



THE UNIVERSITY  
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# Therapeutic Alliance in Teens using Telemental Health

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## Outcome Objectives

- Describe the three components encompassing the concept of Therapeutic Alliance
- Describe three factors that may impact therapeutic alliance for adolescents using telemental health
- Explain potential limitations to the recommended hybrid approach in building therapeutic alliance with adolescents

# Background

## Definition of Terms

### Therapeutic Alliance (TA)

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- Collaborative relationship
  - Three Concepts:
    - 1. Strong Affective Bond
    - Agreement on
      - 2. Goals of Treatment
      - 3. Tasks during encounter

### Telemental Health

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- Synchronous encounter
- Audio +/- video
- Any mental health professional discussing mental health issues
- Increase use during COVID-19 pandemic

### Adolescents

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- Age of consent for treatment
- 14-18

# Significance

- 1 in 5 teens reports a severe mental health disorder
- 50% of lifetime mental illness begins by age 14
- Yet, 50% treatment rate
- Impact: absenteeism, risky behaviors, suicidal behaviors
- Therapeutic Alliance is a strong predictor of positive outcomes



Research Question

How does telehealth as a means of interaction impact the therapeutic alliance between adolescent patients and their mental health providers?

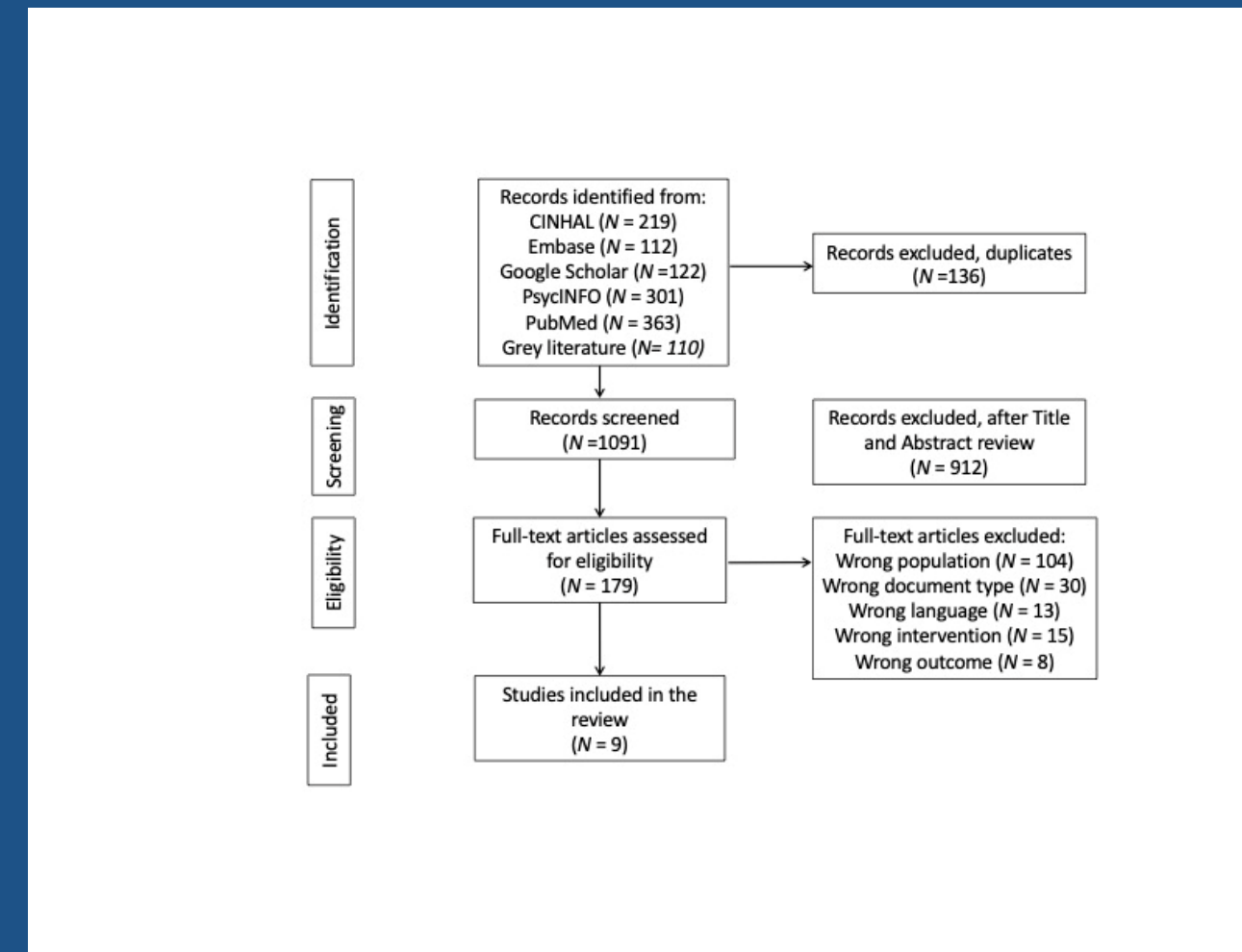
## Search Strategy:

- PubMed, Embase, PsychINFO, CINAHL, ProQuest and Google Scholar
- Fall 2022 & Summer 2023

## Inclusion/Exclusion:

- Synchronous Telehealth
- Adolescent Age Group
- Mental Health Diagnosis
- Examine Therapeutic Alliance
- *Grey Literature*: exclude quality improvement

# PRISMA-ScR



# Description of Studies

9 articles total

- 6 countries
- Combined mean age of the participants = 15.74 years
- 3 took place prior to COVID-19 pandemic
- Most often used Scale: Working Alliance Inventory (WAI)



Established Relationship  
Prior to Telemental Health



Diagnoses Best Suited for  
Telemental Health



Technology's Role in  
Telemental Health



Therapeutic Space and  
Privacy



Appointment Attendance

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## Established Relationship Prior to Telemental Health (TMH)

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- Initiation of Therapeutic Alliance in person helped to maintain when transitioned to TMH
- Assisted with some adolescents becoming even more vulnerable during TMH encounters
- Clinicians reflected that may have to extend greater effort if no established TA
- Those without a strong TA ended sessions once transitioned to TMH

References: Allison et al., 2022; Mekori- Domachevsky et al., 2021; Nicholas et al., 2021; van Rooj et al., 2023

## Diagnoses Best Suited for Telemental Health (TMH)

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- Lower Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) scores:
  - Internalizing Symptoms: Lower task and goal subscales
  - Depression, Anxiety, and Stress scale: lower goal subscale
- Establishing Therapeutic Alliance (TA):
  - Easier
    - Audio only: anorexia nervosa (AN)
    - Less severe, more stable
  - More difficult: depression

References: Carretier et al, 2023; Mekori- Domachevsky et al., 2021

## Technology's Role in Telemental Health (TMH)

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- Advantages
  - Independence/autonomy for adolescents
  - Eliminate transportation burden, including time needed for travel
  - Increase flexibility in scheduling
- Barriers:
  - Access to hardware, high-speed internet
  - Difficult to decode nonverbal communication
  - Distractibility, less commitment
- Compared to synchronous chat, videoconferencing had higher session impact, higher TA, more nuanced communication

References: Allison et al., 2022; Boydell et al., 2010; Chalmers et al., 2018; King et al., 2006; Mekori- Domachevsky et al., 2021

## Therapeutic Space and Privacy

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- Neutral, therapeutic space
- Privacy
  - Only 75% adolescents reported “very private” encounter vs 96% reported in-person encounters\*
- Barriers
  - Technology placement within the home; lack of privacy /separate room for adolescent
  - Lack of alone time with provider
  - Security of platform

References: \*Allison et al., 2022; Carretier et al, 2023; Castro et al., 2023; van Rooij et al., 2023

## Appointment Attendance

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- More likely to continue treatment/attend appointments
  - Established relationship prior to change to telemental health<sup>^</sup>
  - Higher bond and goal sub-scores on Working Alliance Inventory (WAI)<sup>^</sup>
- Show rate: similar (81%) between in person and TMH\*
  - If did not show: related to technological issues or increase in functional behaviors
- Reduction transportation burden

References: Carretier et al, 2023; Chalmers et al., 2018; Cooper et al., 2024<sup>^</sup>; Frye et al., 2022\*

# Discussion



Hybrid Approach



Problem Solve Privacy



## Limitations

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### Limitations:

- 1 RCT (< 200 participants)
- Only 3 occurred before pandemic
- Lack of diverse representation

## Future Research

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- In post-pandemic era
- Include a comparison arm
- More rigorous studies





# Thank you

## References

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