Artificial Intelligence in Counselling Psychology: A Conceptual Review of Ethical, Relational, and Epistemological Challenges

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Abstract

The growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in mental health services has opened up new ways to provide psychological help, such as through AI chatbots, virtual assistants, and digital therapy tools. At the same time, using AI in counselling psychology raises important questions about the nature of therapeutic relationships, empathy, professional responsibility, confidentiality, and the reliability of AI-generated psychological support. This conceptual review highlights the relational and epistemological challenges that arise when using AI in counselling psychology by synthesizing relevant theory and scholarly work. This review examines the therapeutic alliance and ethical principles that are important for digital mental health communication. It explores how AI may change the counselling process and the roles of counsellors and clients. Particular attention is given to problems related to authenticity, empathy, privacy, confidentiality, transparency, professional accountability, and the limitations of AI in understanding individuals' unique experiences. The review suggests that AI tools can improve access to mental health support and provide timely, personalised assistance. These tools can simulate understanding and care, but they do not experience real feelings or possess real-life experiences. Therefore, they are different from human counsellors in their ability to establish an authentic therapeutic relationship. The use of AI raises questions about protecting personal information, confidentiality, accuracy, transparency, and accountability. The review concludes that AI should be used as a tool that works alongside counsellors rather than as a replacement for counsellors. A more responsible approach involves integrating AI with professional expertise in counselling psychology. The review also identifies some areas requiring further research, such as the therapeutic alliance, ethical concerns, and the effectiveness of AI-assisted counselling.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Counselling Psychology, Digital Mental Health, Ethics, Therapeutic Alliance.*