

# A Cross-Sectional Survey on Telemental Health: What Do Service Providers and Clients Think of Its Effectiveness?

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## Introduction

While increasing evidence demonstrates equivalent effectiveness between telemedicine and direct patient care, little research has been done specifically on telemental health (TMH). TMH is a virtual delivery of healthcare and the exchange of healthcare information to provide mental health services to clients.

## Objective

We aimed to establish the perceived effectiveness of TMH as compared to direct patient care, in order to identify confounding factors affecting the effectiveness of TMH, and to compare perceptions and barriers to TMH.

## Method

Two sets of self-administered surveys were distributed to identified TMH service providers and clients using snowball sampling, in which the participation was voluntary and de-identified. Five-point Likert scales were used to assess perceptions across domains of usefulness, effectiveness, ease of use, interaction quality, reliability, and overall satisfaction, with safety being an additional domain for service providers. Information on barriers was also collected. The results were summarized by calculating mean scores and percentages, while parametric and non-parametric tests were performed to test for relationships between variables.

## Result

TMH significantly improved access to mental health care. Among 37 service providers (SP) and 49 clients (CL) (n=86), more CL than SP favored TMH. Most participants agreed that TMH is useful (SP 68.5%, CL 83.7%), effective (SP 59.9%, CL 74.9%), easy to use (SP 65.5%, CL 85.0%), satisfactory (SP 63.1%, CL 78.6%) and were willing to use TMH again (SP 78.4%, CL 75.5%). An unsuitable environment to carry out the session was a major barrier faced by most clients (39.2%). The survey uncovered several confounding factors that may have contributed to the perceived effectiveness of TMH.

## Conclusion

Service providers and clients have different views on the effectiveness of TMH. While TMH may not be comparable to direct patient care, TMH services were met with high levels of satisfaction. TMH could, therefore, be considered as a supplement to mental health management.

## Key Words

*Telemental health, service providers, clients, effectiveness, satisfaction*

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