Expert Systems in Mental Health

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Preliminary Results Based on Interviews with Programmers, Practitioners, Public Health Administrators, Policy Makers, and Experts by Experience

Introduction and methods

As psychiatric disorders continue to pose a significant societal burden, AI offers unprecedented opportunities for early diagnosis, personalized treatment, and crisis intervention. However, the deployment of AI technologies also raises critical questions about data privacy, clinical efficacy, and equitable access to care. Our methodology centers on a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing insights from interviews with a diverse range of experts, including programmers, healthcare practitioners, public health administrators, policy makers, and individuals with lived experience in mental health issues. This comprehensive inquiry seeks to delineate the capabilities and limitations of AI-driven systems in mental health, aiming to contribute to the development of robust, ethical, and effective solutions.

Results up to date

The integration of biometrics and other forms of data into expert systems offers a paradigm shift in the realm of mental health care, enabling a level of personalization and real-time intervention hitherto unattainable. Here, we delve into the specifics of how such data can be processed and utilized for enhanced care.

Biometric data, such as heart rate variability, galvanic skin response, and even facial micro-expressions, can be continuously monitored through wearables and IoT devices. These data points can serve as physiological markers of emotional states, providing a real-time, objective measure of an individual's mental well-being. For instance, sudden changes in heart rate variability may indicate acute stress or anxiety, triggering immediate therapeutic interventions like guided breathing exercises or emergency contact with a healthcare provider.

Activity trackers and sleep monitors can offer insights into behavioral patterns, such as circadian rhythms and physical activity levels, which are crucial for managing disorders like depression and bipolar disorder. Machine learning algorithms can analyze these patterns in conjunction with medical history and pharmacological data to optimize medication regimens and suggest lifestyle modifications.

Typing styles, including keystroke dynamics and typing speed, can be analyzed for cognitive load and emotional state. For example, a sudden decrease in typing speed and increase in typing errors might indicate cognitive impairment or heightened emotional distress. Such data could trigger a real-time alert for clinical assessment, thereby averting a potential crisis.

Social data, including frequency and quality of interactions both online and offline, can be processed to identify signs of social withdrawal or hyperactivity.

Sentiment and semantic analysis of text messages and social media posts can offer additional layers of understanding about an individual's emotional state. This is particularly useful for identifying early signs of conditions like social anxiety or manic episodes, allowing for timely intervention. Moreover, machine learning algorithms can process this amalgam of data to identify complex, non-linear relationships between different variables, thereby creating a holistic profile of an individual's mental state. This profile can be used to develop highly personalized treatment plans that consider the multifaceted nature of mental health.

Future work

The next phase of this research will continue to engage experts across multiple disciplines, focusing on the ethical governance of AI in mental health care, the development of transparent and accountable algorithms, and the exploration of innovative, equitable care models that can be seamlessly integrated into existing healthcare infrastructures.

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Research funded through

University Professor Training contract (FPU) FPU19/00028

Project partially funded by actions
FOSTREN C190017
REMO C190023