



Pandemic, Mental Health and Digital Interventions

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused extraordinary upheaval in our lives. The long list of precarious scenarios, including, but not limited to, health concerns related to covid, social distancing, and financial strain, has resulted in ballooning mental health crises. As a result, the field turned to emerging digital interventions to address the elevated demand for mental healthcare to offer accessible and affordable solutions. While digital therapies and online solutions have existed before the pandemic, recent adoption and use of digital interventions has several benefits and needs long term investigations to further our understanding of the field.

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Pandemic, Mental Health, and Digital Interventions

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused extraordinary upheaval in our lives. The long list of precarious scenarios, including, but not limited to, health concerns related to covid, social distancing, and financial strain, has resulted in ballooning mental health crises. As a result, the field turned to emerging digital interventions to address the elevated demand for mental healthcare to offer accessible and affordable solutions. While digital therapies and online solutions have existed before the pandemic, recent adoption and use of digital interventions has several benefits and needs long term investigations to further our understanding of the field¹.

¹ The references of the article can be accessed through the hyperlinks that are italicized and underlined.



As of today, the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported more than 600 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 6 million deaths globally. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges and changes to our lives. These uncertain times have come with multifaceted problems resulting in various mental health issues.

According to Mental Health America (MHA), approximately 50 million Americans are experiencing mental illness. It was worrisome yet unsurprising when the WHO reported a global increase in anxiety and depression cases by a staggering 25% within the first year of the pandemic. This WHO report also informed us that adolescents, young adults, women, individuals with preexisting health conditions, marginalized communities, and racial and ethnic minorities were affected the most without access to affordable healthcare and mental health resources.

[Related: Stress-related psychopathology during the COVID-19 pandemic]

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, people across diverse demographics and communities have experienced unparalleled and drastic changes. Issues presented by health concerns, social distancing, financial instability, resource-related challenges, increased caregiver responsibilities, and loss of loved ones have compounded to exacerbate existing mental health conditions and develop new psychological disorders. Individuals have suffered globally on many fronts, which has led researchers to suggest that perhaps this is a mental health pandemic atop the global infectious disease pandemic. In addition to anxiety and depression, researchers have shed light on the emerging issues of COVID-19-related feelings of loneliness, isolation, increased stress, rising frustration, sleep disorders, and new or increased substance use. Technology-driven interventions have come to the forefront to meet the increasing demands for mental health services, address preexisting and developing psychopathology, and provide continuity of care. Mandatory social distancing seemed to be a catalyst for technology-driven interventions – it has pushed the professionals and the clients into a digital era of healthcare and research.

[Related: COVID-19 and its mental health consequences]

Because technology-driven interventions and social media-driven advocacy were already advancing, researchers and clinicians did not have to reinvent the wheel. Mental health professionals have found transitioning and adapting to digital



solutions from traditional in-person settings, a relatively swift process, given the availability of initial and continuing research in the field. Not discounting the adverse effects of increased screen time, psychologists have argued that brief, digital interventions hold promise for future inquiries.

In addition to digital interventions, social media advocacy has also seen a surge during and post the pandemic. Mental health professionals have been advocating and influencing through their digital platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) for spreading awareness, sharing research findings, reducing stigma, building inclusive communities to meet the public demands and growing interest in the field of psychology and mental wellness.

[Related: [Social media is increasing impact](#)]

In addition to accessible and affordable interventions, additional strategies help in alleviating symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress to promote psychological wellbeing:

- **Spending time in nature.** Research suggests that spending time around nature is an effective way to relieve stress, rejuvenate and experience overall well-being.
- **Engaging in physical activity.** Exercise has profound physical and psychological benefits. Physical activity promotes hormonal regulation and helps with managing preexisting physiological and psychological conditions.
- **Exploring mindfulness and meditation.** Focusing on being present and having a non-judgmental approach increases emotional balance and instils a sense of calmness.
- **Reaching out to friends and family.** For a species wired to connect, regaining social momentum after an extended period of social distancing can reduce psychological distress and increase feelings of connectedness and belonging.



About the Author

Utsavi Bhimani is a researcher and clinician at the Healthy Minds Clinic. She is currently located in Lincoln, Massachusetts, United States of America.