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Article Overview:

This article is a meta-review of reviews investigating the effectiveness of digital health interventions (DHIs) for mental problems in children and young people. 21 reviews were included in the final publication.

Key take home messages:

1. Findings provided support for the clinical benefits of digital health interventions, particularly computerised cognitive behavioural therapy (cCBT) for depression and anxiety in adolescents and young adults. There is also evidence that remote CBT is as effective as face-to-face.
2. The benefits of digital health interventions for attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, psychosis, and eating disorders are uncertain. There is also a lack of evidence regarding the cost-effectiveness of digital health interventions.
3. Human facilitation support is an important factor in influencing uptake, engagement and outcomes of digital health interventions, however there is a need for further research on what form and how much human support is most effective. Age also needs to be considered. It is likely that digital health interventions for children need to incorporate more interactive, game-like elements.
4. Digital health interventions offer huge potential for widening access, increasing efficiency and improving healthcare outcomes. However, existing research indicates that benefits have yet to be fully realised and effectiveness of these approaches remains uncertain. Issues in current clinical trials include variable uptake and engagement, lack of an agreed typology/taxonomy, small sample sizes, lack of blinded outcome assessment, combining different comparators, short-term follow-up and poor specification of the level of human support.
5. From a clinical perspective, authors recommend that an integrated approach should be developed that takes into account the views of children and young people, the opinions of mental health professionals and seeks to blend digital health interventions with face-to-face therapy.