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Teleassessment in Psychological Practice: Opportunities, Challenges and Critical Considerations

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ABSTRACT

Teleassessment has taken on an increasingly important role in psychological practice, representing an innovative methodology that leverages digital technologies and remote communication tools (videoconferencing, online platforms, dedicated software, etc.) for clinical evaluation and the administration of psychodiagnostic tests remotely. This approach allows for overcoming geographical and logistical barriers, improving accessibility to psychological services and offering greater flexibility to both professionals and users. However, teleassessment also presents numerous challenges, including technological issues, methodological limitations, clinical difficulties, and ethical concerns related to privacy and data security. The present work aims to provide an overview of this methodology, highlighting its main advantages, the remaining limitations to be addressed, and ethical implications that require attention. Additionally, operational guidelines for the correct and responsible use of teleassessment are presented, emphasizing the importance of specific training and empirical validation of tools to ensure the quality and reliability of remote assessments. Finally, future prospects offered by the evolution of immersive technologies are discussed, which could further revolutionize psychological clinical practice.

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Introduction

In recent years, the practice of remote psychological assessment, also known as teleassessment, has experienced exponential growth, in line with the evolution of digital technologies and telemedicine. This development accelerated significantly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated the reconfiguration of many health and psychological services to remote modalities. However, the concept of remote psychological intervention is not entirely new: as early as the 1990s, some authors had hypothesized the use of telecommunications for clinical and diagnostic purposes [1], anticipating changes that would materialize decades later.

The pandemic represented a turning point, pushing healthcare organizations, professional bodies, and publishers specializing in psychodiagnostic tests to adapt tools and procedures to enable their remote use. In particular, companies such as Pearson, Giunti Psychometrics, and others have provided digital versions of various assessment instruments, while the American Psychological Association (APA) published ethical and operational guidelines for the use of teleassessment [2,3]. Concurrently, numerous studies have investigated the validity, reliability, and psychometric robustness of assessments administered through digital tools [4-8].

Teleassessment currently represents a valid and flexible methodology, capable of ensuring continuity of care even in situations of logistical difficulties, territorial isolation, or health emergencies. Its application allows psychologists to overcome geographical and temporal barriers, extending access to psychological services to a broader clientele, including individuals with physical limitations or difficulties accessing in-person services.

From an operational standpoint, communication methods have evolved from simple modalities—such as telephone contact, emails, or chats—to increasingly interactive and immersive formats based on videoconferencing, virtual environments, and, more recently, emerging technologies like holographic interfaces [9]. This evolution has also entailed a redefinition of the concept of the "clinical setting," which today can include digital spaces governed by security, privacy, and confidentiality protocols compliant with current regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in the United States.

Moreover, the implementation of teleassessment involves significant ethical and professional implications. Psychologists must ensure the protection of personal data, the integrity of the assessment process, and the respect of patient well-being even in the virtual context. This requires the adoption of certified platforms, the use of secure technologies, and the acquisition of adequate digital competencies by both professionals and users.

The growing number of scientific publications on the subject testifies to widespread interest in this mode of work, which has shown promising results in various fields, including developmental assessment, neuropsychology, and educational settings [10-12].

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In this contribution, the aim is to systematically explore teleassessment: its development context, methodology, technical and professional requirements, advantages, limitations, and ethical implications will be illustrated. The objective is to provide an updated, evidence-based overview useful for mental health professionals, researchers, and academics engaged in clinical psychology and psychodiagnostic assessment.

Reliability and Method

Recent research suggests that teleassessment in the psychological field can be considered reliable and valid, especially in neuropsychological evaluations conducted with adults. Comparative studies have found that remote administration of cognitive tests produces results similar to those obtained in face-to-face settings. For example, Brearly et al. [13] found a strong correlation between scores obtained through both modalities, with clinically negligible differences. Similarly, Galusha-Glasscock et al. [14] demonstrated that the use of remote neurocognitive tools does not compromise the reliability of the data collected, while Loh et al. [15] and Wadsworth et al. [16] confirmed the diagnostic equivalence and clinical validity of remote neuropsychological assessments, asserting that diagnoses made online are comparable in accuracy to those made in person.

In developmental contexts, the assessment process can be more complex due to the need for greater mediation and assistance during test administration. Some subtests, such as the Block Design from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Fifth Edition (WISC-V), are technically difficult to adapt for remote use because of their manipulative and visuospatial nature. However, Wright [5-7] and Hodge et al. [17] found high levels of correlation between in-person and remote administrations even in children, suggesting that under certain conditions, remote assessment does not significantly compromise the validity of the evaluation.

These findings have also been confirmed for cognitive assessment batteries such as the Woodcock–Johnson IV Test of Cognitive Abilities [18] and the Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scales, Second Edition [19], where studies indicated that differences between scores in the two administration modes are statistically negligible. This supports the hypothesis that the mode of test delivery, if conducted with methodological rigor and in controlled environments, is not a distorting factor in the results obtained. More recently, the Rorschach test has also been administered remotely with encouraging results [20].

However, the reliability of teleassessment depends on several factors: connection quality, patient compliance, suitability of the setting, and professional training. It is essential for the psychologist to acquire good familiarity with the technological tools used and to adhere to standardized administration procedures, including remote monitoring, patient identity authentication, and environmental verification, in order to minimize errors and measurement bias. Wherever possible, it is advisable to integrate remotely collected data with complementary sources, such as clinical observations or detailed anamnesis, to maintain the high quality of the diagnostic intervention.

Some Operational Guidelines and Technological Requirements

For teleassessment to be conducted effectively, securely, and with scientific validity, a series of technical, methodological, and ethical precautions must be put in place to ensure the integrity of the assessment process and the protection of the client [21,22]. Operational preparation represents a fundamental preliminary phase to minimize the risk of bias, guarantee the quality of collected data, and ensure compliance with professional standards and psychological ethics [23].

Before starting the assessment process, it is essential to obtain the client's informed consent. This document, completed and digitally signed, must include clear information about the evaluation procedures, the limitations of the technology used, and the measures taken to protect confidentiality. Clients must also be informed about any audio or video recordings, specifying the purpose of the recording, data storage methods, and retention periods, in accordance with privacy regulations (e.g., GDPR in Europe or HIPAA in the United States). The digital platform used for test administration must comply with the security and encryption standards required by current legislation and be certified by reliable authorities.

Access to test materials should occur exclusively through controlled digital environments, avoiding the sending of test links or files via email or unprotected systems.

During self-administered testing, real-time audiovisual supervision by the psychologist is strongly recommended [24]. This requires establishing a stable videoconference connection with active monitoring capabilities. The psychologist must verify the client's identity, ensure the absence of external interferences, and confirm optimal environmental conditions for the evaluation: a quiet, well-lit space free from distractions or third parties [25]. It is also advisable to instruct the client on how to prepare the space and what to expect during the session.

To participate in a teleassessment under optimal conditions, the client must have an adequate electronic device (preferably a desktop, laptop, or tablet with a screen size ≥12 inches), a good quality webcam, a reliable microphone, and an updated operating system (e.g., Windows 10 or higher, macOS 10.14 or higher). Additionally, a stable, high-speed internet connection capable of supporting uninterrupted video sessions is essential [26].

Another indispensable prerequisite is the client's digital literacy — that is, their ability to use technological tools, videoconferencing platforms, and online self-administration systems independently and correctly. It is the psychologist's responsibility to verify this competence beforehand, potentially offering a brief technical orientation phase.

Advantages of Teleassessment

Teleassessment represents an innovative mode of delivering psychological services that offers multiple advantages for both professionals and patients. Remote psychological evaluation allows for the overcoming of numerous barriers traditionally associated with access to mental health services, positioning itself as a versatile and adaptable tool for the needs of contemporary society [27,28].

One of the most significant benefits is the elimination of geographical barriers—that is, improved geographic accessibility. Teleassessment enables individuals living in rural, mountainous, or otherwise remote areas to access specialized psychological evaluations, overcoming the physical limitations of distance. This is particularly important in contexts where the availability of qualified psychologists or specific diagnostic services is limited or entirely absent [29].

Remote assessment also allows for time optimization by significantly reducing time-related barriers. Time spent traveling, waiting in offices, or coordinating in-person visits is eliminated. This increases efficiency for the patient—who can more easily integrate the evaluation into their daily routine—and for the professional, who can manage their schedule with greater flexibility.

Additionally, the economic costs associated with in-person assessment—such as transportation, parking, missed work, or the need for accompaniment—are greatly reduced or completely eliminated.

From a clinical standpoint, teleassessment is particularly useful for patients who, due to their symptoms, find it difficult to physically attend an office appointment. This includes individuals experiencing severe depressive symptoms, social anxiety, relational withdrawal, or phobias related to public spaces. In such cases, the familiar and safe environment of one's own home may facilitate greater adherence to the assessment process. Remote connections can also help reduce cultural and symbolic barriers associated with seeking mental health care.

Finally, teleassessment provides the opportunity to access professionals with specialized expertise, even if they are not located in the patient's geographical area.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its numerous advantages, teleassessment also presents challenges and limitations that must be carefully considered to ensure the validity, reliability, and ethical conduct of remote psychological evaluation [30]. These challenges mainly concern technological, methodological, clinical, and ethical aspects.

One of the primary difficulties encountered in teleassessment is technical issues. An unstable internet connection or the use of inadequate devices can interfere with the quality of audio-video communication, affecting the clarity of interaction, behavioral observation, and the precision of test administration [26]. Network interruptions may cause anxiety or frustration for both the client and the professional, compromising the smoothness and reliability of the diagnostic procedure [22].

Moreover, not all clients possess adequate digital literacy, which can make it difficult to autonomously manage the tools necessary for the evaluation. This barrier may be particularly significant in vulnerable populations, such as the elderly or individuals with cognitive disabilities.

Additionally, some psychodiagnostic instruments, especially those requiring physical interaction with materials (e.g., blocks, cards, puzzles), are more complex to administer remotely. For example, the Block Design subtest of the WISC-V has been identified as less suitable for telematic format [5,6,17].

Furthermore, it is not always possible to guarantee control over the environment in which the assessment takes place. Noise, distractions, the presence of other people, or lack of privacy can influence the cognitive or emotional performance of the client, thereby affecting the validity of some collected data. This is particularly critical in clinical assessments of complex disorders that require a highly controlled context.

Another area of concern is the protection of sensitive data. Although the use of platforms compliant with regulations (such as GDPR or HIPAA) is mandatory, the risk of accidental breaches, cyber intrusions, or human error persists. It is essential that the professional informs the client in advance about all aspects of digital privacy, including any video/audio recording processes, data storage, or sharing of clinical documentation.

Future Perspectives and Final Considerations

Teleassessment represents one of the clearest expressions of the ongoing digital transformation in clinical psychological practice. The integration of technological tools and evaluation processes has led to the creation of new modes of clinical interaction, to the point that, according to G. Riva [31], it configures an "interreality," a hybrid environment where the real and virtual merge and coexist. In this context, technology's role is not only instrumental but also transformative, influencing how the psychologist observes, assesses, and interacts with the client.

Teleassessment has become particularly widespread in recent times, and it is highly likely that telemedicine services will continue to grow in the near future [32-34]. However, even before the pandemic, psychology had already begun to introduce certain technological concepts and practices through telecommunications [35-37].

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was limited incentive for remote assessment, but later, companies producing psychological tests (e.g., Pearson) [38] began offering adaptations for remote test administration, and professional organizations released guidelines on how to conduct teleassessments ethically and appropriately.

Future prospects are shaped by the evolution of immersive technologies such as interactive virtual environments, three-dimensional holograms, and the metaverse, which could enable even more realistic and personalized assessment methods, overcoming many current technical and relational limitations. For example, three-dimensional reconstruction of environments can facilitate behavioral observation in simulated contexts, and the creation of realistic avatars [9] could improve engagement and communication, especially with younger patients or those who have difficulties in interaction.

However, to ensure teleassessment maintains scientific, ethical, and professional standards, it will be essential to:

- Properly train psychologists in the use of digital technologies, with practical training and continuous updates;
- Empirically validate diagnostic tools for remote administration, through systematic research on their reliability and validity;
- Strictly comply with national and international regulations on personal data protection;
- Constantly monitor the impact of the new setting on therapeutic alliance, clinical communication, and patients' psychological well-being.

It is important to emphasize that teleassessment does not replace in-person evaluation but rather complements it, offering additional opportunities, especially in cases where physical access to services is limited. It can be a valuable resource for continuity of care, inclusion of remote or vulnerable populations, and optimization of clinical time and resources.

Knowing and mastering this methodology, with its strengths and limitations, is now an essential skill for every mental health

professional. The challenge for contemporary psychology will be to combine technological innovation with scientific rigor, always ensuring the primacy of the human relationship even within the context of digital assessment.

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