a vital solution for the continuity and progress of delivering quality mental healthcare services alongside preserving the strong therapeutic alliance between the client and therapist. This review examined sixteen (16) articles that accentuated the ethical issues within the milieu of teletherapy work, such as: competence of mental health professionals, confidentiality and data privacy, digitalized testing and assessment, and the intricate landscape of cross-jurisdictional practice. From the depths of the present scoping review's results and discussions, teletherapy has proven to be an invaluable tool for individuals seeking mental health services in areas where resources are limited, or demand is high. Through technology, remote consultations and support can be provided, effectively bridging the gap between urban and rural mental healthcare and alleviating the strain on overwhelmed facilities. The American Psychological Association's (2023) telepsychology guidelines, which were established even before the pandemic ravaged our entire society, have set the bar for competent, ethical delivery of remote mental healthcare services. Nonetheless, the rapid integration of technology into the practice of psychology has become increasingly popular and widely accepted because it demonstrates a promising function in managing the exigency for

mental healthcare services, however, it must be approached with caution since it also presents new challenges that require proactive solutions across interdisciplinary domains.

Illuminating further this scoping review's implications for the future of mental healthcare, clinical/counselling work in the Philippines and in other countries, we need to embrace innovative solutions and follow ethical standards. By doing so, we can build a robust, resilient, and sustainable mental healthcare system and teletherapy frameworks that satisfy and cater to the evolving mental health needs of individuals in our society. Overall, this involves investing in new technology and infrastructure, designing programs that provide financial and logistical assistance to those who need it, providing training and support to mental health professionals, and ensuring they adhere to ethical guidelines and requirements.

To sum up, this scoping review elucidated several ethical aspects of teletherapy and pointed out some vital areas requiring attention for optimal utilization. As psychology and mental healthcare advance rapidly, it is essential to introduce comprehensive law-policy reforms and proactive measures to ensure that people in need, regardless of their background or location, has equitable access to quality mental healthcare services. As a final fruit for thought, concerted efforts among stakeholders, continuing professional development, and competent ethical decision-making and conduct are critical in building sturdier digital connections to maximize the full potential of teletherapy while simultaneously closing both knowledge and implementation gaps in the 21st century mental healthcare service provision.

Limitations and Recommendations

The limitations of this scoping review were acknowledged, including the small number of articles, study criteria, article selection and review processes. Thus, the current study holds no generalizable assumption that the evidence reviewed were exhaustive. In all of the articles reviewed in this study, only a few used qualitative methodologies and none reported the use of meta-analyses, and thus, this opens up a radical point of inquiry on pursuing qualitative research and further meta-analyses studies into the best practices mental health professionals use to combat the ethical issues associated with their engagement in teletherapy.

Forging ahead, more studies exploring the impact of teletherapy on the well-being of mental health practitioners, clients and their families, and clinical/counselling psychology students, needs to be conducted in our post-pandemic environment. The different perspectives and experiences coming from these individuals may provide useful data to explain the acceptance process for teletherapy, determine factors related to behavioral changes and active engagement in teletherapy, and to formulate practice-based standards and interim guidelines to advance teletherapy work globally.

Future research should also focus on developing tests and establishing local norms for assessing the competence of mental health practitioners, as well as clients' perceived satisfaction or dissatisfaction with teletherapy. An additional priority for future research is to identify which teletherapy modalities and software platforms can effectively help the most vulnerable populations in both emergency and non-emergency circumstances. This determination could serve as a focal point for comparison and training intervention needs, which is particularly significant in reaffirming our cause to destigmatize mental health and

promote wider public acceptance of teletherapy and tele-assessment as an adjunct mental healthcare service to in-person clinical/counselling work.

Moving forward, in order to ensure the efficiency and successful execution of teletherapy and tele-assessment procedures, it is crucial to consider mental health professionals' proficiency and additional competencies, capacitating them with comprehensive, holistic education that broadens the breadth of their training experiences. Thus, developing psychoeducational materials and standardized training programs, particularly on digital mental health literacy that address the technological, legal, and ethical aspects of teletherapy are areas ripe for further investigations. This kind of innovative research direction will potentially help novice and seasoned mental health practitioners understand the multifaceted nature of telepsychology, enabling them to embrace their all-encompassing roles in the effective delivery of digital mental healthcare services and preparing them to better navigate teletherapy with a fresh clinical eye interconnected to cross-disciplinary, multiculturally sensitive lenses.

As evidenced from the result highlights of the current scoping review, there is a pressing need to formalize teletherapy to be an acceptable, trustworthy approach in rendering mental healthcare services; thus, a fitting suggestion to fulfill this need is to incorporate teletherapy and tele-assessment into undergraduate and graduate student teaching and training coursework programs/curriculums in order to achieve more congruous, consistent skill adoption that could plausibly address the growing changes in the field and practice of clinical and counselling psychology, and methodically evaluate both the negative and positive implications of teletherapy.

Undergoing supervision for teletherapy practice is an important process to deftly redress, fortify the skillsets, techniques, mental health toolkits, and overall professional preparedness of clinical/counselling psychology student trainees, as well as practicing therapists/counsellors, and consequently, to help improve teletherapy standards. Another noteworthy recommendation is to form new task force groups or special supervisory teams for teletherapy activity within various government and psychological agencies. This collective effort has the potential to contribute to the development of an inter-professional teletherapy competency system, which is essential for improving the coordination of regulatory and licensing requirements for teletherapy and tele-assessment operations.

Practicing inter-jurisdictional teletherapy, ensuring the confidentiality and security of stored online data could altogether be arduous given that the client-therapist/counsellor relationship may have an involuted course of engagement. Thus, having an intact informed consent form that discusses exhaustively the technologies used in teletherapy work and details its confidentiality and data privacy terms, using secure and advanced telecommunication platforms, encrypting data storage and having restriction access controls, and staying up-to-date with evolving inter-jurisdictional guidelines and laws are essential to ensure that mental health professionals practice competently and cultivate ethical assertiveness in their teletherapy work.

Additionally, the administration process for tele-assessment evaluations is intricate and presents numerous challenges. One of the key setbacks is the shortage condition of standardized tele-assessment protocols, and the existing teletherapy guidelines still lack clear criteria for best practices in tele-assessment work. As an outcome, this predicament warrants additional research and collaboration from our country's as well as other nations' leaders, policymakers, ethics and regulatory board committees, psychological associations, IT/web administrators, test developers and assessment companies. By working together, new age-appropriate, user-friendly apps and other forms of technology might be built, preserving therapeutic presence along with the integrity of testing and assessment conditions even when conducted via teletherapy.

Lastly, this shared responsibility could hopefully result in more informed decisions about proper investments and increased institutional funding for teletherapy and mental health. More importantly, cohesive and well-defined ethical policies, protocols, competencies, best practices for both local and international teletherapy and tele-assessment work that benefit all parties involved might likewise be curated with considerations for diverse cultures and preferences to guarantee ethical, reliable, and safe delivery of digital mental healthcare services.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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