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Online group therapy helps adults with anxiety and depression, new review finds

University of Lethbridge researchers see group approach as way to increase access to much-needed assistance

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have profound impacts on the mental health of adults. A new [review](#) by University of Lethbridge researchers highlights a way to increase public access to effective psychological therapies in an online environment.

“We know that psychological counselling delivered by video, phone and apps can work,” says Dr. Cheryl Currie, an Associate Professor of Public Health at the University of Lethbridge, and lead investigator of the review. “The catch is that how well these therapies work is often tied to the intensity of web-based therapist guidance. This has time implications for the therapist and cost implications for the client and health-care system.”



With so many people needing psychological help right now, Currie and her team wondered if there was a way other than one-on-one approaches. The research team systematically searched the scientific literature to determine if psychological treatments delivered by therapists to groups could be effective online.

Examining more than 4,000 articles, they found 21 randomized controlled trials that tested if psychological therapies offered to adults in a group format online or by phone were effective.

Based on the evidence, the team concluded that adults who engaged in 8-12 hours of live group therapy with a counsellor or psychologist online experienced significant improvements in their anxiety and depression. These therapies were especially effective when delivered by videoconference, when adults could see one another during the sessions.

“Humans are social creatures,” explains Currie. “As a result, psychological supports offered in a group setting can have many therapeutic benefits. This review contributes to our understanding by showing that the benefits of group therapy extend to the online therapeutic environment.”

The findings support establishing online group therapy programs so that more people can have access to these opportunities.

“This is great news,” says Currie. “It means that psychological care delivered online by therapists to groups can be effective. It means that more people can be helped at the same time. During a time of global crisis, increasing access to high-quality psychological support is something that so many adults could benefit from right now.”

The review was published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research on January 11, 2022, and can be found at: <https://www.jmir.org/2022/1/e27939>

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/online-group-therapy-helps-adults-anxiety-and-depression-new-review-finds>

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