Author’s response to reviews

Title: The working alliance in a randomized controlled trial comparing online with face-to-face cognitive-behavioral therapy for depression

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Olino,

Many thanks for sending us the valuable comments and reviews. We have incorporated all of the reviewers’ suggestions in the new version of the manuscript, as you will see in the attachment.

Both reviewers commented on the lack of mid-treatment assessment of the Working Alliance Inventory. Although we assessed the WAI at mid-treatment, we originally decided not to report these findings in the manuscript. As a major change to the revised manuscript, we have now added the mid-treatment WAI results and analysis. We hope that this change makes a substantial contribution to improving our manuscript.

Please let us know if you have any further questions.

Kind regards,

Barbara Preschl
Responds to reviewer concerns:

Reviewer: Thomas Berger

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1) Further information has been added to the “Participants” section.
2) Both reviewers (see also our responses nos. 4, 8, and 9 to Brijann Ljotsson) are correct in noting that only reporting working alliance measures at post-treatment limited our analysis in several ways. We also collected data on the working alliance (client ratings) at mid-treatment. However, as we considered these data to be less important than the post-treatment ratings, we did not include them in the previous version of the manuscript. We admit that not reporting these data caused several limitations and we now include these data in our analyses (see Tables 2–4, and the Results section).
3) Additionally, as suggested by the reviewer, we now critically discuss the low correlations of the WAI and the BDI scores in the Discussion section.

Minor Essential Revisions:

1) More information on the randomization procedure has been added (p. 9).
2) As suggested, we have moved the paragraph on exclusion criteria to the “Procedures” section.
3) More detailed information about the therapists has been added.
4) More information about the treatment rationale and therapist time has been added.
5) We have renamed “residual gain” as “change score.”
6) We now report findings on the association of BDI-pre and change scores in the Results section and discuss them in the Discussion section.

Discretionary Revisions:

1) We have changed the title as suggested.
2) We have added a note to the Discussion section concerning the magnitude of the correlations as suggested.

3) We have included test statistics showing that the BDI baseline scores of the two groups did not differ significantly (p. 9).

4) We have included the full title of the abbreviation BSIS.

5) We have added a paragraph noting that the limitation that we are not yet able to present follow-up data to the Discussion section.

**Reviewer: Brijann Ljotsson**

**Major Compulsory Revisions:**

1) We have deleted this sentence from the abstract.

2) We have renamed “residual gain” as “change score.”

3) For better understanding we have deleted the effect sizes.

4) As we now include WAI mid-treatment measures in our calculations (see also our responses to comments nos. 8 and 9 from this reviewer and comment no. 2 from the other reviewer), we have conducted new a regression analysis. Further, we have provided a table showing the regression analysis and coefficients for all independent variables included as suggested.

5) We now compare scores from other studies with ours. We are not aware of ceiling effects reported by other authors in this context.

6) The difference in the drop-out rates of the two groups is significant. We have included the test statistics on p. 18.

7) We removed parts of the sentences (p. 19) and have added the correlation between BDI-pre and the WAI scales as suggested (we also followed the reviewer’s suggestions no. 28 concerning Tables 3 and 4)

8) See response no. 2 to the other reviewer, Thomas Berger.

9) We have deleted the last part of the sentence (p. 20). As we now include data on WAI at mid-treatment, we were able to add further information about the mechanisms.

**Minor Essential Revisions:**
10) We have clarified the sentence by adding information about the dependent variable “treatment outcome (depression score at post-treatment)”.

11) As suggested, we have added a reference to the statement.

12) We have changed the phrase as suggested (“Against this background, the fact that internet-based interventions involve less therapeutic contact—not only in terms of time, but also through their restriction to purely text-based and computer-mediated communication—may be a cause for concern”).

13) To make it clearer, we have deleted the sentence.

14) (There was no number 14 in the reviewer’s comments.)

15) The reviewer is correct in noting that “intense” therapist support is confusing in this context. We have deleted “confusing” and added a description “with therapist support based on computer-mediated communication without the use of a specific assisted internet program.”

16) The reviewer is correct in noting that 194.5 min of therapist time spent cannot be labelled “low”; we have rephrased the sentence (“These authors reported 194.5 min of therapist time spent across the 10-week intervention”).

17) The reviewer is correct in noting that this sentence lacks information. We have added “for depression” to show the difference between Kiropolos et al (ref 26) and our study. Kiropolos et al. focused on panic disorder and used a self-help program with additional therapist contact.

18) We have moved all in-text information to Table 1 and added a “Comparison” column.

19) We have added the suggested information: “The treatment commenced 3 to 4 days after the patients had returned their informed consent form.”

20) We have added the suggested information: “Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions as they were included in the study.”

21) We have added an explanation of the assessment that was formerly on p. 10. Following the suggestion of the other reviewer, we have moved this paragraph to the “Procedure” section.

22) We have repeated ref. 32 and provided a brief explanation of the life-review module.

23) The sentence has been changed to better explain the nature of the homework assignments.

24) We now provide a more detailed explanation of the writing assignments.
25) As suggested, we have put the sentences in the correct order.

26) We now report BDI-post treatment scores and test statistics and the amount of therapist time spent per participant.

27) We have removed the test statistics from the text and changed Table 2 as suggested.

28) We have combined Table 3 and 4 as suggested and no longer report correlations between the subscales of WAI-C and WAI-T.

29) We have added the name of the first author before ref 21.

30) We have changed “sore” to “score”

31) As suggested, we have removed the last part of the sentence.

Discretionary Revisions:

32) We have changed “to” to “with”.

33) As mentioned by the reviewer, this is also to our knowledge common practice. We would like to leave it up to the Editor to decide whether using significance tests is accepted.

34) As suggested, we have deleted the sentence.

35) We have changed the description to “age below 18 years”.

36) As suggested, we have added a sentence stating that treatments were equal in length.

37) We have changed the sentence as suggested.

38) We have changed “set” to “given”.