

Benefits And Pitfalls Of Online Therapy Groups

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Online therapy groups are groups where an individual meets with one or more licensed therapists through a virtual medium to share and discuss issues. These groups provide a valuable space for individuals to “connect, share experiences, and receive emotional support” (Hsiung, 2000), offering different features, prices, and user reviews that help them opt for budget-friendly [group therapy](#) options. However, as everything comes with its advantages and disadvantages, online therapy groups offer accessibility and convenience but also come with potential challenges. For instance, due to the lack of physical presence, non-verbal cues that are vital in traditional therapy can be missed, which can lead to misunderstandings between the therapist and the individual. This paper explores the potential benefits of online therapy groups and their therapeutic alliance, making them an attractive option, as well as the challenging pitfalls that may occur due to misunderstandings and distractions.

An Overview of Online Therapy Groups

Online therapy groups work under the umbrella of telemedicine, which has emerged as the potential and prospective solution to connect people with mental health problems and provide them with emotional support from therapists or people who face similar issues. As the name implies, this therapy occurs in virtual groups via video conferencing tools like Zoom to provide support to people who are dealing with trauma after divorce, coping with grief, or addressing substance abuse. These are the groups where a mental health professional such as a psychiatrist or a psychologist meets with a number of patients going through similar problems in their lives and provides them with psychotherapy. These therapy groups offer encouragement and valuable connections that certain individuals find more effective than in-person group therapy. Moreover, in these groups, cohesion is the best predictor and manifestation of positive outcomes and symptomatic improvement to foster the therapeutic relationship among patients (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020).

Benefits of Online Therapy Groups

Online therapy groups can be as effective and prospective as in-person therapy groups, such as online “Cognitive Behavioral Therapy” (CBT), which is equally effective in treating moderate anxiety disorders as in-person CBT practice (Atanasova et al., 2018). One of the biggest reasons online therapy groups are on the pro side of the spectrum is that they are more convenient and accessible than in-person groups, as they allow a patient to connect with a therapist or psychiatrist from the comfort of their home using an internet-connected device. These groups provide access to mental

health treatment for people dealing with various mental health conditions in the group in remote or rural areas. In addition, group sessions are more cost-effective because a person has to connect from his/her mobile phone or laptop, bearing only an internet connection, making these therapy groups an attractive option. The therapy groups are especially beneficial for those who might not have any other choice due to limited local mental health practices. Not only do online therapy groups offer convenience, accessibility, and effectiveness, but they also offer affordable and high-quality group support for various topics, including loss, grief, trauma, and separation, while focusing mainly on peer support (Hsiung, 2000).

Challenges or Pitfalls of Online Therapy Groups

The online therapy groups being “online” is the dimension some people consider a major drawback in the field of teletherapy. In online sessions, therapists cannot compensate for all challenges and losses which may “flatten online relationships, making them shallower” (Atanasova et al., 2018) in the eyes of people already struggling with relationship traumas or grief. For instance, the therapist cannot compensate for the relationship loss of a father figure through a virtual medium due to the lack of “body-to-body” interactions. Moreover, in therapy, the “setting” is an important factor in creating a “safe holding” environment by keeping the space and time boundaries which virtual platforms may fail, as being at home while attending therapy sessions may lead to distractions that would not occur in a therapist or psychiatrist’s clinic (Weinberg, 2021). In the case of in-person group therapy sessions, therapists can choose different chairs and different angles for their patients with similar or distinctive mental health needs and problems to convey the message of different privileges which they lack in online therapy groups.

In online therapy group sessions, when the therapy scenario shifts from circle to screen, the therapist does not have control over the setting, due to which they potentially lose boundaries online and the question of privacy or confidentiality among group members (Wright et al., 2011). For instance, the therapist or psychiatrist cannot instruct his online clients to close the door of their room or which chair they will sit in before the group discussion begins, leaving the therapist and clients with no privacy and mere disruptions such as ringtones, texting, neighbourhood noise, or a room full with irrelevant people. Poor internet connectivity can disrupt connections on Zoom or other platforms, which may cause frustration among patients already suffering from mental discomfort or illnesses. Privacy concerns during the online therapy group sessions are also challenging for individuals who are introverted and prefer private space to let their emotions out, especially for those who share their residence with others.

Summary and Conclusion

There is no doubt that online therapy groups share different modalities than in-person therapy groups. The virtual approach to conducting group therapy sessions comes with both advantages and

pitfalls based on the personal preferences and needs of the patients as well as the therapists in the group. Specifically designed for peer support, these therapy groups offer diverse and budget-friendly opportunities to seek behavioural and cognitive therapy sessions with professionals who focus on evidence-based techniques to provide a supportive community for those in need. These platforms can be a lifeline for individuals experiencing mental health challenges, providing a sense of understanding and community.

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