

# Awareness Integration Theory: A Comprehensive Telehealth and Virtual Psychotherapy Tool for the Treatment of Anxiety and Depression


Foojan ZEINE<sup>a,1</sup> and Nicole JAFARI<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> California State University, Long Beach, California, USA

*Founder @Awareness Integration Institute*

<sup>b</sup> Chicago School of Professional Psychology, USA;

*Founder & Principal @ Cross-Cultural Research & Educational Institute*

ORCID ID: Foojan ZEINE  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7709-5580>

ORCID ID: Nicole JAFARI  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7762-9673>

**Abstract.** The psychotherapy profession continuously seeks multi-modality strategies to meet the client's needs. In recent decades, virtual client services have grown; the need for telehealth magnified by the Covid-19 pandemic shifted, deviating from the traditional in-person client-clinician interaction. Comparative studies have shown comparable virtual and face-to-face (F2FC) psychotherapy efficacy in patient-positive outcomes. Many studies comparing in-person therapy with online telehealth resulted in participants reporting improvements in anxiety, better access to support and advice, greater satisfaction with the support they received, and improvements in self-management and health literacy. The Awareness Integration Theory (AIT) has created a comprehensive cyberpsychology and telehealth model that can be narrated in multiple languages and cultural competencies to address the scarcity of global mental health resources proactively. Numerous studies on using AIT have validated its effectiveness in reducing depression and anxiety while increasing self-esteem and self-efficacy in in-person psychotherapy and self-help journaling modalities. This paper demonstrates the mechanism of AIT and its universality of usage in multi-modality applications helping individuals gain skills in creating healthy building blocks to achieving a holistic self and a fulfilling life.

**Keywords.** Telehealth, Anxiety, Depression, Psychotherapy, APP, Awareness Integration Theory.

## 1. Introduction

The first Telehealth has existed since the infancy of the internet. One of its first Internet demonstrations was a simulated psychotherapy session between computers at Stanford University and the University of California, Los Angeles, during the 1972 international conference on computer communication. Psychotherapists who had previously used telephone therapy found the transition to online therapy straightforward<sup>1</sup>. In the past sixty years, the option to provide mental healthcare remotely has been the subject of many research studies<sup>2</sup>. Providers have been using videoconferencing for

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: Foojan ZEINE<sup>1</sup>, California State University, Long Beach, California;  
1250 Bellflower Blvd. Long Beach, CA 90840, USA. Email: foojanzeine@gmail.com

therapy, assessment, evaluations, and managing patients' medication to supplement in-person treatments<sup>3</sup>.

In February 2023, the World Health Organization reported that Covid19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented increase in mental health adversity. Since the prevalence of Covid19 pandemic, the global community has experienced a 25% increase in anxiety and depression, which calls for an urgent response by heads of state to increase funding for mental health care. The heightened acuity in anxiety and depressive symptoms catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic presents an urgent need for practical yet feasible alternatives to in-person mental health treatment. A survey of APA members found that 76% of the practitioners who stopped seeing patients in person because of COVID-19 have been treating all their patients remotely<sup>4</sup>. A randomized clinical trial comparing Telepsychiatry using videoconferencing with face-to-face (F2FC) conventional psychological methods showed that virtual mental health treatments have an efficacy equivalency as the F2FC alternatives<sup>5</sup>. In 2016, Salisbury and colleagues conducted a mega study comparing in-person therapy with telehealth online. Participants reported improvements in anxiety, better access to support and advice, greater satisfaction with the support they received, and improvements in self-management and health literacy<sup>6</sup>. Other studies also suggested no significant differences between telehealth care and F2FC in-person and telehealth groups in depressive symptom reduction<sup>3</sup>. As discussed in the next section, innovative telehealth modalities, such as the Awareness Integration Theory (AIT) online telehealth modality, have also shown consistently favorable efficacy results in virtual psychotherapy in-patient treatment.

## **2. Awareness Integration Theory**

Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT) is a multi-modality psychological model that promotes self-awareness of one's thought process, beliefs, dualities, and schemas. AIT also allows for awareness of feelings and emotions in the body by observing, naming, containing, and releasing the feelings. AIT fosters observation of one's behaviors, including communication styles and their impact on one's life and other people's life. This mode of observation and awareness is toward relation to others, in projections and assumptions about others relating to the self and the relation toward oneself. Through this practice in multiple areas of life, one becomes aware of the negative core beliefs and has the opportunity to revisit previous or childhood traumas, experiences, and memories that have been the source of the personalization and generalization of concepts to self. Clearing, healing, and re-narrating past experiences allows one to integrate and complete the unfinished matters of the past. By becoming whole and accessible to all parts of the self, including skills, strengths, and resiliency, one can envision the desired future. Setting goals, skill building, actions plan, and structures to reach and sustain short, long, and maintenance goals are thought<sup>7</sup>.

AIT operates based on the following nine principles: 1) Reality is based on the observer's subjective perception; therefore, one can co-create Reality. 2) Every person has the aptitude to acquire the knowledge and abilities to lead a fulfilling life. 3) Skills are acquired through personal experiences, physical and psychological developmental stages, and role modeling with parents, peers, teachers, and from culture, media, and society. 4) The human mind interprets all external stimuli and assigns meaning internally, developing beliefs, schemas, and individual identity to relate to oneself, others, and the world. 5) Humans cognitively, emotionally, and physically store experiences in the body.

The significant unintegrated memories resurface automatically triggered by an event needing attention. 6) As the unintegrated belief-emotion-body state is experienced, healed, released its meaning, and integrated into the whole system, neutral and positive attitudes, beliefs, and emotions are experienced. 7) Self-awareness and integrated self can create conscious choices and commitments regarding beliefs, emotions, and actions toward a new and positive result. 8) New skills are learned and practiced enhancing one's capabilities toward obtaining the desired results. 9) Conscious Intentionality toward an envisioned result, with practical and structured planning, raise the probability of achieving one's desired results in all areas of life toward living a fulfilled life<sup>7</sup>.

### **3. The Structural Mechanism of AIT as a Psychotherapeutic Construct**

AIT Interventions are implemented in 6 phases encompassing all areas of an individual's life: **Phase 1-** Awareness of the participant's thoughts/ perceptions/ beliefs, emotions, and behaviors about their external environment, their relation to others, and how those constructs impact their lives. **Phase 2:** This phase has three essential functions - 1) one's awareness of personal projections toward others; 2) One's recognition of inner meanings assigned to observations; 3) Comparing internal projections to other's reality. **Phase 3:** Awareness of assigned identity and recognition of negative core self-beliefs. **Phase 4:** AIT focuses on simultaneously experiencing the connection between beliefs, feelings, and the body areas that have stored and maintained intense emotions with the origin of a traumatic event that has produced the negative core belief. In this phase, irrational thoughts and decision-making strategies are reevaluated, integrated, and contained, and the narrative is replaced with the recognition of strengths. **Phase 5:** One can be responsible and accountable for their perception intentionally, thought, and emotional process as well as their action and the impact of their behaviors on their life and others. To set values to live by, visualize and commit to goals in all areas of life, and develop action plans toward tangible desired goals toward creating a fulfilled life. **Phase 6:** Set sustainable structures to ensure reaching and maintaining goals in all areas of life<sup>7</sup>.

AIT has been used as a telehealth model since its inception due to working with international clients transitioning globally for their careers. The model naturally adapts itself to new technologies. Depending on the telehealth laws of the country the clinician is licensed or certified in, the service can be adjusted, offered, or refused. Some clinicians who are also certified offer Life Coaching when serving clients beyond their licensing jurisdiction.

### **4. AIT in Telehealth**

The administrative process for utilizing AIT in telehealth varies. AIT can be used via the asynchronous written method through secured email or text messaging; synchronous written mode via end-to-end encryption chat (Imessage, WhatsApp, Telegram); real-time audio conversation via phone; synchronous audio messages via the apps; or video conferencing (Zoom, WhatsApp, Telegram, etc.).

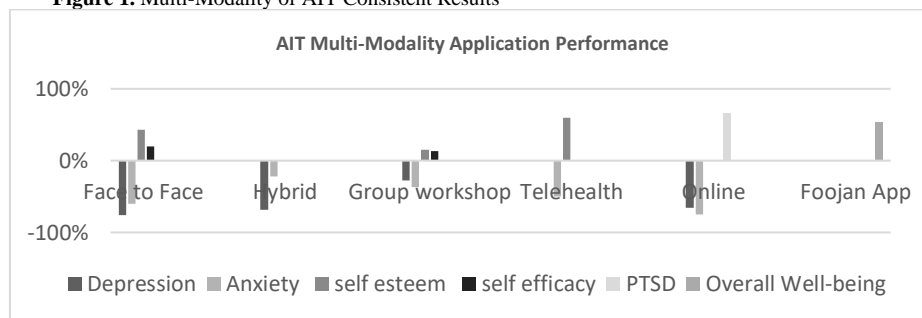
The first session aims to create a therapeutic alliance by identifying the presenting problem, exploring the client's history, identifying crisis management issues, and setting therapy/ coaching goals. The therapist and the client choose one area of life related to the presenting problem (i.e., Marriage, career). Intervention phases 1-4 will be utilized in as

many relevant areas of life as a subsidiary of the central area of focus. After completing the 4 phases with all relevant life areas, phase 5 guides the client to set a personal vision and mission statement of values to operate from. The client will attend to each life area and is encouraged to set short/extended/maintenance goals and action plans to actualize their goals. The client is requested to create a sustainable structure to maintain the commitment and actions to create a fulfilling life as designed and intended in Phase Six. A termination session is advised to evaluate the therapy process. Although structured, the AIT interventions are client-centered and can be adapted to the need of the client and the therapist's style.

### 5. AIT in Synchronistic Online Mental Health Multi-Modality

From its conception, the AIT psychotherapy method has been offered in various modalities and applications, yielding positive results in reducing anxiety and depression via face-to-face (F2FC), group settings, hybrid, virtual, and online training. Multiple published studies on the efficacy of AIT have shown consistent positive outcomes. A study conducted at the Personal Growth Institute using AIT in F2FC therapeutic sessions showed depression decreased by % 76 and anxiety by %60 while increasing self-esteem by %43 and self-efficacy by %20<sup>7</sup>. A study on the American college student population using the Awareness Integration Theory in a hybrid modality showed an overall 68% decrease in depression and a 21.72% decrease in anxiety<sup>8</sup>. In a group workshop setting, the AIT has also been tested on separated or divorced individuals, resulting in a 27.5% improvement in depressive moods, a 37% decrease in feelings of anxiousness and anxiety while showing a 15% increase in self-esteem, and a 13% boost in self-efficacy<sup>9</sup>. Additional studies utilizing AIT via telehealth resulted in decreasing anxiety by %50 and an increase in self-esteem by %60<sup>10</sup>, and in another case study, decreased depression by %66, anxiety by %75, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms by %66<sup>11</sup> (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Multi-Modality of AIT Consistent Results



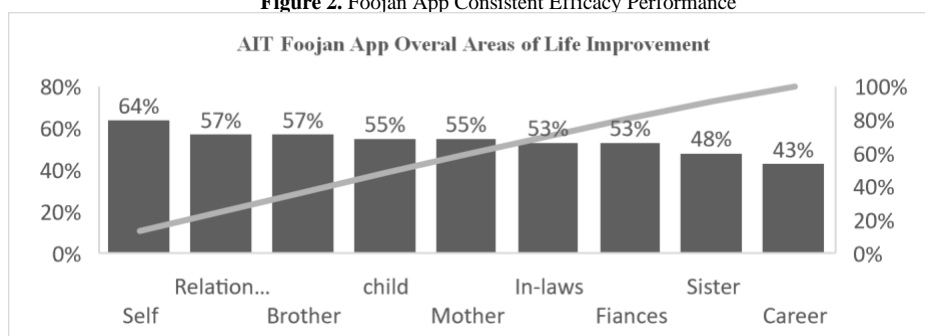
### 6. AIT in a Mobile App for Clients' Ease of Accessibility

The value of remote mental health services to clients who do not have remedial access to such services has been under research studies for several decades. The efficacy of such programs has since been measured and deemed beneficial on so many levels<sup>12</sup>. As a forerunner of telehealth, remote, and affordable client services, the AIT

methodology has been developed in a mobile App name “Foojan,” launched in Jan. 2023. The FoojanApp is now accessible to people globally via the Apple Store and google play. The user can subscribe to a monthly plan or a yearly plan. Every month the app offers three new areas of life and skill-building videos relevant to those areas. The user can choose between 3 life areas and begin the AIT process. The user can complete phases 1-6 for each area of life before moving on to the next area. The app explains the purpose of each phase through an animated video or audio recording. In Phase Five, the user will be asked about the skills they need to create their goals and are directed to [www.foojan.com](http://www.foojan.com) to choose from skill-building videos created by experts in the field<sup>13</sup>.

The users can also access AIT-certified professionals for individual, couple, or family psychotherapy or life coaching sessions. The Foojan app aims to facilitate access globally and affordably to all that need to foster mental health. The results of the survey have shown improvements in the following areas of relationship with Self-%64; Career-%43; Intimate relationship-%57; Child-%55; Siblings-%57; In-Law-%53; Mother-%55; and Father-%53. Next phase Foojan App will offer the app in 6 languages, in an audio version with an avatar, and incorporate Artificial Intelligence in creating more individualized, interactive responses and processes<sup>13</sup>. Foojan App has shown high-performing efficacy, as shown in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2. Foojan App Consistent Efficacy Performance**



## 7. Discussion

The field of psychology has continuously sought strategies to improve patients’ mental health and well-being. Throughout the history of this profession, different modalities have been tested for improvement in ease of accessibility to mental health professionals, connecting to resources, simplifying scheduling, and record-keeping, to mention a few. The transition from telephone therapy to email, chat, video therapy, and online sessions has created an integrated and holistic approach while improving patient care. With transforming technology, the added value of real-time online video has made it as similar as it could be to in-person therapy. Although the efficacy of online and telehealth psychotherapy methods has been the subject of scientific studies by many researchers, the result has been favorable and compatible with the traditional in-person approach. Many countries have explored the potential of psychological intervention programs using telehealth to respond to the rising demands of patients with chronic

**Annual Review of Cybertherapy and Telemedicine 2023**  
*Navigating the Ethical Crossroads:*  
*Bridging the gap between Predictive Power and Explanation*  
*in the use of Artificial Intelligence in Medicine*  
Volume 21- Year 2023 - Pgs. 239-265 – ISSN:1554-8716

disorders. From its early days, AIT set out to be a forerunner in easy conversion from in-person to online therapy, particularly for treating individuals and couples with anxiety and depression.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the efficacy of AIT, both online and in-person, have shown that regardless of the modality, the results have continuously been favorable in reducing anxiety/depression while improving self-esteem in individuals. Proactively, AIT has taken all the necessary measures to comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act - HIPAA securing patient record keeping, privacy, confidentiality, and ethical code of conduct in serving clients via online and telehealth modes. Additionally, taking patient care and accessibility to a higher level, Foojan App now offers the same quality, high-efficacy psychotherapy of AIT to a mobile app to reach a larger demographic needing such services. More than ever before, Mental health and well-being have become urgent at a global level. The field of psychology is responding to this sense of urgency by utilizing technology as an instrumental tool to provide mental health care services globally and transnationally.

## 8. References

- [1] Derrig-Palumbo, K., Zeine, F. (2005). *Online Therapy: A Therapist's Guide to Expanding Your Practice* W.W. Norton Publishers; 2005
- [2] Hilty, D.M., Ferrer, D.C., Parish, M.B., Johnston, B., Callahan, E. J., Yellowlees P.M. (2013). The effectiveness of telemental health: 2013 review. *Telemed. e-Health*. 2013;19(6):444–454.
- [3] Bulkes, N., Davis, K., Kay, B. Riemann B. C., (2022). Comparing the efficacy of telehealth to in-person Mental health care in intensive treatment-seeking adults. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, volume 145, January 2022, Pages 347-352
- [4] American Psychological Association (APA) (2022). Telehealth guidance by the state during COVID-19. <https://www.apaservices.org/practice/clinic/covid-19-telehealth-state-summary>
- [5] De Las Cuevas, C., Arredondo, T. M., Cabrera, F., Sulzenbacher, H., Meise, U. (2006). Randomized Clinical Trial of Telepsychiatry through Videoconference versus Face-to-Face Conventional Psychiatric Treatment. *Telemedicine and e-Health* 2006 12:3, 341-350.
- [6] Salisbury, C., O’Cathain, A., Edwards, L., Thomas, C., Gaunt, D., Hollinghurst, S., Nicholl, Large, S., Yardley, L., Lewis, G., Foster, A., Garner, K., Horspool, K., Man, M.S., Rogers, R., Pope, C. Dixon, P., Montgomery A, A. (2016). Effectiveness of an integrated telehealth service for patients with depression: a pragmatic randomized controlled trial of a complex intervention. *Lancet Psychiatry*; 3:515-525. Published Online April 27, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(16\)00083-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(16)00083-3)
- [7] Zeine, F. (2016). Awareness Integration: A New Therapeutic Model, *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience*, Vol. 16, No. 60-65, pp. ISSN 1522-4821
- [8] Zeine, F., Jafari, N., Forouzes, M. (2017). Awareness Integration: A Non-Invasive Recovery Methodology in Reducing College Student Anxiety, Depression, and Stress”, *TOJET– Nov. 2017, Special Issue for IETC (2017)* [www.tojet.net/special/2017\\_11\\_1.pdf](http://www.tojet.net/special/2017_11_1.pdf) (Pg. 105-114), Presented at Harvard University.
- [9] Zeine, F. Jafari, N., Haghighatjoo, F. (2017). Awareness Integration: An Alternative Therapeutic Methodology to Reducing Depression, Anxiety, While Improving Low Self-Esteem and Self-efficacy in Separated or Divorced Individuals”. *Mental Health in Family Medicine*.13: 451-458
- [10] Madani, H, Zeine, F. (2022). Awareness Integration Therapy for Generalized Anxiety Disorder” *International Journal of Psychiatry Research*, Vol. 5, Issue 4, 1-7.
- [11] Zarbakhsh, L. Zeine, F. (2023). Awareness Integration Theory Case Report: Therapeutic Intervention for Anxiety and Depression in Transsexual Male College Students. *International Journal of Scientific Research*, Vol. 12, Issue 3.
- [12] Rabinowitz, T., Murphy, K. M., Amour, J. L., Ricci, M.A., Caputo, M. P., Newhouse, P. A.(2010). Benefits of a telepsychiatry consultation service for rural nursing home residents. *Telemed.-eHealth*: 16(1):34–40.
- [13] Foojan App (2022). Design the Life You Desire. <https://foojan.com/>
- [14] Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act - HIPAA ( 2023). Health Information Privacy. <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/index.html>