

# Attitudes towards Tele-Psychotherapy, Behavioral Intention and Therapeutic Alliance Among Psychotherapists

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of tele-psychotherapy as both patients and therapists relied on technology to maintain mental health care, but very little is known about attitude of psychotherapists towards telepsychotherapy. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the impact of attitudes towards telepsychotherapy on therapeutic alliance with the mediating role of behavioral intention. The study employed a cross-sectional research design, consisting of 250 psychotherapists and counselors, having a degree of MS/MPhil or BS in psychology with diploma or certification and a minimum of two years of clinical experience, with age ranging from 23-55 years ( $M = 27.5$  and  $SD = 5.45$ ). Attitude towards tele-psychotherapy and behavioral intention was measured by the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology- Therapist version (UTAUT-T; Békés et al., 2022), and a therapeutic alliance was measured by the Working Alliance Inventory-Short Form Revised Therapist version (WAI- SRT; Hatcher & Gillaspay, 2006). Results showed that attitude towards telepsychotherapy positively correlated with therapeutic alliance, and behavioral intention. Similarly, mediation analysis demonstrated that behavioral intention mediated the relationship between attitude towards telepsychotherapy and therapeutic alliance. These findings are crucial for mental health practitioners in fostering the therapeutic alliance by increasing and strengthening their performance standards and general attitude towards telepsychotherapy.

## INTRODUCTION

Pakistan faces a significant mental health crisis due to a lack of mental health professionals and high rates of mental illness (Dayani et al., 2023). This shortage necessitates exploring alternative ways to deliver mental health care. Tele-psychotherapy may help address the shortage of mental health services in Pakistan by providing a viable alternative for improving access to care (Asad et al., 2024). The effectiveness of tele-psychotherapy can be identified by therapeutic alliance, which is a collaborative connection between therapist and client aimed at achieving the treatment goals (Glass & Bickler, 2021). This study aims to assess the impact of attitudes towards therapy on the therapeutic alliance, taking into account the behavioural intention.

## Objective

- To study the impact of attitudes towards tele-psychotherapy on therapeutic alliance among psychotherapists and counsellors.
- To investigate the mediating role of behavioural intention between attitude towards tele-psychotherapy and therapeutic alliance

## Hypotheses

- Attitude towards tele-psychotherapy (performance expectation, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, and attitude) will positively correlate with therapeutic alliance among psychotherapists and counsellors.
- Anxiety will negatively correlate with therapeutic alliance among psychotherapists and counsellors.
- Behavioural Intention will mediate the relationship between attitude towards tele-psychotherapy and therapeutic alliance

## Sample

The study employed cross-sectional research design, consisting of psychotherapists and counsellors ( $N = 250$ ), having a degree of MS/MPhil or BS in psychology with diploma or certification and a minimum of two years of clinical experience, collected through purposive sampling technique from all over Pakistan, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Federal.

## Instruments

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology- Therapist version (UTAUT-T; Békés et al., 2022) was used to measure attitude towards tele-psychotherapy and behavioral intention, and therapeutic alliance was measured by the Working Alliance Inventory-Short Form Revised Therapist version (WAI- SRT; Hatcher & Gillaspay, 2006).

## Procedure

This study received ethical approval from the Director of the Department of National Institute of Psychology. Data was collected from various healthcare settings across Pakistan. Of the 415 participants approached, 250 completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 60.2%.

Table 1

Correlation Analysis between Attitudes towards Tele-Psychotherapy, Behavioral Intention, and Therapeutic Alliance ( $N = 250$ )

	ATP	PE	EE	SI	FC	ATD	ANX	BI	TA
ATP	-	.80**	.77**	.78**	.78**	.87**	.51**	.80**	.54**
PE		-	.68**	.63**	.52**	.76**	.20**	.72**	.43**
EE			-	.64**	.51**	.80**	.07	.70**	.56**
SI				-	.59**	.75**	.09	.74**	.43**
FC					-	.59**	.40**	.57**	.43**
ATD						-	.19**	.81**	.47**
ANX							-	.20**	.22**
BI								-	.44**
TA									-

Note. ATP = Attitude towards telepsychotherapy; PE = Performance Expectation; EE = Effort Expectancy; SI = Social Influence; FC = Facilitating Conditions; ATD = Attitude; ANX = Anxiety; BI = Behavioral Intention; TA = Therapeutic Alliance

\*\* $p < .01$ .

## LIMITATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

- This study offers valuable insights into therapists' perspectives on tele-psychotherapy and the therapeutic alliance, it overlooks the experiences and opinions of clients.
- Future studies should consider exploring the impact of different mental health disorders on the therapeutic experience in tele-therapy settings.
- Future research should incorporate through surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the therapeutic alliance in tele-therapy settings.

Table 2

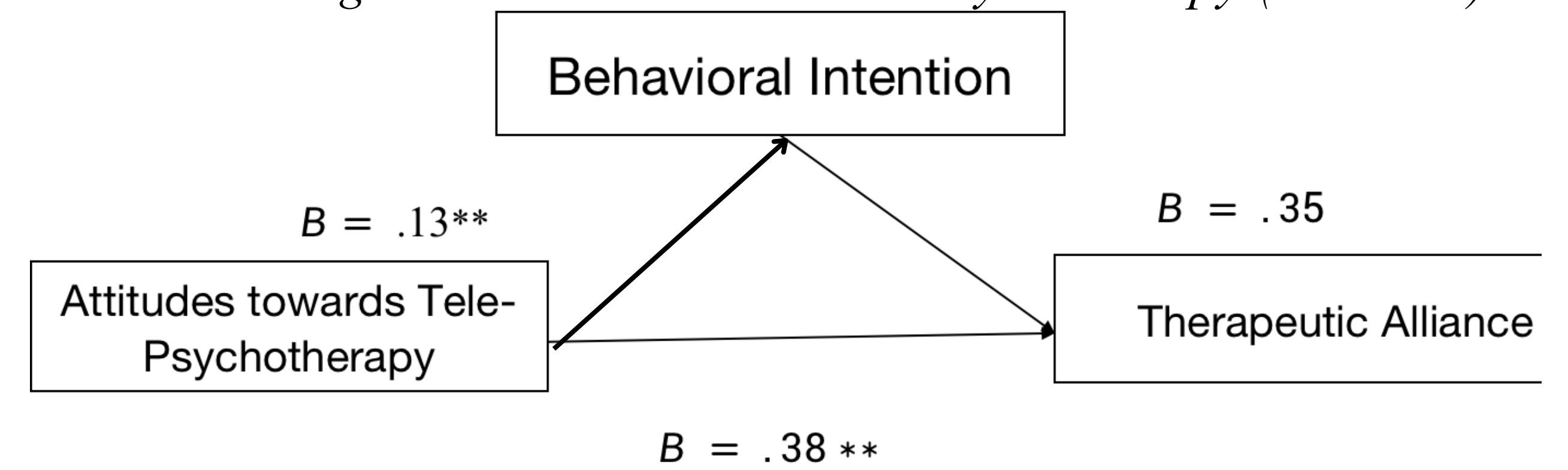
Mediating Effect of Behavioral Intention in Predicting Therapeutic Alliance through Attitudes towards Tele-Psychotherapy ( $N = 250$ )

	95% CI			
Variables	Model 1B	Model 2B	LL	UL
Constant	6.71**	46.68**	41.17	52.20
ATP	.15**	.38**	.26	.50
BI		.35	-1.18	.48
R <sup>2</sup>	.73	.30		
$\Delta R^2$		.43		
F	221.56	53.01		

\*\* $p < .01$ .

Figure 1

Mediating Effect of Behavioral Intention in Predicting Therapeutic Alliance through Attitudes towards Tele-Psychotherapy ( $N = 250$ )



## CONCLUSION

- These findings are crucial for mental health practitioners in fostering the therapeutic alliance by increasing and strengthening their performance standards and general attitude towards tele-psychotherapy.
- This study contributes to the growing body of literature on tele-psychotherapy and highlights critical factors influencing its efficacy, providing valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and mental health practitioners committed to enhancing mental health services for vulnerable groups.

## References

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