

ASSESSMENT OF TELEPSYCHOTHERAPY SATISFACTION FROM THE PATIENT'S PERSPECTIVE DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC.

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Abstract:

The main objective of this study is to learn from the patient's perspective the satisfaction of the psychotherapeutic process during the pandemic, through the use of telepsychotherapy. It is a quantitative, cross-sectional and descriptive research, a sample of 326 participants was used. Among the most relevant findings are that the greatest psychological impact of the pandemic evidences symptoms of anxiety and depression in ages between 18 and 35 years old. Currently there are people who attend face-to-face consultation, others online and mixed, indicating high levels of satisfaction with respect to treatment.

The main objective of the present study is to know from the patient's perspective the satisfaction of the psychotherapeutic process during the pandemic, through the use of telepsychotherapy. It is a quantitative, cross-sectional and descriptive research, a sample of 326 participants was used. Among the most relevant findings are that the greatest psychological impact of the pandemic shows symptoms of anxiety and depression in ages between 18 and 35 years of age. Currently there are people who attend the psychotherapy in person, others online and mixed, indicating high levels of satisfaction with respect to the treatment.

Key words: pandemic, telepsychotherapy, psychotherapy, Covid-19, satisfaction.

RECEIVED: 09-02-2022 ACCEPTED: 11-05-2022 PUBLISHED: 30-06-2022

How to quote: Rojas Leal, D. (2022) Assessment of telepsychotherapy satisfaction from the patient's perspective during the COVID 19 pandemic. *Almanaque*, 39, 1-16.
<https://doi.org/10.58479/almanaque.2022.36>



INDEX

Abstract:	1
Historical background, empirical research	5
Method	6
Results	7
Discussion	12
Conclusions	13
Bibliographic references	14

Historical background, empirical research

It is already known to all, that since March 2020 the WHO declared the COVID 19 SARS, COV 2 virus a pandemic. This brought about immediate changes in people's lifestyles and in the way they carry out their daily activities.

For psychotherapists, although telepsychotherapy is something that some professionals in the field had already been developing, most of them found it necessary to carry it out due to isolation and in order to reduce contagion rates.

In this sense, studies have been done to investigate the effectiveness of psychotherapy during the pandemic. There is research that indicates the effectiveness of the use of telepsychotherapy for the treatment of depression, anxiety and stress in times of COVID 19 (Agüero et. all 2021).

The assessment of psychotherapists to telepsychotherapy has also been studied, finding in most of them a positive attitude towards online psychotherapy and thinking of continuing to use it in the future. These attitudes of psychotherapists are influenced by their past experiences, the modality of psychotherapy, their clinical experience, previous experience with telepsychotherapy, as well as their transition during the pandemic and their geographical location (Békés and Aafjes-van Doorn, 2020).

It appears that the use of technology is more integrated into psychotherapy and even psychotherapists, feel more confident and may become more comfortable with telepsychotherapy than the literature predicted, as MacMullin, Jerry, Cook (2020) point out in their study. These authors comment that telepsychotherapy can be enhanced by intentional reflection on their own experience, examining routine behaviors, and developing strategies to counteract the unreliability of the technology.

There are ethical considerations that every psychotherapist must take into account. While it is true that among psychotherapists there is openness to the practice of telepsychotherapy, there is a need for the development of regulations in ethical codes regarding its use and application (Stoll, Sadler, & Trascher, 2020).

It is recently that the phenomenon of telepsychotherapy has been studied, in fact it was initiated as a resource within telemedicine, found consistent and valid evidence about telepsychotherapy for mental health care (Bashshur, Shannon, Bashshur, & Yellowlees, 2006).

There is a study conducted in Iran that shows a good satisfaction score, 80% in the use of telepsychotherapy for family therapy. Ghalibaf, Karimi, Moghadam (2015).

In contrast, a study was found, which measured the satisfaction of telemedicine in primary care patients using the telemedicine service that includes telepsychotherapy, evidencing few favorable numbers at the beginning and maintenance of the same as is the case of the study conducted by Deen, Fortney, Schroeder, (2013) which shows that of the 38% of patients who had agreed to attend the session, only 17% attended and 8% continued with the treatment.

During the pandemic, the effectiveness of telepsychotherapy in situations of suicidal risk has been used and estimated using the CAMS method (Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality). The utilization of this method using telepsychotherapy proved challenging for crisis intervention in patients with remote locations, however, it worked. Crumlish, Evans (2020).

In this sense, it is practically mandatory for psychotherapeutic practice through telepsychotherapy to study from the patient's perspective their satisfaction and to learn about their experience. The following study provides valuable information about the patients' assessment and estimation of the telepsychotherapy they have received during COVID 19.

Method

This research was conducted under a quantitative, cross-sectional approach and with a descriptive scope whose objective was, to know from the patient's perspective the satisfaction of the psychotherapeutic process during the pandemic through the use of telepsychotherapy.

Among the specific objectives are: a) to determine the difference in satisfaction with regard to the modality of face-to-face, online or mixed therapy, and b) to establish the main reasons for consultation.

This research was conducted during the months of June and July 2021. The data collection technique was carried out through an instrument previously validated by 3 experts in order to ensure its reliability and content validity. This questionnaire was a survey conducted in a google form that was distributed online through digital media.

Thus, once the validation of the instrument was obtained through the experts, the form was created in a google form. In this form, the participant was warned that it was anonymous and voluntary, that the data collected were for academic and research purposes, and that to participate it was necessary to be over 18 years of age. Once a number of participants had

been collected that was considered adequate for the analysis of the results and that would allow the research objectives to be met, the data were analyzed.

The selection of the sample was intentional, the origin of the sample was diverse since the participants came from several countries, both men and women, and the online distribution of the questionnaire allowed a greater scope of the same. An exploratory data analysis was carried out, leaving a total sample of $n= 326$.

Finally, the analysis of the results was carried out using descriptive statistics, which allowed the objectives to be met and the results to be discussed.

Results

We will begin by describing the characteristics of the sample and then analyze it in more detail.

Table 1

Género	
Mujer	261
Hombre	55
Prefiero no decirlo	6
Transgenero	1
Género Fluido	2

Elaboration: own source

As can be seen in the table above, most of the people who come for consultation are female, followed by male, and less frequently transgender, fluid gender and those who prefer not to say it. This means that women seek professional help more than other genders and are more susceptible to expressing some type of emotional distress.

Table 2

Edad	
18-25	175
26-35	45
36 - 45	36
46 - 55	29
56 - 65	22
66 +	14
N/A	4

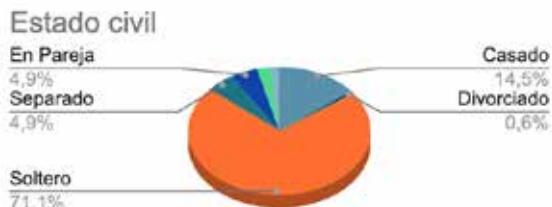
Elaboration: own source.

These results indicate that most of the people attending psychotherapy at the time of the present investigation were between 18 and 35 years of age. This suggests that during the pandemic this has been the most affected target. In contrast, it is observed that as the person increases in age, he/she attends less psychotherapy.

Table 3

Estado Civil	
Casado	47
Divorciado	2
Soltero	231
Separado	16
En Pareja	16
Viudo	8
N/a	5

Chart 1



Elaboration: own source.

A higher percentage of 71.1% of the people attending psychotherapy at the time of the research were single, followed by married people. It is noteworthy that people who indicate that they are in a couple as well as those who are married, show the same percentage. The fact that single people are the ones who attend therapy the most may be due to multiple factors, for example, they feel lonely or the support network they have (family and friends) is not enough, the confinement and isolation made them feel emotionally bad, they are people who do not have major responsibilities and can invest in personal psychotherapy.

Table 4

País	
Argentina	5
Canadá	1
Chile	1
Colombia	7
España	1
Estado Unidos	4
México	80
Venezuela	226

Prepared by: own source.

The countries that participated most in the research were Venezuela and Mexico and to a lesser extent Spain, Chile and Canada. Although it was distributed equally in all these countries, the countries mentioned above had more participation. As it was distributed through social networks, they manage their own algorithms and this could have influenced these results.

Table No. 5

Motivo de consulta	
Ansiedad	139
Depresión	63
Duelo	13
Pandemia	7
Problemas pareja	12
Ideas suicidas	6
Económico	1
Otros	50
TOC	3
Problemas familiares	7
Crecimiento Personal	18
Estrés	6

Elaboration: own source.

The above data indicate that most people seek professional help for issues related to anxiety and depression. Sometimes people do not know exactly what these terms refer to clinically, however, they suggest that they may be suffering from unusual anguish, panic attacks, feeling sad, unmotivated, among others. They also present, less frequently, grief, relationship problems and suicidal ideas.

There is another important number referring to “others”. When the person selected this category, he/she was invited to specify the reason. Although it was not possible to specify the reason, some people indicated that they had already been diagnosed with a mental pathology and wanted to receive psychotherapy.

It is noteworthy that there is a percentage of people who seek help in pandemic for personal growth, this may be due to several circumstances, for example, that people either because they were working from home and could organize their schedules to receive psychotherapy, or because they saw pandemic as an opportunity to do or invest in activities that they had postponed, such as courses and personal therapy.

Table 6

Modalidad sesiones	
Online	100
Presencial	111
Mixta	46
No respondieron	68

Elaboration: own source.

The table above shows that 100 people attend psychotherapy online (telepsychotherapy) and 111 people in person. This study was conducted in the summer of 2021; presumably, if it had been conducted in 2020, the results in terms of therapy modality would have been different.

Table 7

Experiencia	
Excelente	28
Buena	142
Mala	47
No respondieron	108

Graph 2



Elaboration: own source.

The above results show that 43.7% (142 subjects) of the sample rate the therapeutic experience in pandemic as good, 8.6% (28 subjects) rate it as excellent, 14.5% (47 subjects) rate it as bad and 33.2% (108) did not respond. These are very diverse results. It should be noted that most of the respondents sought psychotherapy in pandemic and this suggests that there is a percentage that is in the middle of the therapeutic process and this could have influenced the lack of evaluation of the experience.

Table No. 8

Modalidad presencial	Nivel satisfacción
Excelente	13
Buena	71
Mala	18
NR	9

Chart No. 3

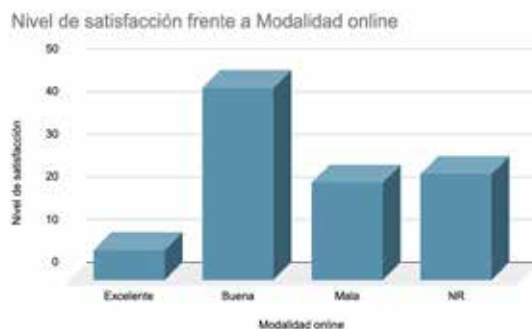


The above data show that 11.7% (13 subjects) who attend in presencial modality value their therapeutic process in pandemic as excellent, 64% (71) as good, 16.2% (18) as bad and 8.1% (9) subjects who did not respond.

Table No. 9

Modalidad online	Nivel de satisfacción
Excelente	7
Buena	45
Mala	23
NR	25

Chart No. 4



Elaboration: own source.

The above data show that 7% (7 subjects) of those who attended the online modality rated their therapeutic process in the pandemic as excellent, 45% (45) as good, 23.% (23) as bad and 25% (25) did not respond. It is noteworthy that the rating in the online modality of the

therapy as bad in this modality is higher than in the face-to-face modality, this may be due to problems of connection and privacy to talk.

Table 10

Modalidad mixta	Nivel de satisfacción
Excelente	7
Buena	25
Mala	5
NR	9

Graph 5



Elaboration: own source.

The above data show that 15.2% (7 subjects) who attend in mixed modality rate their therapeutic process in pandemic as excellent, 54.3% (25) as good, 10.9% (5) as bad and 19.6% (9) subjects did not respond. In general terms, the modality that is most highly rated as excellent is the mixed modality. This suggests that the flexibility of the modality according to the patient's needs makes the psychotherapeutic process more satisfactory and therefore better

Discussion

The COVID 19 pandemic has posed a challenge in the psychotherapeutic process, modifying the usual way of practicing psychotherapy and moving to telepsychotherapy.

In this sense, we see how a hybrid modality is presented today that allows a greater adaptation of both the patient and the therapist to the current circumstances.

Among the emotional factors that most affect the sample during the covid 19 pandemic are anxiety and depression, these results are similar to those found by Quintero, Hernandez, Snaguinetti and Andrade (2021) in their research with a sample of migrants and non-migrants during the covid 19 pandemic.

Within the population that most seeks professional help, it is located between 18 and 35 years of age. Vahratian Blumberg (2021) found that during August 2020 and February 2021 the population most affected with episodes of anxiety and depression is located in those over 18 years of age.

Taking into account the above, it can be concluded that the population between 18 and 35 years of age are presenting a greater psychological impact experiencing anxiety and depression and that is why they are more likely to seek professional help. In contrast,

it is interesting to know what Wang, et al 2020 found that the population with the greatest psychological impact is between 11 and 21 years of age in China. Presumably, this is an age group that switched from attending face-to-face classes to online modality with many stumbling blocks in the process.

As for the satisfaction with psychotherapy according to its modality (face-to-face, online or mixed) in all modalities, the majority of the sample rated it as good; however, the mixed modality presented better results than the other two modalities.

These results are compatible with Richards and Vignano (2013) who point out that there are positive results about telepsychotherapy and that it can have a similar impact to face-to-face therapy and replicate the conditions that facilitate the therapeutic process.

Poletti, et. al (2020) found evidence of significant improvement of anxiety and depression symptoms with individual cognitive-behavioral telepsychotherapy after 6 to 8 sessions. This suggests the efficacy of telepsychotherapy at the present time. It is worth noting the importance of timely and effective psychotherapeutic care in any of its modalities (online or face-to-face) for the reduction of the population's discomfort.

Additionally, despite not being the object of study of the present research, training for the therapist is necessary, as well as a code of ethics that regulates the practice of telepsychotherapy, as pointed out in his study Khatib (2021).

There were some refined cases that gave unusual answers, others with a tendency to agree with everything that was asked, and this results in a smaller sample than the initial one.

Conclusions

The results of the present study indicate that there is a good satisfaction with the psychotherapeutic process in pandemic, in any of its modalities.

Additionally, the psychological impact of covid 19 translates directly into the presence of anxiety and depression to a greater extent in those between 18 and 35 years of age. It is therefore to be expected that this is the age group most in need of professional help.

On the other hand, although it is not explicitly evidenced in the study, the good attitude of patient and therapist seems fundamental for telepsychotherapy to achieve its effectiveness, in addition to the technological conditions for it.

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