

# Telemental Health and Diverse Populations amid COVID-19

Subjects: Medical Informatics

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Telemental health is defined as the delivery of psychological and mental health services via telecommunication technologies, including telephone-delivered therapy, videoconferencing, and internet-delivered programs. Research indicates that telemental health services are as effective as in-person services, and a dramatic increase in the use of telemental health has been observed during COVID-19. However, there are still persistent challenges and concerns about mental health providers' competencies, clients' data privacy, and legal and regulatory issues during this pandemic. Additionally, disparities in the use of telemental health services with diverse populations, based on factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, and culture, have been identified during this pandemic.

Keywords: telemental health ; telemental health disparity ; diverse population ; COVID-19

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The Novel Coronavirus 2019 Disease (COVID-19) was an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), first reported in Wuhan, China <sup>[1]</sup>. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared this outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) after COVID-19 infection rates rapidly spread across the world <sup>[2]</sup>. Initially, the public had to face this imminent health risk with limited information. In response, governments across the world decided to impose movement restrictions to curb COVID-19 spread <sup>[3]</sup>. The implementation of movement restrictions on daily life brought immediate challenges across all elements of society. In particular, the restrictions required mental health providers to offer and deliver care services via distance-based services rather than in-person services.

These distance-based services are collectively referred to as telemental health services. Telemental health refers to the use of telecommunication technologies to deliver mental healthcare services remotely, such as telephone-delivered therapy, videoconferencing, and internet-delivered programs. Services that can be delivered via telemental health include providing patients with health information and direct healthcare. This allows individuals to receive care from their own homes or other locations.

Telemental health has become an increasingly important tool in providing access to healthcare for the diverse population before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, disparities existed in access to telemental health services across different groups <sup>[4]</sup>. This entry aims to provide a general overview of the challenges and concerns that mental health providers are likely to face while delivering telemental health services and to examine disparities in telemental health services usage among diverse populations during COVID-19. However, the scope of the entry is limited to the existing literature that pertains to the use and delivery of telemental health services, and the low publication rate of Eastern countries may result in limited geographical diversity.

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## References

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