

zar sus habilidades terapéuticas, así como del juicio necesario en la práctica de la telepsicología. Finalmente se solicita tener un ranking de valoración de los terapeutas que esté avalado por el COPM.

## Conclusiones

Los resultados de esta investigación son representativos de la muestra de psicólogos de la CM. La gran mayoría de los respondientes están interesados en la teleterapia. Las preocupaciones sobre el uso de la teleterapia son muy similares a las que aparecen en las investigaciones de otros países y se refiere a la pérdida de la comunicación no verbal, el *rappport* y los problemas de confidencialidad, pero curiosamente entre el grupo de psicólogos que no utilizan la teleterapia, mientras que los problemas técnicos de conectividad son los más sensibles para los psicólogos que trabajan con terapia a distancia.

Si comparamos las recomendaciones que se han hecho en países en los que la teleterapia tiene mayor arraigo, se advierte que se corresponden con las preocupaciones expresadas por nuestros encuestados, siendo su contenido la necesidad de formación profesional, de códigos éticos, de confidencialidad de los datos y de validez de los instrumentos. La ausencia de formación específica del uso de Internet aplicado a la práctica psicológica entre los terapeutas, unido a la percepción que tienen de la dificultad del uso de la telepsicología, predice el menor uso de Internet en la salud mental (Simms et al., 2011).

## Limitaciones

Este estudio es exploratorio y va dirigido a proporcionar un análisis inicial de la situación actual de los psicólogos colegiados en la CM, dibujando una tendencia creciente de la demanda de la telepsicología y las necesidades formativas y de apoyo a los psicólogos. La limitación mayor de la muestra es el número bajo de contestaciones. Las respuestas en encuestas online oscilan entre el 6 y el 70% (Horn, Green y Martinussen, 2009), siendo en nuestro estudio sólo de un 3% de la muestra en general, pero habiéndose accedido a la totalidad de la población. Pudiera ser que el envío de la encuesta se haya realizado al correo electrónico que utiliza habitualmente el psicólogo/a, que no sea el del COP, o que se manejen poco con las nuevas tecnologías y no miren habitualmente el correo o que no sean proclives a realizar encuestas por Internet, lo que daría un sesgo al tipo de muestra que finalmente respondió el cuestionario.

En estos momentos, el perfil de psicólogo con el uso de las nuevas tecnologías nos da una nueva cualificación para depurar tanto la construcción de una nueva encuesta como la mejora del porcentaje de respondientes.

Los datos especifican que la implantación de la telepsicología como forma integrante de la psicología terapéutica requiere el esfuerzo intenso y la inversión de capital profesional y económico para entender todos los factores asociados con el uso de las nuevas tecnologías en los servicios de salud mental, incluyendo la necesidad de formar a los psicólogos para el uso de la telepsicología como favorecedores del proceso.

## Extended Summary

Given the novelty of Telepsychology, the pertinent concepts have not been clearly defined yet, so we are going to propose terminology. We will start with Telepsychology as the term that encompasses all others. *Teletherapy* is the practice of psychology using technology that makes it possible to interact with a client remotely (by telephone, e-mail, Twitter, Internet, etc.) without face-to-face contact. Teletherapy is part of the widely-used distance therapy psychology. Most psychologists practicing teletherapy are

clinicians. Teletherapy involves counselling remotely without face-to-face contact.

As in many other fields, North American psychologists (from both the US and Canada), as well as psychologists from other countries like Australia and New Zealand, have pioneered this field. The first guide for psychological services available electronically was published in Canada.

Since the beginning, there has been concern about the issue of the effectiveness of this therapeutic modality and many studies have focused on encouraging the use of distance psychological support. Most of the research on effectiveness comes from cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). However, there has been interest in various therapeutic streams, especially psychoanalysis.

Almost all of the controlled studies have been conducted on depression and anxiety, which are also the most prevalent disorders. The results show positive findings for suicide compared to the control group. The Electronic Bridge to Mental Health Services has carried out treatment. The intention was to provide motivation or to facilitate the search for friendly and professional family help; the results showed a significant increase in the search for help.

Telepsychology can also be used in the pediatric population with the same success as face-to-face therapy. The behavior and participation of children is the same as in face-to-face visits, but online therapists reduce or control their own stress less than in face-to-face visits.

The major concern of therapists using new technologies is to create a good therapeutic relationship. In the study by Rees y Stone (2005), there were no significant differences between therapeutic relationships developed in face-to-face therapy and distance therapy, especially in the case of video conferences.

Another successful form of teletherapy is Web Therapy, which offers self-applied programs for patients with access to the Internet, who can use the programs without the online mediation of a therapist (automated online therapy) or with timely interventions.

The primary concerns of professionals who carry out their therapeutic work using distance techniques relate mainly to clinical limitations (the therapeutic relationship, deficient perception of nonverbal information in the interaction and the effectiveness of therapy), and legal and technical aspects. Other issues of concern are the confidentiality of client information and legal liability.

The sample consisted of 486 psychologists registered with the Madrid Association of Psychologists (COPM, in its Spanish acronym) out of a total of 16,428 psychologists, representing 3% of the psychologists practicing in the Madrid Region. Of this sample, 75% were women (80.39% of the total) and 25% were men (19.61% of the total). Their ages ranged from 23 to 74 years. Most of them were specialized in Clinical Psychology with health care accreditation. Most of them worked in private practice in Clinical Psychology. A questionnaire was developed ad hoc, consisting of 19 questions to be completed in about 6 minutes. The response scales were multiple choice and open questions. The respondent received a link to the questionnaire by e-mail sent by the COPM. The questionnaire was completed and processed directly without identifying the respondent. Authorization from the COPM was requested to send the survey in digitized format with a short presentation to all its members in Madrid via e-mail, May 7, 2015; and surveys were received until June 7. The objective was to seek the views of psychologists on using the Internet in their professional practice. Data processing included a study of the descriptive characteristics of the sample, frequency analysis, and qualitative study of the open questions. SPSS 19.0 software was used.

The results of the analysis show that only 26.66% of the psychologists in the health care field indicated that they currently conduct therapeutic sessions via videoconference, although 60.49% favored using it in the future and only 12.78% ruled it out.

The media used in distance therapy, ordered by higher to lower frequency, were: videoconferencing through a specific application, telephone communication, and the earliest date when distance therapy was used by respondents was 2000. There was a significant increase in the use of distance therapy in 2010.

Distance therapy sessions represented 10% of all sessions for 16.92% of psychologists. The highest number of distance therapy sessions a month per therapist was 4, with 21.03% of therapists having this number of sessions. With regard to the regularity with which face-to-face therapy was combined with distance therapy with the same clients, distance therapy was a procedure used by 86% of psychologists in different ways. The respondents reported that they started using distance therapy at the request of the client.

The fees applied for distance therapy were the same as for face-to-face therapy for 67.50% of psychologists. Regarding the cost for therapists of providing distance therapy, 23.91% acknowledged that distance therapy was up to 20% less costly than face-to-face therapy; 7.06% claimed that it was more than 20% less expensive than face-to-face therapy.

Using the Internet as a support for face-to-face therapy was a common practice among respondents. Among all the media used by respondents to promote their professional services and make themselves known on the Internet, websites were most used.

The two main concerns of practitioners were the diminished ability to collect information from the immediate client interaction that occurs when therapy is conducted online, and the greater difficulty of achieving good rapport with this form of therapy. These concerns were followed by technical concerns, such as the risk of breaching confidentiality, inadequate transmission speeds or interruptions in transmission, scientific evidence supporting the validity of online therapy, legal coverage, the therapist's lack of technical or clinical knowledge, the patient's lack of technical knowledge, legal problems with working with clients abroad, payment systems, unauthorized practice, the use of questionnaires, or the weakening of the patient's link to therapy.

The issues mentioned by COPM members referred to topics already addressed in previous points of the survey: legal issues, confidentiality, professional ethics, forms of payment, technical particulars, the ability to access foreign markets, working with children and adolescents, obtaining feed-back from psychologists experienced with distance therapy, better understanding of the applications and the possibility that the COPM might make a platform available for conducting distance therapy sessions for members who need it and a ranking of psychologists conducting such sessions.

Finally, Spanish psychologists feel a need for teletherapy training.

## Discussion

For the first time, our study examined the attitudes of psychologists registered in the Spanish Association of Psychologists, Madrid branch, towards the use of Internet and new technologies in their professional practice, which has been influenced by the rapid onset of computer use and access to the Internet of most people in Spain, reaching more than 36 million homes in 2015.

In our sample, we observed more participation of males than females in relation to the total number of COPM registered members, which may reflect a greater approval of telepsychology by men than women, although gender did not affect the results predicted by therapy.

The ages of the practitioners in the sample ranged from 27 to 54 years, with young practitioners prevailing. The earliest date respondents used teletherapy was 2000, when there were 5,488,520 home Internet users in Spain. By 2010, there was a significant increase in

distance therapy, paralleling an increase to 30,387,781 in the number of home Internet users. The reason for starting distance therapy was the demand by clients as a supplement to face-to-face sessions when the patient had to travel or move. Although the use of distance therapy in Madrid Region is low compared to countries like the United States or Canada, it is recognized that distance therapy is developing as an option. Economic questions have not been a driving force in the implementation of distance therapy because the fees are the same or lower, never higher, than for face-to-face sessions.

In Madrid Region, teletherapy is currently conducted via videoconference by only a small proportion of psychologists in comparison to those who favor using it in the future, indicating that the attitude of psychologists in Madrid is good.

Among the media currently used for videoconferencing, many respondents use a specific application (e.g., Skype). As this application allows synchronous communication, the real-time flow of communication and tracking of the patient's behavior are better, but the medium does not encourage deeper reflection in the course of assessing serious issues.

The largest proportion of respondents conducted 4 sessions of distance therapy a month, which indicates that the psychologists in our sample still make limited use of this medium.

The principal concerns reported were clinical in nature and related. The first concern was about deficiencies in the collection of verbal and nonverbal information, which is an important factor in establishing a good therapeutic relationship, whereas the second concern, regarding the absence of actual physical presence, was more of a limitation than a concern and probably requires the adaptation of some techniques used in face-to-face sessions and the suppression of others. Among the technical concerns of professionals who use distance therapy, inadequate transmission speed or interruptions in the connection was rated as the primary concern by respondents, and one of the top three concerns for them. Regarding the difficulty in establishing good rapport, it might be questioned whether this was a real problem or therapist bias since studies show otherwise. Of the needs that our psychologists have expressed in relation to tele-therapy, legal coverage was recognized from the very first investigations, whereas concerns about confidentiality have since been mitigated by better knowledge of the technical concepts of data storage and Internet infrastructure.

## Conflicto de intereses

Los autores de este artículo declaran que no tienen ningún conflicto de intereses.

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