

Effective digital mental health more necessary than ever during COVID-19 pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused worldwide fear, uncertainty and restriction of movement. The physical distancing, socio-economic consequences of quarantine measures, and the loss of social support are a grave threat to public mental health. One way to help counter and resolve some of these issues is the spread of digital mental health. A study published today by the research group of Professor Claudi Bockting (Center for Urban Mental Health, University of Amsterdam) shows that digital psychological interventions can effectively diminish the symptoms of mental disorders including depression and substance use, even in low and middle income countries.

With large proportions of worldwide populations living with the consequences of quarantine measures, mental health fallout from the pandemic has been mounting. Digital psychological interventions can be a useful tool to reach those affected by mental health problem who otherwise have limited human contact. Professor Bockting:

"Our study can help to further encourage digital psychological help for those experiencing mental health problems, during and after the COVID pandemic."

Digital technology has, of course, reshaped our life globally, including in the field of psychotherapy. Digital mental health is widely applied in the care settings in Western countries. But nearly 80% of the worldwide population lives in low and middle-income countries, where they face a drastic shortage of mental health professionals. Psychotherapy adapted into a [digital format](#) is emerging as a promising compliment to standard in-person care. And this applies more than ever during a global health emergency such as COVID-19.

For the first time, researchers have been able to demonstrate the potential of digital mental healthcare in low and middle-income countries. On aggregate, based on 22 randomized controlled trials globally, digital psychological interventions effectively diminished the symptoms of mental disorders, including depression and addiction. The meta-analysis has been published in *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

One of the researchers, Zhongfang Fu, explains: "Our meta-analysis demonstrated that internet interventions as delivered by, for instance, a website or a [smartphone app](#) have robust effects in treating mental health conditions in low and [middle income countries](#). Thanks to these interventions, in addition to growing internet coverage and expansion of smartphone use, more people suffering from mental [health](#) problems can be reached. In particular young people who are familiar with [digital technology](#) can easily be reached."

More information: Zhongfang Fu et al.
Effectiveness of digital psychological interventions
for mental health problems in low-income and
middle-income countries: a systematic review and
meta-analysis, *The Lancet Psychiatry* (2020). [DOI:
10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30256-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30256-X)

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