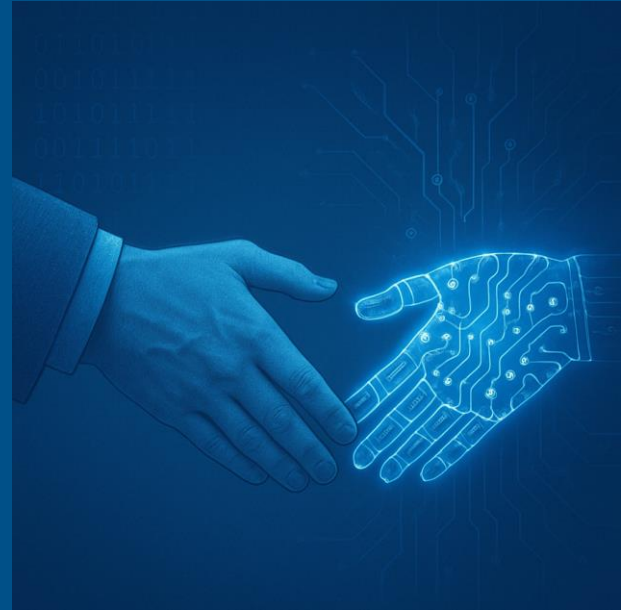


AI and Mental Health: Humans vs Computers in Therapy

Exploring collaboration, not competition

by Prof. Kate Cavanagh & Eva
Papadopoulou



AI vs Humans

- AI is rapidly entering mental health practice.
- From chatbots to clinical decision support, the line between human and machine is blurring.

Live Demo: Human vs AI Therapist



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Join at: vevox.app

ID: 142-095-594

Preparing Results

How comfortable would you feel talking about your mental health concerns with a confidential AI chatbot instead of a human therapist?

Comfortable



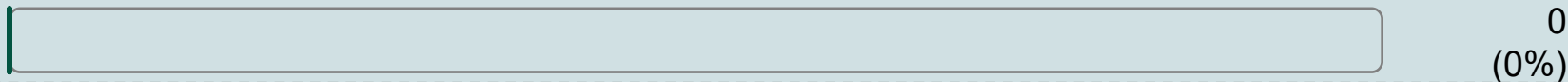
Uncomfortable



Not sure



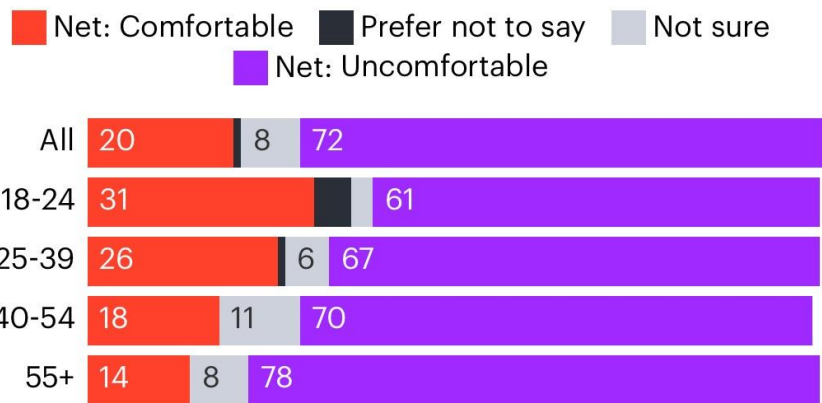
Prefer not to say



RESULTS SLIDE

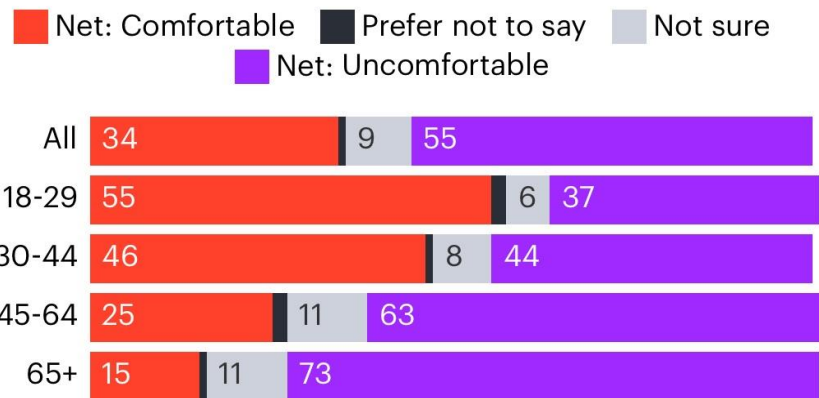
A fifth of Britons are comfortable sharing mental health concerns with confidential AI chatbots

How comfortable would you feel talking about your mental health concerns with a confidential AI chatbot instead of a human therapist? (% of UK adults)

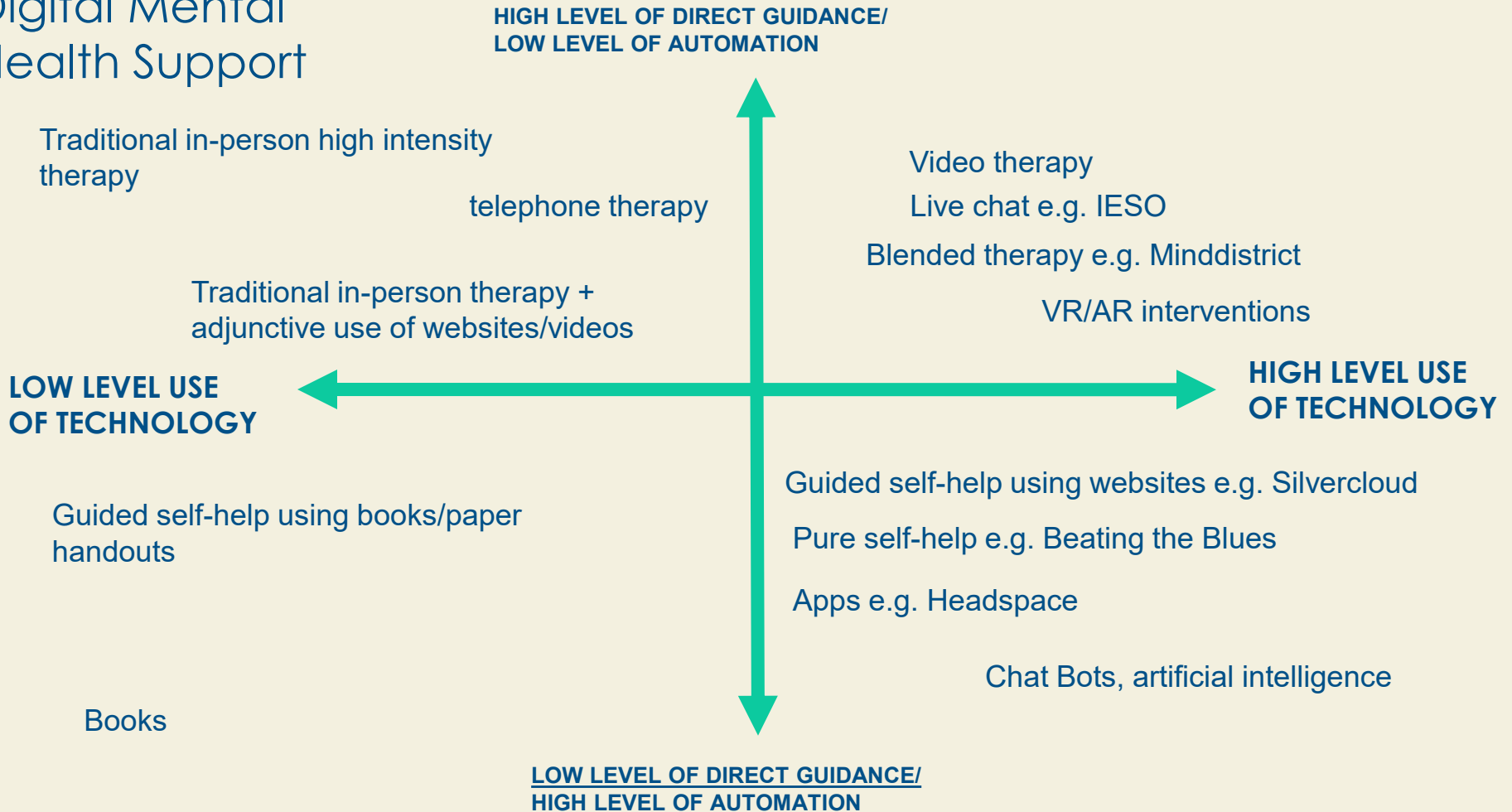


A third of Americans are comfortable sharing mental health concerns with confidential AI chatbots

How comfortable would you feel talking about your mental health concerns with a confidential AI chatbot instead of a human therapist? (% of US adults)



Digital Mental Health Support



The Research Landscape

- Self help resources such as mental health apps targeting symptoms of anxiety and depression have small but significant effects, increased by use of CBT content, mood monitoring and chatbot features (Linardon et al, 2024, $k=176$)
- Human guided self-help is generally found to be more engaging and more effective than unguided approaches (Baumeister et al., 2014; Bennet et al., 2019; Mosche et al., 2022, Musiat et al, 2022),

Human guided digital resources

- Human supported digital mental health resources are found to be acceptable and effective for a range of mental health problems in a range of populations (e.g. Andersson et al., 2019; Bennet et al., 2019; Bennet et al., 2020).
- Similar outcomes to more traditional face-to-face approaches (Carlbring et al., 2018; Hedman-Lagerlof et al., 2023; Rozental et al, 2015), although lower in studies of children & adolescents (Bennet et al., 2019)

Adding to mental health services

- Supporting assessment and intervention – digital resources designed to increase capacity, reach and effectiveness
- Measurement technologies to support assessment and monitoring
- Before, during and after therapy – recordings, reminders, resources and notes
- Virtual reality
- Digital booster sessions and peer support connections
- Artificial Intelligence for conversation, resource enhancement and prediction/personalisation



One word - how does AI in therapy make you feel?

interesting anxious intrigued confident

uncomfortable

curious

victim apprehensive

hollow

safe

disillusioned

supported

unthinking

RESULTS SLIDE

bias

excited

scary but excited

future

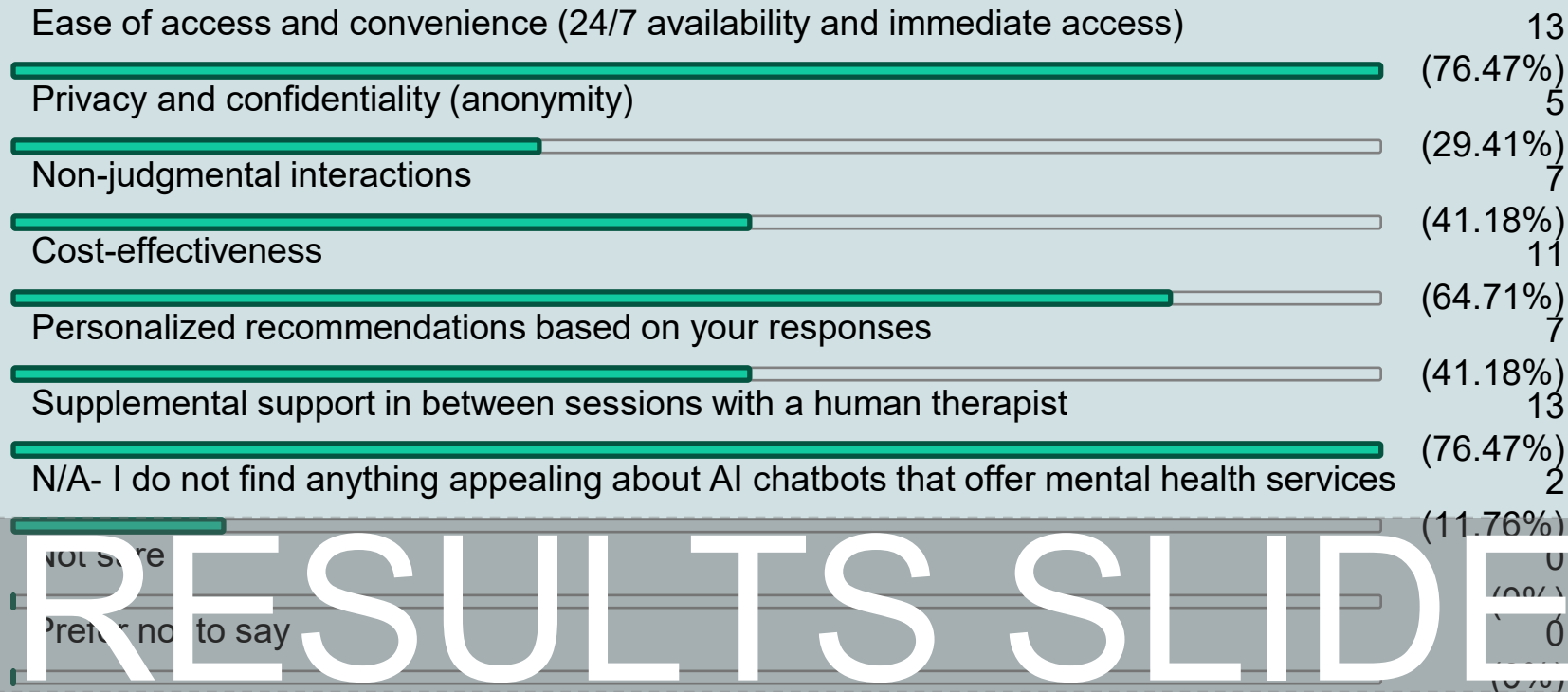
biased

Pros: Why AI and digital approaches can help

- Increased choice, access & scalability
- 24/7 availability
- Objective data tracking (mood, sleep, language)
- Reduced stigma for first-time users
- Personalisation and Agency

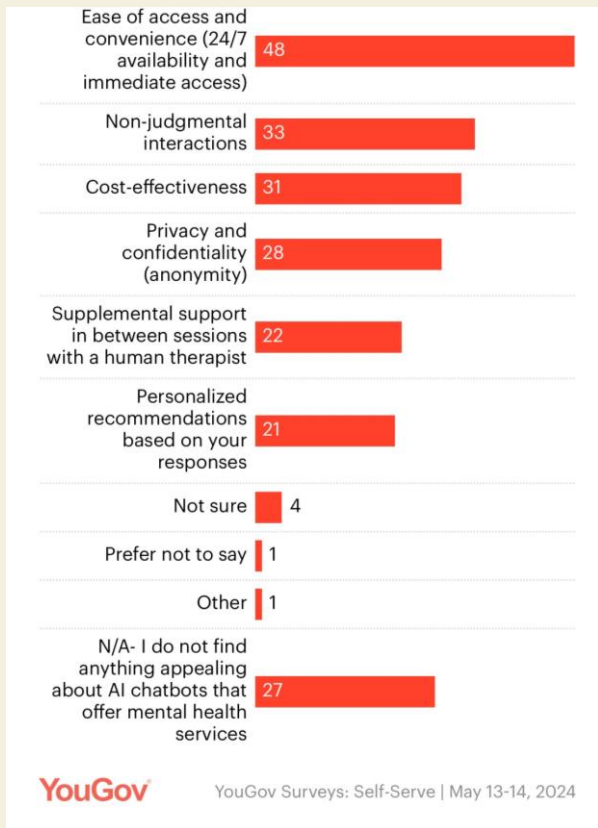


Which of the following, if any, do you find most appealing about AI chatbots that offer mental health services? (Select all that apply)



RESULTS SLIDE

What do Britons find appealing about AI chatbots offering mental health conversations?



Cons: Why Humans Still Matter

- Empathy and attunement
- Trust, data privacy & safety risks
- Digital poverty / exclusion
- Over-reliance on algorithms
- Bias and cultural insensitivity in AI models
- Risk of stigmatising, inaccurate, inappropriate and unsafe responses
- Overdependence and interference with professional help-seeking
- “AI can simulate care — but can it truly care?”



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Preparing Results

Can you think of any more cons of digital and AI in therapy?

Neglect of cultural context of users	Tech companies will sell your psychological data	You cant report or hold a chatbot accountable if they	AI not good at humour and sarcasm, which has been a
	Tells u what u want to hear	Change in algorithms when clients have already built	The timing and ability to challenge as human therapists do
	yes, bad actors as gatekeepers to tech	AI not fully understanding what you're trying to say	Maybe covered by "use of data" - will these technologies
	Human presence	Distorts the expectations about real communication	+3 more messages

RESULTS SLIDE

Research on AI in Mental Health

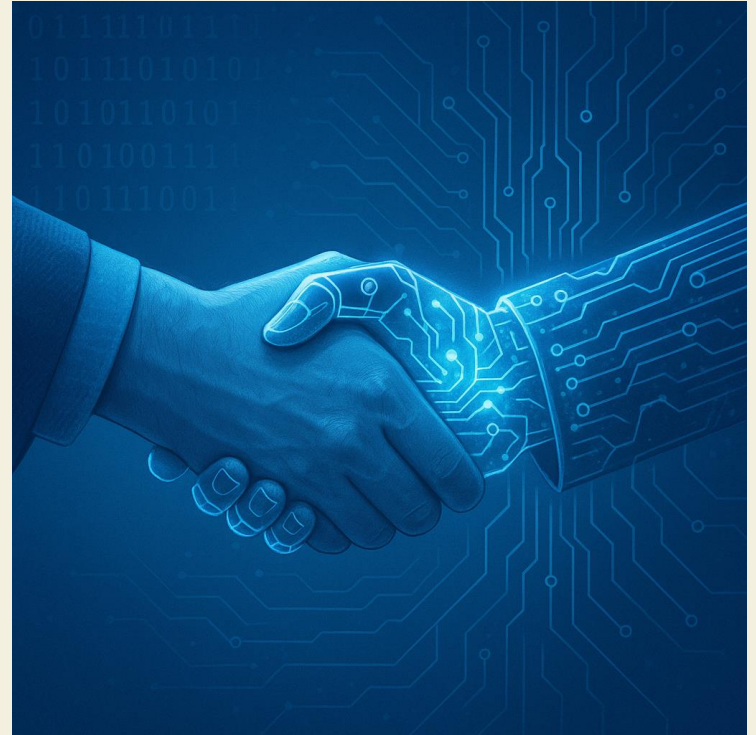
- Early promise of performance in mental health classification/diagnoses (e.g. Rony et al., 2025)
- Mixed findings for AI in therapy – recent review suggests significant effect on symptoms of depression, but not anxiety or stress (Lau et al., 2025, $k=31$ RCTs)*
- Positive experiences of 'emotional sanctuary', 'joy of connection' and 'insightful guidance' described (Siddals et al., 2024)
- Overall – some promise from early studies, but limited robust, real world evidence (Torous et al., 2025)
- Growing consensus that AI should be seen as a resource to complement human-led mental health services not a solution

Collaboration, Not Competition

- Towards a hybrid future: human intuition + AI precision.
- New roles: Digital Navigator and Augmented Clinician.
- Skill shift → co-design, digital literacy, data ethics, tech-informed empathy.

Conclusion

It's not either - or,
but how we work
together.



Q&A + Resources

- Further reading:
- Torous et al (2025) The evolving field of digital mental health

- Contact us:

[Kate Cavanagh Profile | University of Sussex](#)



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