# AI therapy tools show promise but ethical and emotional gaps remain



Since the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) in mental health care around 2017, psychologists and researchers have explored its potential to enhance various facets of psychological diagnosis and treatment. Early studies showcased AI's capabilities, such as predicting adolescent binge drinking with over 70% accuracy through machine learning algorithms that analysed brain scans. Another significant study demonstrated that AI could accurately identify patients with bipolar disorder from a mix of diagnostic interviews, online questionnaires, and biological samples. These advancements were seen as promising proof of AI’s clinical utility in mental health contexts.

However, these breakthroughs have not come without a chorus of caution. Ethical concerns surrounding the integration of AI into mental healthcare have gained prominence, particularly as the technology matured and gained widespread adoption. Discussions among ethicists and journalists have highlighted the uncertainty surrounding the AI's thought processes and decision-making. Fiona McEvoy, an AI ethics researcher, underscored the difficulty consumers face in making informed decisions about AI therapy, remarking on the inherent unknowns associated with such technology.

As interest in AI's diagnostic capabilities grew, attention shifted towards its potential in providing therapeutic support. Popular AI-driven applications like Earkick and Woebot, which offer guided exercises reminiscent of cognitive behavioural therapy, have gained traction, particularly among younger demographics. These tools aim to inform and guide users but are careful not to claim the authority to diagnose or treat medical conditions. Despite their rising popularity, there remain concerns regarding their effectiveness in addressing severe mental health issues. Advocates urge for increased regulation and better integration of AI tools with traditional healthcare services to ensure comprehensive mental health support.

Despite the promise shown by AI in delivering elements of psychological therapy, questions about its ability to replicate the nuanced human connection inherent in therapy continue to surface. In studies examining user interactions with chatbots, preliminary findings suggest users may find AI responses helpful; however, many remain sceptical about replacing traditional therapists. The emotional intelligence and trust built through human interactions significantly influence treatment outcomes, a realm where AI struggles due to its lack of genuine empathy.

Furthermore, researchers have noted that AI-driven systems often manifest biases due to the data on which they are trained, raising concerns regarding their reliability and ethical implications. Reports have emerged detailing instances where AI chatbots have made erroneous claims about their training or credentials, misleading users and possibly risking their well-being. These incidents highlight the ethical quandaries of deploying AI in sensitive areas like mental health, where issues of confidentiality and data security become paramount.

The complexity of human emotions and relational dynamics in therapy is an aspect that AI cannot replicate. Traditional therapeutic practices involve a connection that offers warmth, empathy, and genuineness—qualities fundamental to the therapeutic relationship but fundamentally absent in AI-driven systems. Additionally, while AI can offer guidance and supportive resources, its responses can sometimes fail to engage with clients authentically, leading to a superficial therapeutic experience. Experts argue that the friction often present in human interaction—those challenging moments that prompt personal growth—may be lacking in AI-assisted therapy.

As Eugene Klishevich, CEO of Moodmate, pointed out, the human factor is critical to effective psychotherapy; it transcends the mere delivery of techniques and embodies the relational quality essential for healing and understanding. While AI shows potential in enhancing mental health care, it is clear that the profound intricacies of human emotional support and connection remain crucial for successful therapeutic outcomes. Until AI can fully navigate the myriad of human emotional complexities, the value of genuine human interaction in therapy will continue to reign supreme.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: Information from [[1]](https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/i-hear-you/202504/should-i-use-an-ai-therapist), [[4]](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/mhdt-10-2024-016/full/html), [[5]](https://ejnpn.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41983-023-00681-z)
2. Paragraph 2: Information from [[1]](https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/i-hear-you/202504/should-i-use-an-ai-therapist), [[6]](https://therapyhelpers.com/blog/ethical-quandaries-of-ai-therapists/)
3. Paragraph 3: Information from [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/73feb819ff52a51d53fee117c3207219), [[3]](https://time.com/6320378/ai-therapy-chatbots/), [[4]](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/mhdt-10-2024-016/full/html)
4. Paragraph 4: Information from [[3]](https://time.com/6320378/ai-therapy-chatbots/), [[4]](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/mhdt-10-2024-016/full/html), [[5]](https://ejnpn.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41983-023-00681-z), [[6]](https://therapyhelpers.com/blog/ethical-quandaries-of-ai-therapists/)
5. Paragraph 5: Information from [[1]](https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/i-hear-you/202504/should-i-use-an-ai-therapist), [[6]](https://therapyhelpers.com/blog/ethical-quandaries-of-ai-therapists/), [[7]](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11681265/)
6. Paragraph 6: Information from [[1]](https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/i-hear-you/202504/should-i-use-an-ai-therapist), [[3]](https://time.com/6320378/ai-therapy-chatbots/), [[4]](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/mhdt-10-2024-016/full/html), [[6]](https://therapyhelpers.com/blog/ethical-quandaries-of-ai-therapists/)
7. Paragraph 7: Information from [[1]](https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/i-hear-you/202504/should-i-use-an-ai-therapist), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/73feb819ff52a51d53fee117c3207219), [[5]](https://ejnpn.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41983-023-00681-z), [[6]](https://therapyhelpers.com/blog/ethical-quandaries-of-ai-therapists/)
8. Paragraph 8: Information from [[1]](https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/i-hear-you/202504/should-i-use-an-ai-therapist), [[3]](https://time.com/6320378/ai-therapy-chatbots/), [[4]](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/mhdt-10-2024-016/full/html), [[7]](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11681265/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/i-hear-you/202504/should-i-use-an-ai-therapist> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://apnews.com/article/73feb819ff52a51d53fee117c3207219> - This article discusses the increasing use of AI chatbots like Earkick and Woebot in mental health care, particularly among teens and young adults. These chatbots offer guided exercises and suggestions similar to therapy but do not claim to diagnose or treat medical conditions and aren't FDA-regulated. Despite their popularity, evidence on their effectiveness is limited, with some questioning their ability to address severe mental health issues and emergencies. Critics argue that existing therapies should not be replaced by these chatbots. While they may help with less severe problems, there is a push for more regulation and better integration of mental health services into regular healthcare.
* <https://time.com/6320378/ai-therapy-chatbots/> - This article examines the role of AI chatbots like Earkick and Woebot in mental wellness, claiming to reduce anxiety and improve moods by providing personalized advice based on users' inputs. While early evidence suggests these AI-driven tools can deliver elements of cognitive behavioral therapy effectively and improve symptoms of depression and anxiety, the question remains if they can replace traditional human therapists. Therapy is deeply rooted in human connection, trust, and emotional intelligence, which are difficult for AI to replicate completely. Studies show that human interaction with empathetic therapists greatly predicts treatment success. Although some research indicates people can form connections with chatbots, a significant portion of the public remains skeptical about AI-assisted mental health care. Despite ongoing advancements, the subjective nature of mental health treatment and the importance of human connection pose challenges for fully replacing human therapists with AI. More research is needed to determine the efficacy and potential role of AI in mental health care.
* <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/mhdt-10-2024-016/full/html> - This editorial discusses the promise and perils of artificial intelligence in psychological therapy. It highlights the potential benefits of AI in therapy, such as improved diagnostic accuracy and personalized treatment plans. However, it also raises significant ethical concerns, including data privacy and security, bias and discrimination, and the current limitations of AI learning. The article emphasizes the need for regulation and standardization in the training of AI to assist therapists and underscores the importance of human judgment in clinical decision-making.
* <https://ejnpn.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41983-023-00681-z> - This narrative review explores the opportunities, applications, challenges, and ethical implications of artificial intelligence in psychiatry. It discusses the potential of AI to revolutionize the field by providing more accurate diagnoses, personalized treatment plans, and improved access to care. However, it also raises significant ethical concerns, including algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the impact on the therapeutic relationship. The article emphasizes the need for ethical guidelines and responsible practices to ensure that AI enhances the well-being of individuals with mental health conditions.
* <https://therapyhelpers.com/blog/ethical-quandaries-of-ai-therapists/> - This article examines the ethical concerns and potential dangers associated with AI therapists. It highlights issues such as the lack of genuine human connection, privacy and data security, limitations in addressing complex mental health issues, and the lack of regulation and oversight. The article emphasizes the importance of human judgment in clinical decision-making and cautions against overreliance on AI in mental health care.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11681265/> - This article discusses the practical and ethical aspects of using artificial intelligence in psychotherapy. It highlights challenges such as data security, potential biases in AI-generated responses, and the lack of standardized practice. The article emphasizes the need for regulation and standardization in the training of AI to assist therapists and underscores the importance of human judgment in clinical decision-making.