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Therapeutic alliance across delivery modalities: a systematic narrative review of alliance strength and outcome prediction in face-to-face, online, and blended psychotherapy

Key words: Therapeutic alliance; Working alliance; Telepsychology; Digital mental health; Blended psychotherapy; Online psychotherapy; Systematic narrative review

Research Summary

This review examined how therapeutic alliance (TA), a key predictor of psychotherapy outcomes, compares across three delivery formats: face-to-face (FTF), pure online (PO), and blended (BLD) psychotherapy. It specifically summarized the evidence in the following aspects:

- Comparison of TA strength across FTF, PO, and BLD
- Comparison of the TA–outcome association across modalities
- Differences between telepsychotherapy and therapist-guided digital interventions
- Variation by modality, rater perspective, and assessment timepoint
- Potential transient early-phase lag in asynchronous online treatment
- Implications for alliance processes in digital psychotherapy

Innovation points

- A modality-based review of therapeutic alliance across FTF, online, and blended psychotherapy
- A refined distinction between telepsychotherapy and therapist-guided digital interventions
- A focused synthesis of TA strength and TA–outcome associations across formats

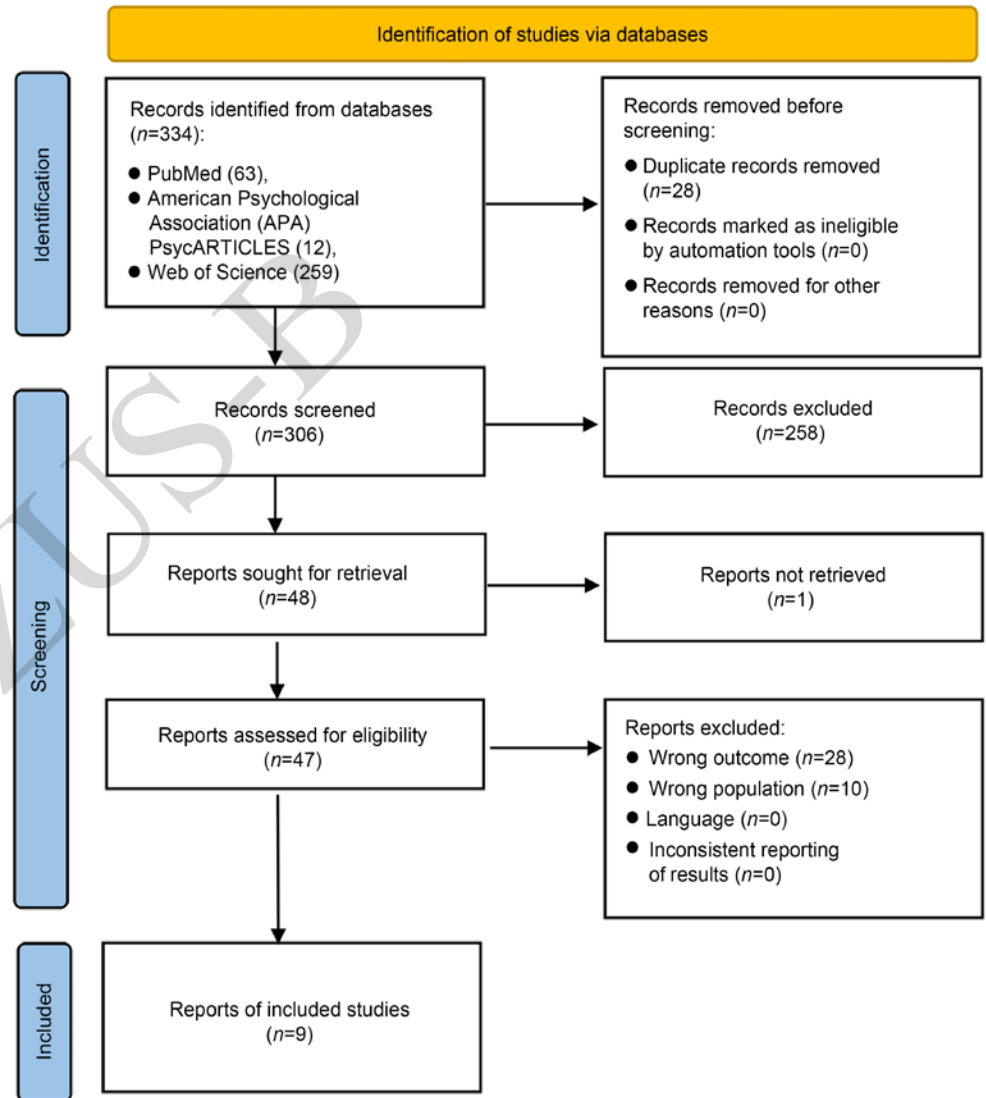


Fig. 1 PRISMA flow diagram