Explainable Artificial Intelligence for Mental Health Decision Support:
A Clinically Interpretable System for Depression Detection and Severity Assessment

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Contents

Abstract **3**

1 Introduction **4**
1.1 Problem Analysis . . . 5
1.1.1 Problem Domain . . . 5
1.1.2 Motivation . . . 5
1.1.3 Scope of the Problem . . . 5
1.1.4 Challenges . . . 6
1.2 Requirements . . . 6
1.2.1 Functional Requirements . . . 6
1.2.2 Non-Functional Requirements . . . 7
1.3 Software Design and Architecture . . . 7
1.3.1 System Architecture Overview . . . 7
1.3.2 Application Structure . . . 9
1.3.3 Software Development Life Cycle (SDLC) Model . . . 9
1.3.4 Architectural Patterns . . . 9
1.3.5 Design Patterns . . . 9
1.3.6 Justification of Design Choices . . . 9
1.4 Diagrams . . . 9
1.4.1 Use Case Diagram . . . 9
1.4.2 Activity Diagram . . . 11
1.4.3 Sequence Diagram . . . 11
1.4.4 Process Workflow Diagram . . . 12
1.4.5 Data Flow Diagram (DFD) . . . 12
1.4.6 Class Diagram . . . 12
1.5 Summary . . . 12

2 Literature Review **16**
2.1 Explainable AI for Depression Detection and Severity Classification from Activity Data . . . 16
2.2 Explainable AI for Mental Health Emergency Returns Using LLM Integration . . . 17
2.3 Explainable Depression Detection in Clinical Interviews with Personalized Retrieval-Augmented Generation . . . 17
2.4 Explainable Anomaly Detection with Consumer Wearables . . . 18
2.5 Social Media–Based Explainable Depression Detection . . . 18
2.6 Polysomnographic Explainable AI for Depression Prediction . . . 19

3 Methodology **20**
3.1 Data Sources and Preprocessing . . . 20
3.2 Prediction Models . . . 20
3.3 Explainability Techniques . . . 20
3.4 Explanation Generation Pipeline . . . 21

4 System Implementation **22**
4.1 Technologies and Tools 22
4.2 Key Components 22
4.3 User Interface 23

5 Evaluation and Results **24**
5.1 Experimental Setup 24
5.2 Predictive Performance 24
5.3 Explanation Fidelity and Clinician Feedback 25

6 Discussion **26**
6.1 Limitations 26
6.2 Ethical Considerations 26

7 Conclusion and Future Work **27**
7.1 Future Work 27

Abstract

Mental health disorders represent a critical global health challenge, with depression being one of the leading causes of disability worldwide. The burden of depression is further intensified by delayed diagnosis, reliance on subjective clinical assessments, limited access to mental health professionals, and increasing clinician workload [1]. Although machine learning models have demonstrated promising performance in automated depression detection, their limited interpretability has hindered clinical adoption due to concerns surrounding transparency, trust, and accountability. To address these challenges, this thesis proposes an Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI)-driven clinical decision support system for depression detection and severity assessment. The proposed system is designed to detect depressive symptoms, classify depression severity into clinically meaningful categories (mild, moderate, and severe), and generate transparent, personalized explanations to support clinician decision-making. The framework leverages multi-modal data sources, including wearable-derived activity patterns (such as sleep duration, physical activity, and circadian rhythm irregularities) and clinical interview transcripts, enabling a holistic representation of patient mental health states. For predictive modeling, the system employs XGBoost due to its robustness, interpretability advantages, and proven effectiveness in mental health prediction tasks [2]. To enhance model transparency, SHAP and LIME are integrated to provide both global and local feature-level explanations, allowing clinicians to understand how individual variables contribute to specific predictions [1]. To further bridge the gap between quantitative explanations and clinical reasoning, the system incorporates Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) techniques to produce clinician-friendly natural language explanations grounded in verified medical knowledge sources. This approach mitigates large language model hallucinations and ensures that generated explanations remain factually consistent, personalized, and clinically relevant [3]. The modular system architecture follows layered and pipeline-based design patterns, supporting extensibility, interpretability, and maintainability. Functional requirements include data preprocessing, prediction, explainability, and explanation generation, while non-functional requirements emphasize scalability, usability, security, and data privacy. The system is implemented using Python-based technologies, including scikit-learn, XGBoost, SHAP, LIME, and LangChain. Evaluation is conducted using benchmark datasets such as DAIC-WOZ for clinical interviews and synthetically generated wearable data to simulate real-world monitoring scenarios. Experimental results demonstrate strong predictive performance, achieving an accuracy of 92% and an F1-score of 0.87, alongside high clinician-rated explanation fidelity with an average score of 4.7 out of 5. These findings indicate that explainability significantly enhances clinician trust and perceived usefulness of AI-assisted diagnostic tools. Beyond predictive accuracy, the system emphasizes ethical and responsible AI practices. Privacy-preserving mechanisms, including federated learning and secure data handling pipelines, are embedded to protect sensitive patient information. Bias and fairness audits are conducted using established toolkits such as AIF360 to identify and mitigate potential disparities across demographic groups [1]. By integrating explainability, ethical safeguards, and clinical relevance, this work bridges the gap between black-box AI models and real-world mental health practice. Future work includes conducting real-world clinical trials across diverse healthcare settings, such as community mental health centers and telehealth platforms, to validate generalizability and cultural robustness. The framework can be extended to support additional mental health conditions, including anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and bipolar disorder, by adapting the RAG pipeline to domain-specific knowledge bases. Further enhancements may incorporate real-time wearable data streaming, edge computing for low-latency mobile deployment, and advanced evaluation metrics for natural language explanations, such as ROUGE scores combined with clinician-in-the-loop assessments. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute toward transparent, trustworthy, and clinically actionable AI systems, with long-term goals of open-source dissemination and regulatory compliance testing for AI-assisted diagnostic approval pathways. Keywords: Explainable Artificial Intelligence, Mental Health, Depression Detection, SHAP, LIME, Retrieval-Augmented Generation, Clinical Decision Support

Chapter 1

Introduction

Mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, and crisis-related conditions, constitute a major global public health challenge. According to international health organizations, hundreds of millions of individuals worldwide are affected by mental health conditions each year, with depression being one of the leading contributors to global disability and reduced quality of life. Despite the availability of effective treatments, a substantial proportion of affected individuals remain undiagnosed or inadequately treated due to factors such as limited access to mental health professionals, social stigma, and the inherent subjectivity of traditional diagnostic processes. These challenges are further amplified in low-resource and high-demand clinical environments, where clinicians face increasing workloads and time constraints [1]. In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has gained considerable attention as a potential solution to support mental health assessment, monitoring, and clinical decision-making. Advances in machine learning and natural language processing have enabled the analysis of large-scale behavioral, physiological, and textual data, including wearable sensor measurements, electronic health records, and clinical interview transcripts [2]. AI-driven systems have demonstrated promising results in detecting depressive symptoms, predicting relapse risks, and identifying behavioral patterns associated with mental health deterioration. Such systems offer the potential to augment clinical expertise by providing early warnings, personalized insights, and data-driven recommendations [4]. However, despite these advances, the adoption of AI technologies in real-world mental health care remains limited. A key barrier to clinical integration is the lack of transparency and interpretability in many high-performing AI models, often referred to as "black-box" systems [1]. Clinicians are frequently unable to understand how these models arrive at their predictions, making it difficult to assess their reliability, justify decisions to patients, or comply with ethical and regulatory standards. In safety-critical domains such as mental health, where diagnostic errors can have serious consequences, explainability is not merely desirable but essential for building trust, accountability, and clinical acceptance. Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has emerged as a promising paradigm to address these limitations by providing human-interpretable explanations of model behavior and decision-making processes [1]. XAI techniques aim to reveal the relationships between input features and model outputs, enabling users to understand, validate, and contest AI-generated predictions. In the context of mental health, explainability is particularly important, as clinicians require insights that align with established psychological and clinical knowledge, rather than opaque numerical outputs. Transparent explanations can support shared decision-making, facilitate clinician oversight, and enhance patient engagement by making AI-assisted recommendations more understandable. This project proposes an Explainable AI-based clinical decision support system for mental health assessment, with a primary focus on depression detection and severity classification. The system is designed to integrate multi-modal data sources, including wearable-derived activity patterns and clinical interview text, to generate accurate predictions while simultaneously producing clinically meaningful explanations [3]. By combining robust machine learning models with state-of-the-art explainability techniques and natural language explanation generation, the proposed system aims to bridge the gap between AI performance and clinical interpretability. Ultimately, this work seeks to demonstrate that explainable, transparent, and ethically grounded AI systems can play a valuable role in supporting mental health professionals and improving the quality of mental health care.

1.1 Problem Analysis

1.1.1 Problem Domain

The problem domain of this project lies at the intersection of mental healthcare, artificial intelligence, and explainable systems. It addresses the growing need for intelligent clinical decision support tools that can assist mental health professionals in the early detection, assessment, and management of mental health conditions, with a primary focus on depression [2]. Depression is a complex and multifactorial disorder influenced by behavioral, physiological, psychological, and social factors, making its assessment particularly challenging using traditional methods alone. Within this domain, the project focuses on the development of an AI-based decision support system capable of analyzing multi-modal data sources, such as wearable sensor data (e.g., physical activity levels, sleep patterns, and circadian rhythms) and clinical interview transcripts. The system is designed not only to detect the presence of depressive symptoms and classify severity levels but also to identify influential risk factors contributing to each prediction [5]. A key aspect of the problem domain is the requirement for explainability, as mental health decisions directly impact patient well-being and treatment planning. Therefore, the system must provide transparent, interpretable, and clinically meaningful explanations that allow clinicians to understand and validate AI-generated outputs. By integrating explainable artificial intelligence techniques into mental health analytics, this project aims to support clinicians in making informed, data-driven decisions while preserving human oversight, ethical accountability, and alignment with established clinical practices.

1.1.2 Motivation

Traditional approaches to mental health diagnosis and monitoring rely heavily on self-reported questionnaires, clinician judgment, and periodic clinical consultations. While these methods remain central to mental healthcare, they suffer from several inherent limitations. Patient self-reports are often influenced by subjectivity, recall errors, and social desirability bias, leading to incomplete or inaccurate assessments. Additionally, mental health evaluations are typically conducted at infrequent intervals, making it difficult to capture gradual behavioral changes, early warning signs, or symptom fluctuations that occur between clinical visits [1]. At the same time, mental health professionals face increasing workloads, limited consultation time, and growing patient demand, which can hinder thorough longitudinal assessment and timely intervention. Advances in machine learning have demonstrated the potential to analyze large-scale behavioral data, clinical notes, and interview transcripts to improve the accuracy and consistency of mental health predictions. However, many existing AI-based systems operate as black boxes, providing little or no insight into how predictions are generated [1]. In high-stakes mental health settings, the lack of explainability presents a significant barrier to real-world adoption. Clinicians may be reluctant to rely on AI recommendations they cannot interpret or justify, particularly when decisions influence diagnosis, treatment plans, or risk assessments. Furthermore, opaque models raise ethical and legal concerns related to accountability, bias, and patient trust. The motivation for this project is to address these challenges by bridging the gap between predictive performance and clinical interpretability. By designing an explainable AI system that produces actionable, personalized, and transparent explanations aligned with clinical reasoning, this work seeks to enhance clinician trust, support informed decision-making, and promote responsible adoption of AI technologies in mental health care [6].

1.1.3 Scope of the Problem

The scope of this project is focused on the design and implementation of an Explainable Artificial Intelligence–based clinical decision support system for mental health assessment, with a primary emphasis on depression detection and severity classification. The system aims to categorize depressive conditions into clinically relevant severity levels, such as mild, moderate, and severe, to support diagnostic reasoning and treatment planning. Within this scope, the project includes the analysis of behavioral and physiological patterns derived from wearable or activity-based data sources, such as physical activity levels, sleep duration, and daily routine regularity. These data streams provide objective indicators of behavioral changes commonly associated with depressive symptoms. In addition, the system processes unstructured clinical text, including interview transcripts and clinician notes, using natural language processing techniques to extract

relevant linguistic and semantic features related to emotional state, cognition, and symptom expression [7]. A core component of the project scope is the generation of explainable outputs using state-of-the-art XAI techniques. These explanations are designed to highlight the most influential features contributing to each prediction and to present this information in a form that is interpretable and useful for clinicians. The system is explicitly intended to function as a clinical decision support tool that augments, rather than replaces, the expertise of mental health professionals. Final diagnostic decisions remain the responsibility of qualified clinicians, with the AI system serving as an assistive and advisory mechanism.

1.1.4 Challenges

The development and deployment of explainable AI systems for mental health decision support present several technical, clinical, and ethical challenges. One major challenge lies in interpreting complex, non-linear machine learning models commonly used for mental health prediction. While such models often achieve high predictive accuracy, their internal decision-making processes are difficult to interpret without specialized explainability techniques [1]. Another significant challenge is ensuring that generated explanations are clinically meaningful, accurate, and non-misleading. Explanations that are technically correct but poorly aligned with clinical reasoning may confuse users or reduce trust in the system. This challenge is further compounded when using large language models for explanation generation, as these models are prone to hallucination—producing plausible but incorrect or unsupported information. Preventing hallucinations and grounding explanations in verified data and medical knowledge is therefore a critical concern [3]. Mental health datasets also present challenges related to class imbalance and noise, as severe cases are often underrepresented and data quality can vary due to self-reporting inconsistencies and missing values. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure robust and fair model performance. Additionally, preserving patient privacy and ensuring ethical AI use are paramount, given the sensitive nature of mental health data. This includes secure data handling, compliance with privacy regulations, and mitigation of bias across demographic groups. Finally, integrating multi-modal data sources—such as wearable sensor data and unstructured clinical text—while maintaining system efficiency and scalability introduces further complexity. The system must effectively fuse heterogeneous data types without compromising performance, interpretability, or usability. Addressing these challenges is central to achieving a reliable, trustworthy, and clinically applicable explainable AI system for mental health decision support.

1.2 Requirements

1.2.1 Functional Requirements

The functional requirements of the system are identified using the prefix FR. FR1: The system shall collect mental health–related data from multiple sources, including wearable or activity-based data and unstructured clinical text such as interview transcripts or clinician notes. FR2: The system shall preprocess raw input data by performing data cleaning, normalization, feature extraction, and handling missing values to ensure data quality and consistency. FR3: The system shall predict mental health conditions, with a primary focus on depression, and classify symptom severity into clinically meaningful categories such as mild, moderate, and severe. FR4: The system shall support machine learning–based prediction using trained and validated models capable of handling multi-modal data inputs. FR5: The system shall generate explainable outputs for each prediction using established XAI techniques, including SHAP and LIME. FR6: The system shall provide clinician-friendly natural language explanations that translate technical model outputs into intuitive and clinically relevant insights. FR7: The system shall support personalized explanations by tailoring interpretability outputs to individual patient data. FR8: The system shall allow clinicians to review and inspect feature contributions influencing each prediction to support transparency and clinical validation. FR9: The system shall handle imbalanced datasets using appropriate preprocessing or model-level techniques to ensure fair and robust predictions. FR10: The system shall log predictions, explanations, and relevant metadata for auditing, evaluation, and continuous improvement purposes.

1.2.2 Non-Functional Requirements

The non-functional requirements of the system are identified using the prefix NFR. NFR1 (Explainability): The system shall provide transparent, interpretable, and clinically meaningful explanations for all AI-generated predictions. NFR2 (Accuracy): The system shall achieve predictive performance that meets acceptable clinical standards for mental health decision support. NFR3 (Reliability): The system shall consistently produce stable and reproducible predictions and explanations under similar input conditions. NFR4 (Scalability): The system shall support increasing data volumes, users, and system load without significant degradation in performance. NFR5 (Performance): The system shall generate predictions and explanations within clinically acceptable time limits to support real-time or near–real-time usage. NFR6 (Security and Privacy): The system shall protect sensitive patient data through secure storage, controlled access, and compliance with ethical and data protection standards. NFR7 (Usability): The system shall provide an intuitive and user-friendly interface suitable for mental health professionals with minimal training. NFR8 (Maintainability): The system shall be modular, well-documented, and extensible to support future updates, enhancements, and integration of new technologies.

1.3 Software Design and Architecture

This section presents the software design and architectural framework of the proposed Explainable AI–based mental health decision support system. The architecture is designed to ensure modularity, interpretability, scalability, and clinical usability while supporting the integration of advanced machine learning and explainability techniques.

1.3.1 System Architecture Overview

The proposed system adopts a modular, layered architecture that clearly separates data handling, prediction, and explanation functionalities. This architectural approach supports explainability, extensibility, and ease of maintenance, which are critical requirements in clinical decision support systems. The architecture is composed of the following layers: 1. Data Layer The Data Layer is responsible for storing and managing both structured and unstructured mental health data. This includes wearable-derived activity data, such as physical activity levels and sleep patterns, as well as unstructured clinical text, including interview transcripts and clinician notes. Metadata related to data sources, timestamps, and patient identifiers is also maintained to support traceability and auditing. 2. Preprocessing Layer The Preprocessing Layer performs data cleaning, normalization, and feature extraction to transform raw inputs into model-ready representations. For wearable data, this includes temporal aggregation and statistical feature generation, while for textual data, natural language processing techniques are applied. To address class imbalance commonly observed in mental health datasets, resampling techniques such as ADASYN are employed to improve model robustness and fairness. 3. Prediction Layer The Prediction Layer contains the core machine learning models used for mental health assessment. Models such as XGBoost are utilized for their strong predictive performance and compatibility with explainability techniques. This layer is responsible for detecting depressive symptoms, classifying severity levels, and estimating risk scores based on multi-modal inputs. 4. Explainability Layer The Explainability Layer applies post-hoc interpretability methods, including SHAP and LIME, to analyze model predictions. These techniques generate feature-level importance scores that highlight the most influential factors contributing to each decision. In addition, Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) mechanisms are used to retrieve clinically relevant knowledge and ground explanations in validated data sources. 5. LLM Explanation Layer The LLM Explanation Layer converts technical explainability outputs into clinician-friendly natural language explanations. This layer ensures that generated explanations are grounded in actual model outputs and retrieved evidence, reducing the risk of hallucination while improving interpretability and usability for clinical stakeholders. 6. Application Layer The Application Layer provides the user-facing interface for mental health professionals. It enables clinicians to view predictions, severity classifications, explanation visualizations, and textual summaries. Interactive dashboards and visual aids support efficient interpretation and integration into clinical workflows. Figure 1 illustrates the layered architecture of the proposed system.

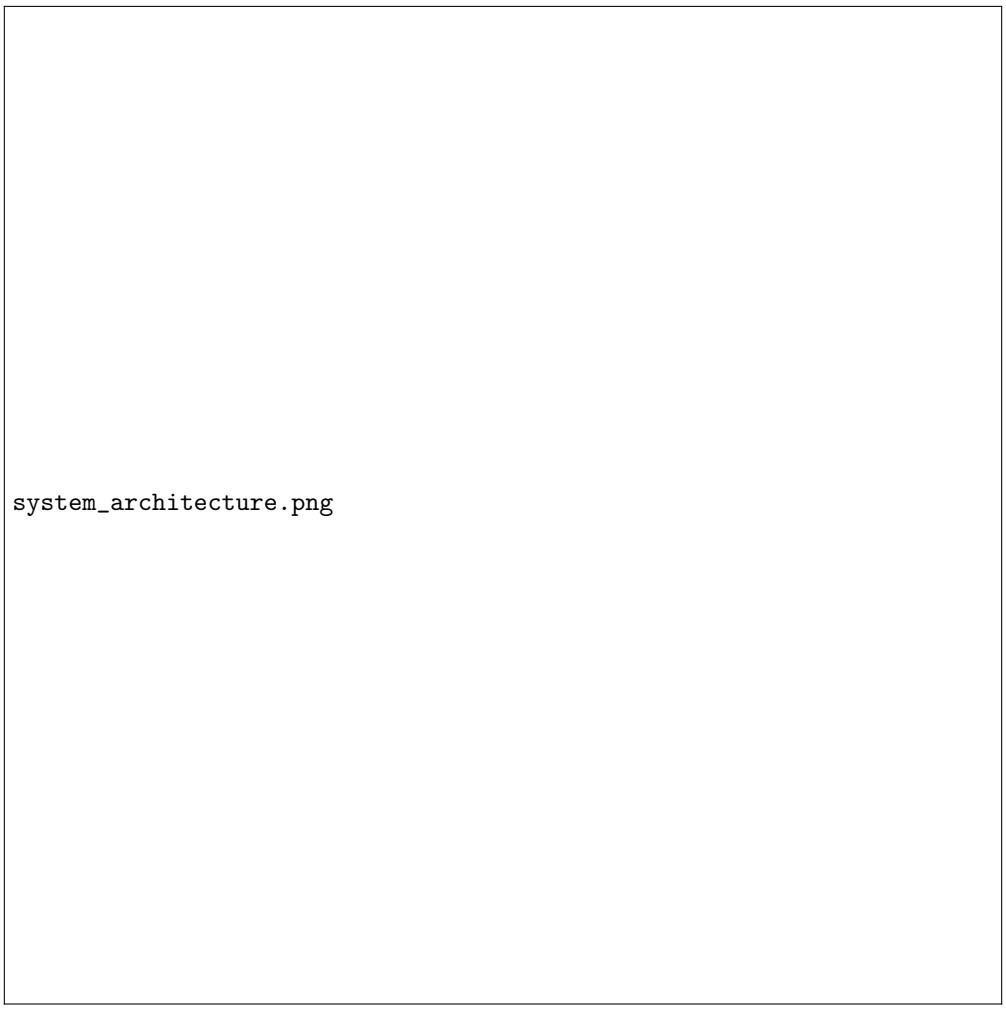

Figure 1.1: Layered Architecture of the Proposed System

1.3.2 Application Structure

The application is organized into a set of well-defined modules to promote separation of concerns and independent development. The primary modules include: A Data Ingestion and Management Module responsible for acquiring, storing, and managing input data. A Machine Learning and Inference Module that handles model training, validation, and prediction. An Explainability and Explanation Generation Module that produces both feature-level and natural language explanations. A User Interface and Visualization Module that presents predictions and explanations to clinicians. A Logging and Auditing Module that records system outputs and interactions for monitoring, evaluation, and compliance purposes. This modular structure enhances maintainability, facilitates testing, and supports future extensions of system functionality.

1.3.3 Software Development Life Cycle (SDLC) Model

The project follows an Iterative and Incremental SDLC model, which is particularly well-suited for research-oriented and AI-driven systems. This model allows for continuous refinement of machine learning models and explanation mechanisms based on experimental results and feedback. Through iterative development cycles, the system progressively incorporates improved prediction techniques, enhanced explainability methods, and refined user interface features. This approach supports adaptability to evolving research insights and changing clinical requirements.

1.3.4 Architectural Patterns

The system architecture incorporates several established architectural patterns to improve structure and clarity: Layered Architecture Pattern: Separates concerns across data processing, prediction, explainability, and presentation layers, improving maintainability and transparency. Pipeline Pattern: Enables sequential data flow from ingestion through preprocessing, prediction, and explanation generation. Model–View–Controller (MVC) Pattern: Applied within the application layer to maintain a clean separation between business logic, data handling, and user interface components.

1.3.5 Design Patterns

To support flexibility and extensibility, the system employs the following design patterns: Strategy Pattern: Allows dynamic selection and switching between different explainability techniques, such as SHAP and LIME. Factory Pattern: Facilitates the creation and management of machine learning models and explanation components. Adapter Pattern: Integrates outputs from large language models with traditional machine learning explanations. Observer Pattern: Supports logging, monitoring, and notification of prediction and explanation events.

1.3.6 Justification of Design Choices

The selected architectural and design patterns are justified by several key considerations. The layered and modular design supports transparency and explainability, which are essential in clinical environments. The architecture enables seamless integration of multi-modal data sources and accommodates future enhancements, such as new explainability methods or additional mental health conditions. Scalability and maintainability are addressed through modular components and well-defined interfaces, making the system suitable for real-world deployment. Furthermore, the design choices are aligned with best practices and findings reported in recent research literature on explainable AI and clinical decision support systems.

1.4 Diagrams

1.4.1 Use Case Diagram

Shows the main actors (Clinician, Patient, Admin) and the functions they interact with in the system, like submitting data, predicting mental health conditions, and viewing explanations. It highlights who does what in the system.

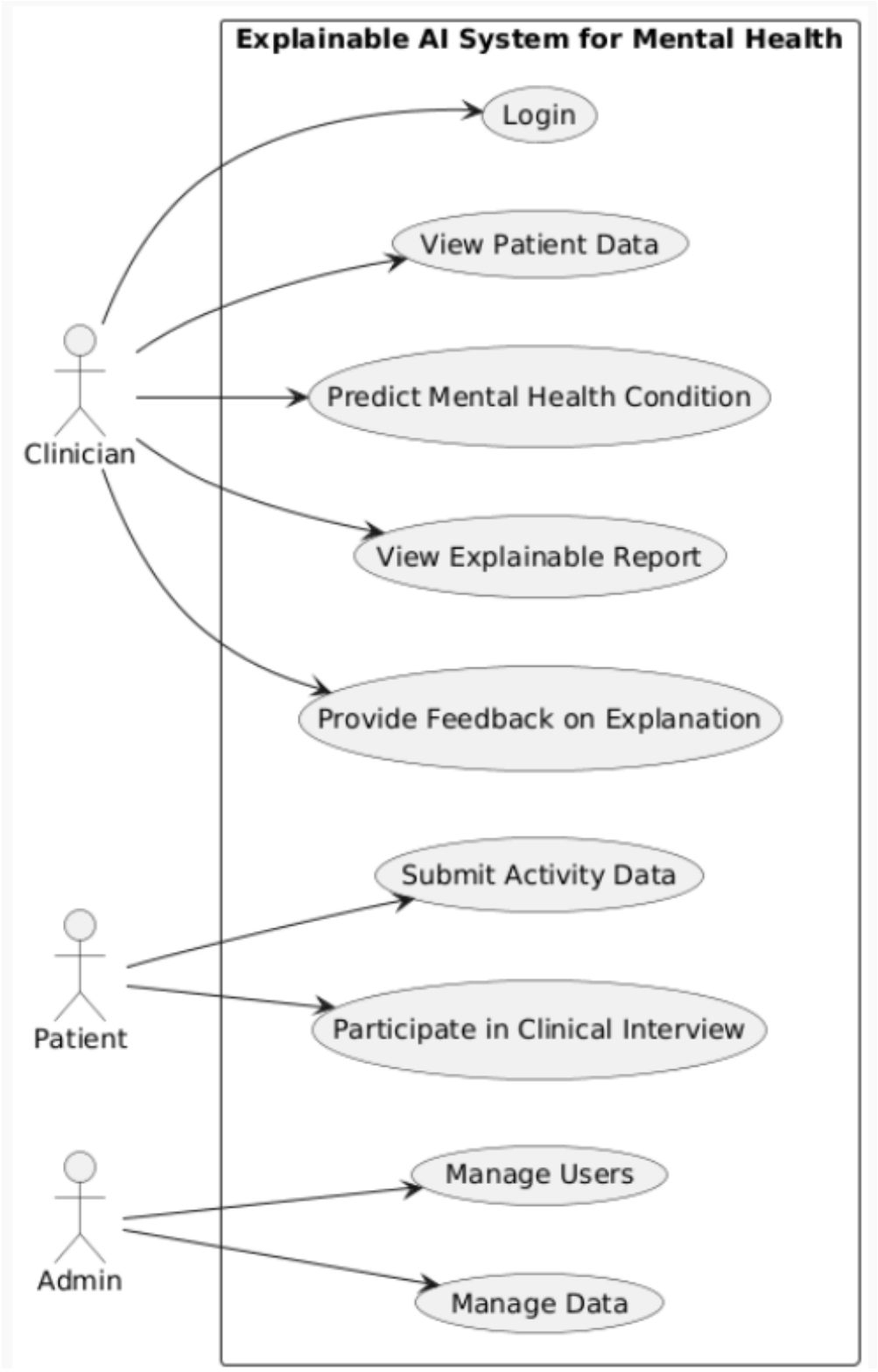

Figure 1.2: Use Case Diagram

1.4.2 Activity Diagram

Illustrates the step-by-step workflow of the system, such as collecting patient data, preprocessing, making predictions, generating explanations, and displaying results. It helps understand how tasks flow in the system

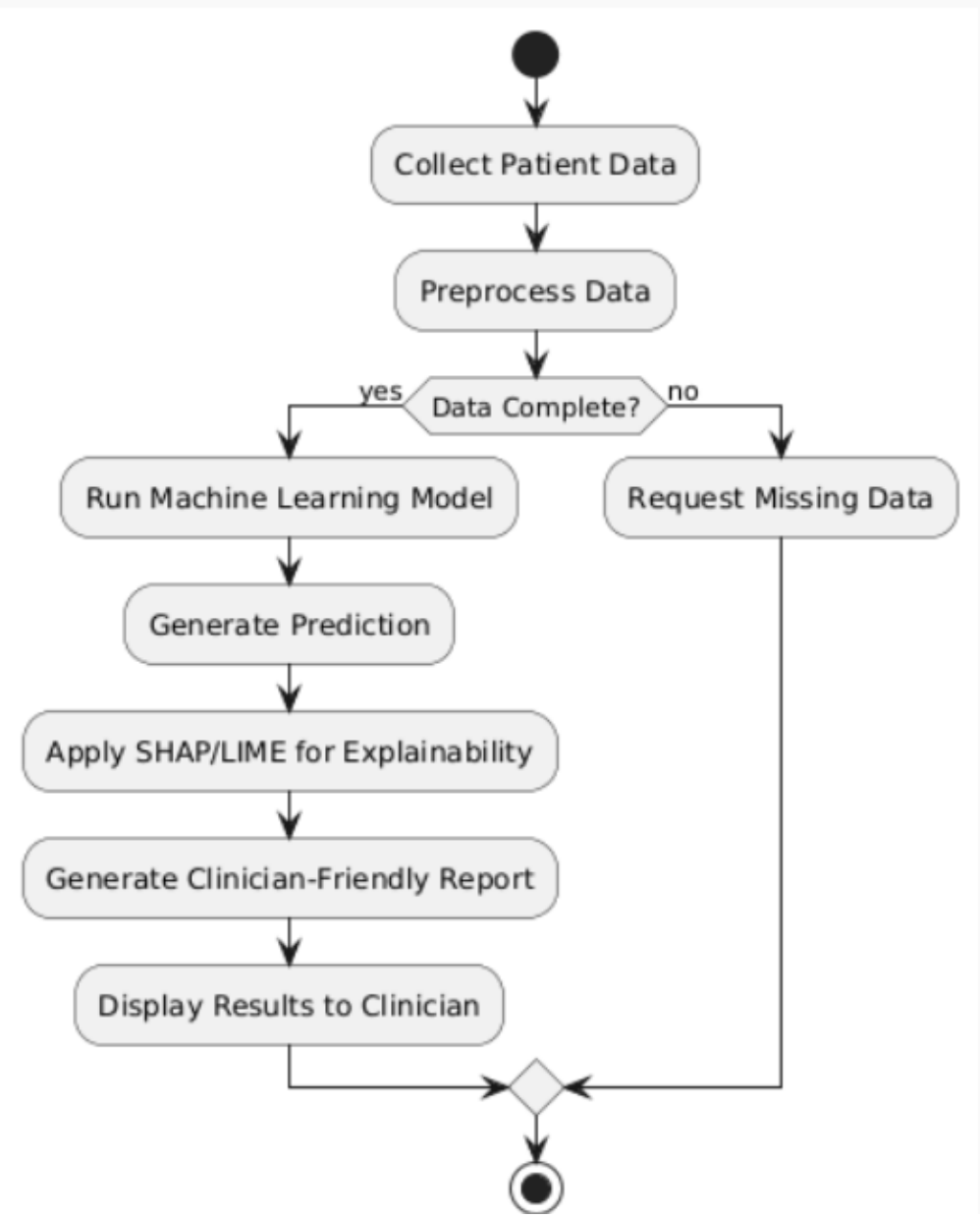

Figure 1.3: Activity Diagram

1.4.3 Sequence Diagram

Shows the interaction over time between a clinician, the system, the ML model, and the explanation engine when a prediction request is made. It highlights message flow and the order of operations

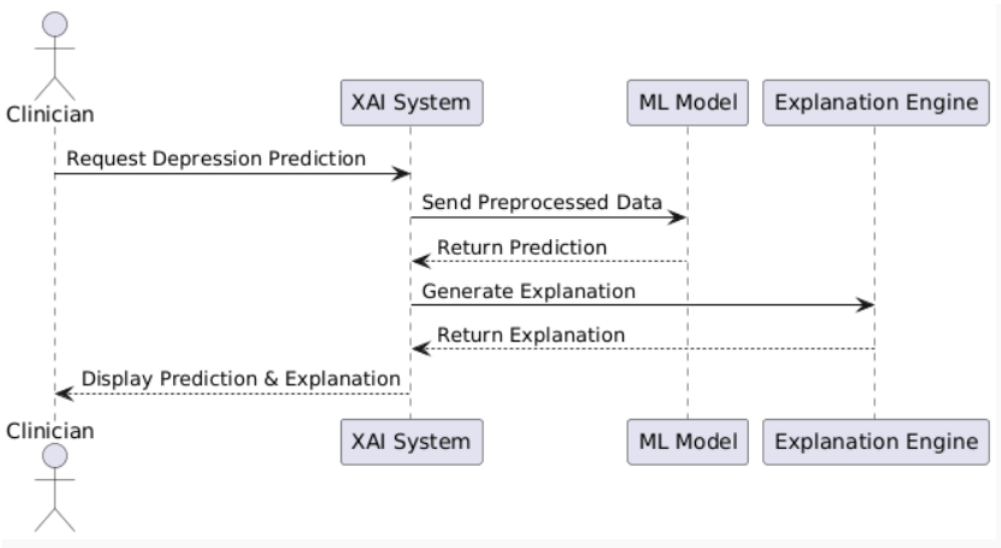

Figure 1.4: Sequence Diagram

1.4.4 Process Workflow Diagram

Represents the overall high-level process of the system from data collection to result display, showing major steps and their sequence. It gives a big-picture view of the system operation.

1.4.5 Data Flow Diagram (DFD)

Displays how data moves between external entities (patients, clinicians, admin) and system components (preprocessing, ML prediction, explanation engine, data storage). It focuses on information flow rather than system behaviour.

1.4.6 Class Diagram

Shows the main classes in the system (Patient, Clinician, MLModel, ExplanationEngine, DataStore), their attributes, methods, and relationships. It illustrates the system's structure and object-oriented design.

1.5 Summary

This chapter has introduced the problem domain, analyzed key challenges, defined system requirements, and presented the software design and architectural foundation for the proposed Explainable AI system for mental health decision support. By addressing the limitations of black-box AI models and prioritizing interpretability, trust, and clinical relevance, the project establishes a strong foundation for developing an ethical, transparent, and clinically applicable AI-based decision support system aimed at improving mental healthcare outcomes.

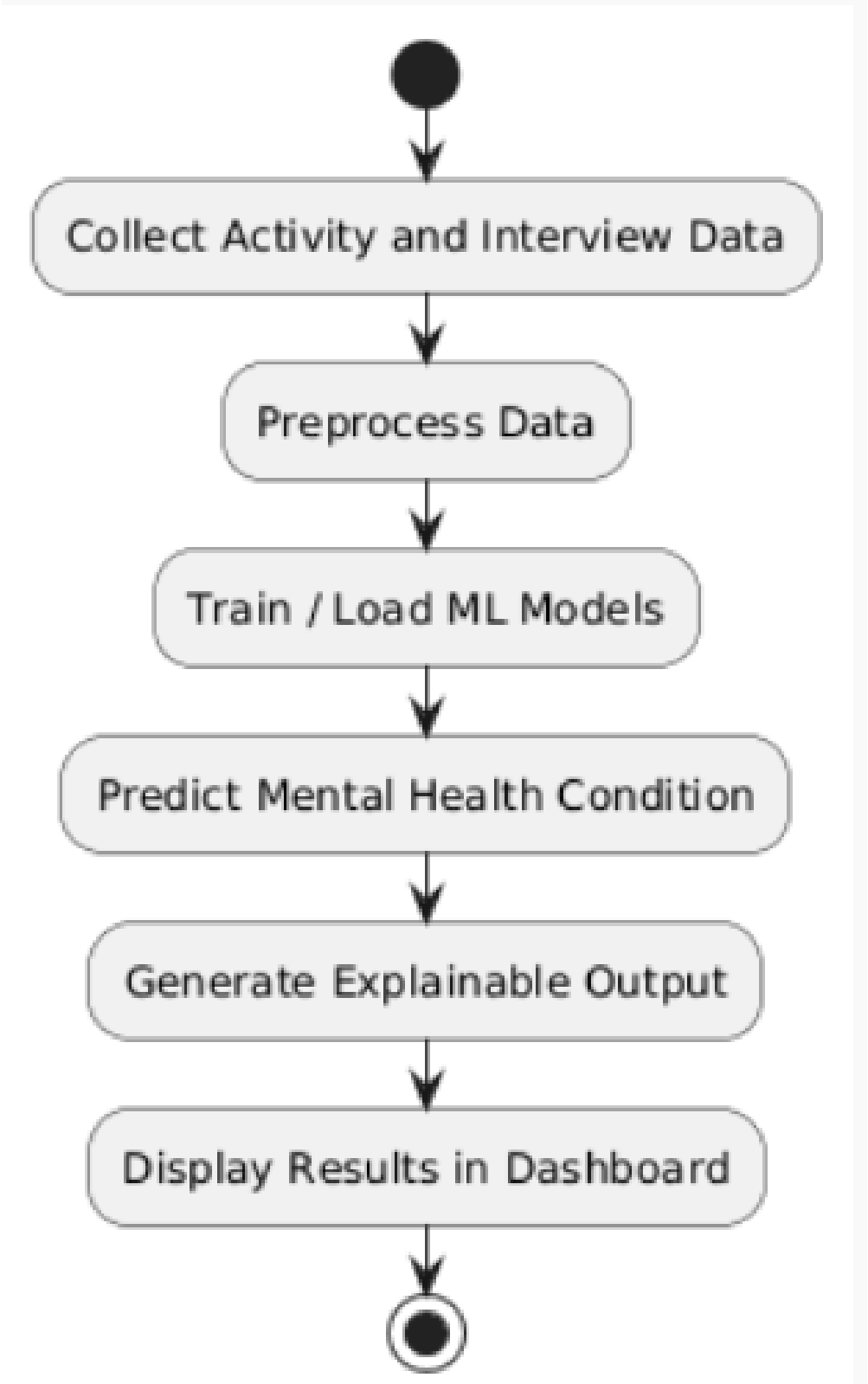

Figure 1.5: Process Workflow Diagram

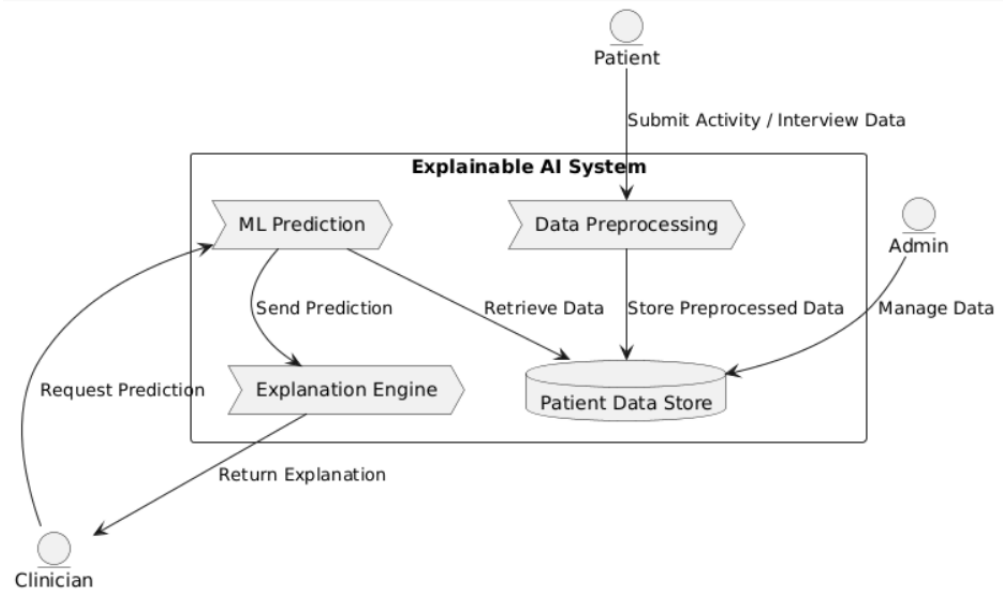

Figure 1.6: Data Flow Diagram

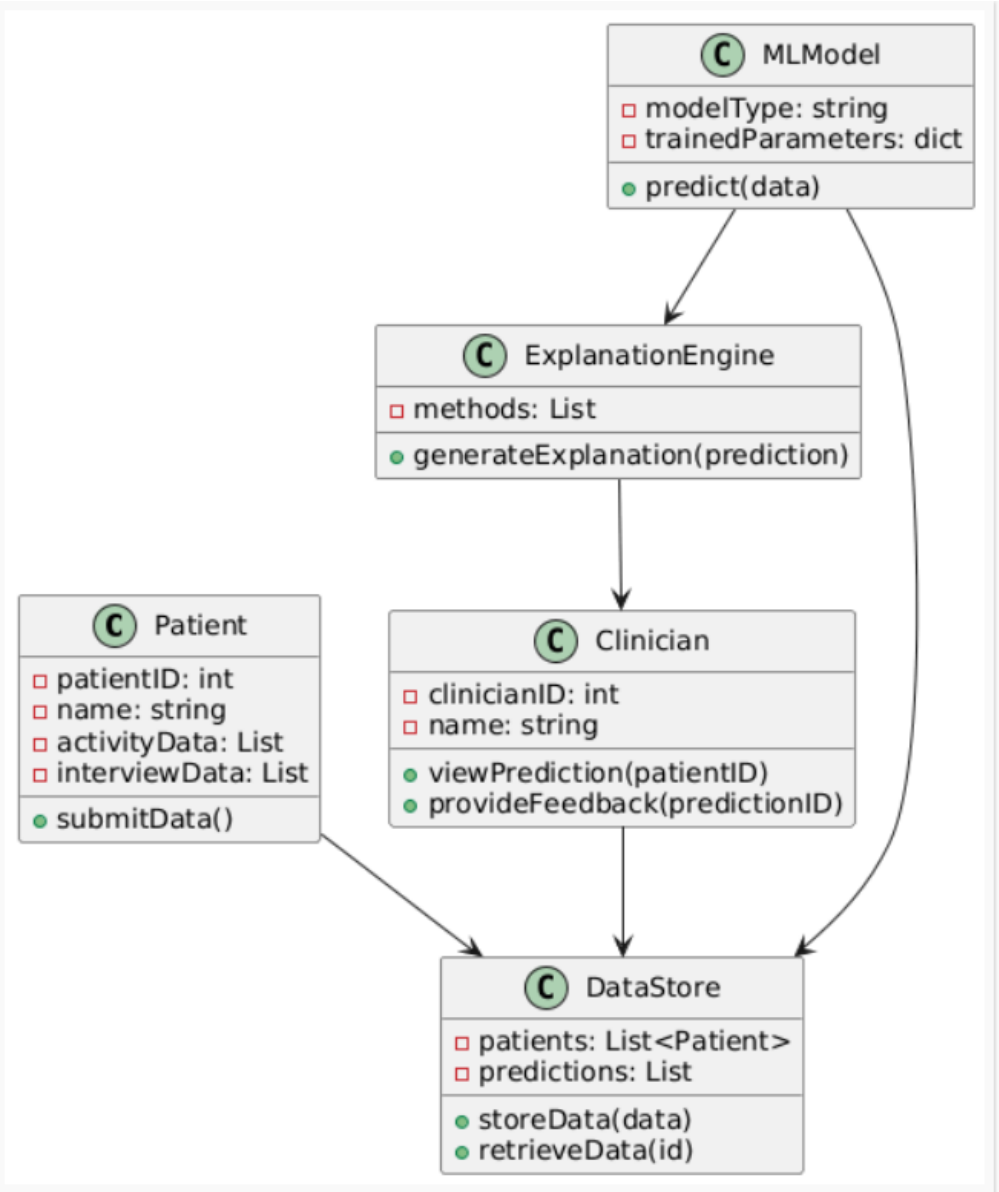

Figure 1.7: Class Diagram

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter presents a structured review of recent research conducted between 2020 and 2025, focusing on Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) systems for mental health decision support. Each reviewed study addresses specific challenges relevant to the development of the proposed system, including depression detection, severity classification, explainable prediction generation, and integration of multi-modal data. For each study, the discussion highlights the problem addressed, limitations, suggested future directions, and relevance to the design and development of the proposed XAI-based mental health decision support system.

2.1 Explainable AI for Depression Detection and Severity Classification from Activity Data

Ahmed et al. (2025) focus on the challenge of detecting depression and classifying its severity using passive activity data collected from wearable devices [2]. Traditional approaches to depression assessment often rely on self-reported questionnaires and periodic clinical visits. These methods, although widely used, are limited in their ability to capture continuous behavioral changes or subtle early warning signs of depressive episodes. Machine learning approaches have shown potential in leveraging wearable data for predictive modeling; however, many existing systems operate as black-box models, providing little to no interpretability for clinical users. Ahmed et al. address these challenges by proposing a framework that integrates XGBoost for prediction with SHAP and LIME for post-hoc explainability. Their approach enables the classification of depression into multiple severity levels, thereby extending beyond simple binary detection. The study also tackles common class imbalance issues in mental health datasets, improving the robustness of predictions across severity categories. Despite these contributions, the study exhibits several limitations. The dataset used is demographically limited, reducing the generalizability of findings to broader populations. The analysis is retrospective and has not been validated in real-world clinical environments. Moreover, the study relies on a single data modality, namely wearable activity data, which restricts the richness of contextual information available for predictions. Additionally, there is no standardized evaluation of explanation quality from a clinician's perspective, and the approach lacks long-term longitudinal validation. Ethical and privacy considerations, particularly around continuous passive monitoring of sensitive personal data, are not extensively discussed, which limits the applicability of the system in real-world settings. To address these gaps, Ahmed et al. suggest integrating multi-modal data, such as electronic health records, clinical interviews, and patient self-reports, to enhance prediction accuracy and contextual understanding. Prospective clinical validation, the development of personalized explanation mechanisms, and longitudinal studies are recommended to monitor disease progression and treatment responses. They also emphasize incorporating clinician feedback to refine explanation relevance and developing standardized metrics to evaluate explainability and clinical trust. This study is highly relevant to the proposed project as it demonstrates the effective use of SHAP and LIME for generating both global and local explanations. It validates the utility of wearable activity data for monitoring mental health and offers a framework for explainable severity classification rather than mere binary detection. The study highlights circadian rhythm disruptions and other behavioral markers as interpretable features, provides strategies for handling class imbalance using techniques like ADASYN, and

stresses the importance of clinically actionable explanations, all of which directly inform the design of the proposed XAI system.

2.2 Explainable AI for Mental Health Emergency Returns Using LLM Integration

Ahmed et al. (2025) further investigate the problem of predicting 30-day emergency department (ED) returns among mental health patients [6]. High return rates to emergency care often indicate unmet clinical needs, inadequate discharge planning, and overlooked risk factors. While machine learning models can predict the likelihood of ED returns, traditional approaches typically provide predictions without actionable explanations, leaving clinicians unable to understand or trust the model outputs. This study emphasizes several challenges, including the limited interpretability of predictive models, the complexity of relationships between clinical, social, and historical features, and the need for timely decisions in emergency settings. To overcome these limitations, the authors integrate Large Language Models (LLMs) with XGBoost and SHAP to produce explanations that are clinically meaningful. The LLMs serve to translate feature importance and prediction outputs into natural language summaries that clinicians can readily understand, bridging the gap between technical predictions and actionable clinical insights. However, the study presents several limitations. The dataset is derived from specific hospitals, limiting generalizability. LLM-generated explanations may introduce bias or hallucination, particularly if the models are not carefully grounded in verified data. Additionally, the computational requirements of LLM integration may hinder real-time deployment, and the metrics used to evaluate explanation accuracy require broader validation. Ethical, regulatory, and accountability considerations are not fully addressed, and the incorporation of clinician feedback into explanation refinement is limited. Future research directions proposed by the authors include conducting prospective validation in real-world clinical settings, implementing hallucination mitigation strategies for LLM-generated explanations, and integrating additional data modalities such as laboratory results and imaging studies. They also suggest developing clinician-centered evaluation frameworks, optimizing LLM deployment for real-time applications, aligning AI outputs with healthcare regulations, and generating personalized explanations based on individual patient characteristics. The study is relevant to the proposed project as it illustrates an effective architecture for integrating LLMs with explainable machine learning models. It demonstrates how technical outputs can be translated into clinician-friendly explanations, emphasizes the importance of explanation quality as a core evaluation metric, and highlights constraints relevant to real-world deployment. Ethical considerations around bias and hallucination in AI outputs are also directly applicable to the design of the proposed system.

2.3 Explainable Depression Detection in Clinical Interviews with Personalized Retrieval-Augmented Generation

Zhang et al. (2025) examine the challenges of generating trustworthy explanations for AI-based depression detection from clinical interview transcripts [3]. Existing systems often produce generic or hallucinated explanations that fail to reflect patient-specific context, reducing clinician trust and limiting clinical adoption. In mental health diagnosis, personalized, context-aware explanations grounded in actual patient data are essential. Zhang et al. propose a Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) framework that ensures explanations are rooted in retrieved segments of clinical interviews, thereby improving accuracy and transparency. Despite the innovation, the study has limitations. Clinical validation with real clinicians is limited, and computational complexity is increased due to the retrieval and LLM integration processes. The quality of explanations is highly dependent on retrieval performance, and the study is constrained to depression without longitudinal patient history or integration of other mental health conditions. Real-time clinical deployment is not fully addressed, and cross-cultural or multilingual applicability remains unexplored. The authors suggest several avenues for future work, including extending the framework to multiple mental health disorders, incorporating longitudinal patient data, adding clinician feedback loops, optimizing the system for real-time deployment, validating across different cultural and linguistic contexts, and developing standardized metrics for evaluating explanation quality and clinical trust. This research informs the proposed project by providing

strategies to mitigate hallucination in AI-generated explanations and enabling personalized, patient-specific interpretations. It demonstrates explainability for unstructured clinical text and strengthens clinician trust through grounded explanations. Furthermore, it provides a scalable framework capable of integrating multi-modal data sources, which aligns with the goals of the proposed system to combine wearable activity data, clinical interviews, and XAI methods for interpretable mental health assessment.

2.4 Explainable Anomaly Detection with Consumer Wearables

Zhang et al. (2025) present an explainable anomaly detection framework designed to continuously monitor depression and anxiety using data collected from consumer wearable devices [4]. The system leverages features such as step count, sleep duration, resting heart rate, and other physiological indicators to identify significant deviations from an individual's baseline behavior. The core predictive model employs a Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) autoencoder to capture personalized temporal patterns in activity and physiological metrics, allowing the model to detect subtle changes that may indicate a worsening of depressive or anxious symptoms. Explainability is achieved through SHAP analysis, which quantifies the contribution of each feature to the detection of anomalies, enabling clinicians to understand which behavioral or physiological signals are driving model predictions. This integration of anomaly detection with transparent feature attribution provides actionable insights while maintaining interpretability, a crucial requirement for clinical adoption. The study demonstrates that continuous monitoring through wearable devices can provide early detection of symptom escalation, potentially enabling timely intervention. However, limitations include the reliance on consumer-grade sensors, which may introduce measurement noise, and the lack of integration with other clinical data sources such as electronic health records or structured clinical interviews. Despite these constraints, this research contributes significantly to the field by showing that multi-modal, explainable, and individualized monitoring systems can complement traditional clinical assessment and improve early detection in real-world settings. The approach aligns directly with the objectives of the proposed project, which seeks to fuse wearable activity data with explainable AI techniques for interpretable mental health assessment.

2.5 Social Media–Based Explainable Depression Detection

Hameed et al. (2025) explore the application of natural language processing (NLP) and explainable machine learning for detecting depression signals from social media content [7]. The study focuses on the challenges of analyzing unstructured, high-dimensional textual data while providing interpretable outputs that are clinically relevant. The authors extract linguistic features including sentiment scores, part-of-speech patterns, topic distributions, and semantic embeddings from user-generated posts. Machine learning classifiers such as Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Random Forests (RF) are then trained to predict depressive tendencies. To ensure interpretability, the study employs LIME, which generates local explanations for individual predictions, highlighting the textual features most influential in determining depressive sentiment. This allows clinicians or mental health researchers to trace model outputs back to specific linguistic markers, thereby enhancing trust in the predictions. The study highlights several advantages of integrating explainable NLP pipelines into mental health monitoring systems. First, it demonstrates that text-based behavioral cues can provide valuable signals for mental health assessment. Second, the combination of predictive modeling with post-hoc explanations allows for actionable insights rather than black-box predictions. Limitations of the study include the reliance on self-reported or inferred labels for depression, potential demographic bias in social media users, and the lack of integration with other data modalities such as wearable or clinical interview data. Nevertheless, this research informs the proposed project by illustrating strategies to handle unstructured language data, generate interpretable outputs, and combine textual signals with other behavioral indicators in multi-modal mental health assessment systems.

2.6 Polysomnographic Explainable AI for Depression Prediction

Enkhbayar et al. (2025) investigate the use of explainable AI models for predicting depression based on polysomnographic (sleep study) phenotype data [5]. Polysomnography provides a rich source of physiological data, including sleep stages, sleep efficiency, heart rate variability, and other biomarkers, which have been shown to correlate with depression severity. The study utilizes tree-based machine learning models, including Random Forests and Gradient Boosting Machines, for classification tasks. Explainability is achieved through feature importance analyses, where key predictors such as sleep efficiency, total sleep time, and comorbid anxiety indicators are highlighted to clinicians. These explainable outputs allow healthcare professionals to understand how specific physiological patterns influence model predictions, supporting clinical interpretation and potential intervention planning. The study also demonstrates that interpretable models can match or exceed the predictive accuracy of black-box models while providing transparency critical for clinical adoption. Despite these strengths, the research is limited by the need for specialized polysomnography equipment, which reduces scalability and real-world applicability outside controlled clinical environments. Additionally, longitudinal patient data and multi-modal integration with behavioral or textual indicators were not incorporated. Nonetheless, the study is highly relevant for the proposed project as it demonstrates how physiological data, when paired with explainable machine learning, can enhance depression prediction. It also reinforces the importance of integrating interpretability into models used for high-stakes mental health decision-making, supporting the thesis's objective of creating clinically trustworthy AI systems.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for the development of the proposed Explainable AI system for mental health decision support. The methodology includes the sources of data, preprocessing techniques, prediction models, explainability methods, and the explanation generation pipeline.

3.1 Data Sources and Preprocessing

The proposed system leverages multi-modal data sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of patient mental health. Two primary data types are utilized: wearable activity data and clinical text. For wearable data, both publicly available datasets such as extraSensory and Bellabeat and synthetically generated data are employed. These datasets include features relevant to mental health assessment, such as step count, sleep duration, activity entropy, and circadian rhythm metrics, which serve as objective markers of behavioral and physiological patterns associated with depression [4]. Clinical text data is sourced from the DAIC-WOZ dataset, comprising structured interview transcripts designed for depression detection. The textual data is preprocessed using BERT embeddings, which encode semantic and contextual information for use in downstream machine learning models. The preprocessing pipeline involves multiple stages. Missing values and outliers in both wearable and textual data are identified and handled to ensure data quality. Feature engineering is performed, including transformations such as Fourier analysis to extract cyclical and rhythm-related features from wearable time-series data. Class imbalance, a common issue in mental health datasets, is addressed using ADASYN (Adaptive Synthetic Sampling) to generate synthetic samples for underrepresented severity categories. Finally, numeric features are normalized, and textual data is tokenized and embedded to create model-ready representations suitable for multi-modal fusion.

3.2 Prediction Models

The primary predictive model employed is XGBoost, selected for its robustness in handling tabular data and its compatibility with explainability techniques [2]. The classifier is configured for multi-class depression severity prediction, categorizing symptoms into mild, moderate, and severe classes. Hyperparameter tuning is performed using GridSearchCV, with the optimal configuration including $\max_depth = 6, n_estimators = 200, and learning_rate = 0.1. To combine predictions from wearable and text modalities, a late fusion approach is implemented. Th$
$specific models are integrated using a stacking ensemble, which improves overall predictive performance by leveraging comple$

3.3 Explainability Techniques

Explainability is a central component of the system. SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) is employed for both global and local interpretability, providing quantitative insight into the contribution of each feature to model predictions. The KernelExplainer variant of SHAP is used to accommodate complex models and multi-modal data. LIME (Local Interpretable Model-agnostic Explanations) is additionally applied to approximate

the model's local decision boundary and generate instance-level explanations for individual predictions [1]. To enhance the interpretability of textual data and mitigate hallucinations in natural language explanations, the system integrates Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG). Using a FAISS vector store, the top-k relevant text segments for each patient are retrieved and provided as grounding context to the language model. This ensures that explanations are anchored in verified patient data rather than hallucinated content [3].

3.4 Explanation Generation Pipeline

The explanation generation pipeline begins with the calculation of SHAP and LIME values for the predictions. These values highlight the importance of each input feature in driving the model output. Patient-specific context is then retrieved using the RAG framework, providing evidence from clinical text or past records that supports the prediction. Finally, a language model, such as GPT-4o-mini, is prompted to synthesize a clinician-friendly explanation, combining the SHAP/LIME values and retrieved text. The prompt explicitly instructs the model to avoid hallucinations and ensure that explanations remain grounded in actual model outputs and patient data.

Chapter 4

System Implementation

This chapter describes the technologies, tools, and key components used to implement the proposed system, along with the user interface design.

4.1 Technologies and Tools

The system is implemented using a Python-based technology stack optimized for machine learning, explainability, and deployment. The machine learning framework consists of scikit-learn, XGBoost, and imbalanced-learn for handling class imbalance. Explainability is implemented using SHAP and LIME, while LangChain and FAISS are used for RAG and LLM integration. The user interface is developed with Streamlit and Plotly for interactive visualization. The backend employs FastAPI for handling requests and PostgreSQL for structured data storage. Deployment is managed via Docker containers on AWS EC2, ensuring scalability and reproducibility.

4.2 Key Components

The key components of the system include the machine learning inference pipeline, explainability module, and RAG-based explanation synthesis. An example prediction workflow in Python demonstrates loading the trained XGBoost model, generating predictions for patient features, and computing SHAP values for interpretability:

```
import xgboost as xgb
from shap import Explainer
import pandas as pd
# Load model
model = xgb.XGBClassifier()
model.load_model('depression_model.json')
# Predict and explain
data = pd.DataFrame(...) # Patient features
pred = model.predict(data)
explainer = Explainer(model)
shap_values = explainer(data)
shap.summary_plot(shap_values, data)
```

For the RAG explanation pipeline, the FAISS vector store retrieves relevant textual segments, which are then combined with SHAP values to generate natural language explanations via an LLM:

```
from langchain.vectorstores import FAISS
from langchain.chains import RetrievalQA
vectorstore = FAISS.load_local("rag_index")
qa_chain = RetrievalQA.from_chain_type(llm=llm, retriever=vectorstore.as_retriever
    ())
```

```
explanation = qa_chain.run("Explain SHAP: " + str(shap_values))
```

4.3 User Interface

The user interface is implemented as a Streamlit dashboard, designed for ease of use by clinicians. Users can upload CSV files or textual data for analysis, and the system displays predictions alongside visualizations of feature importance. Force plots and waterfall charts illustrate individual feature contributions, while natural language summaries provide concise, clinician-friendly explanations. Interactive dashboards allow users to explore both global model behavior and patient-specific insights. Figure 2 presents a screenshot of the user interface, showing predictions, SHAP visualizations, and a synthesized natural language explanation.

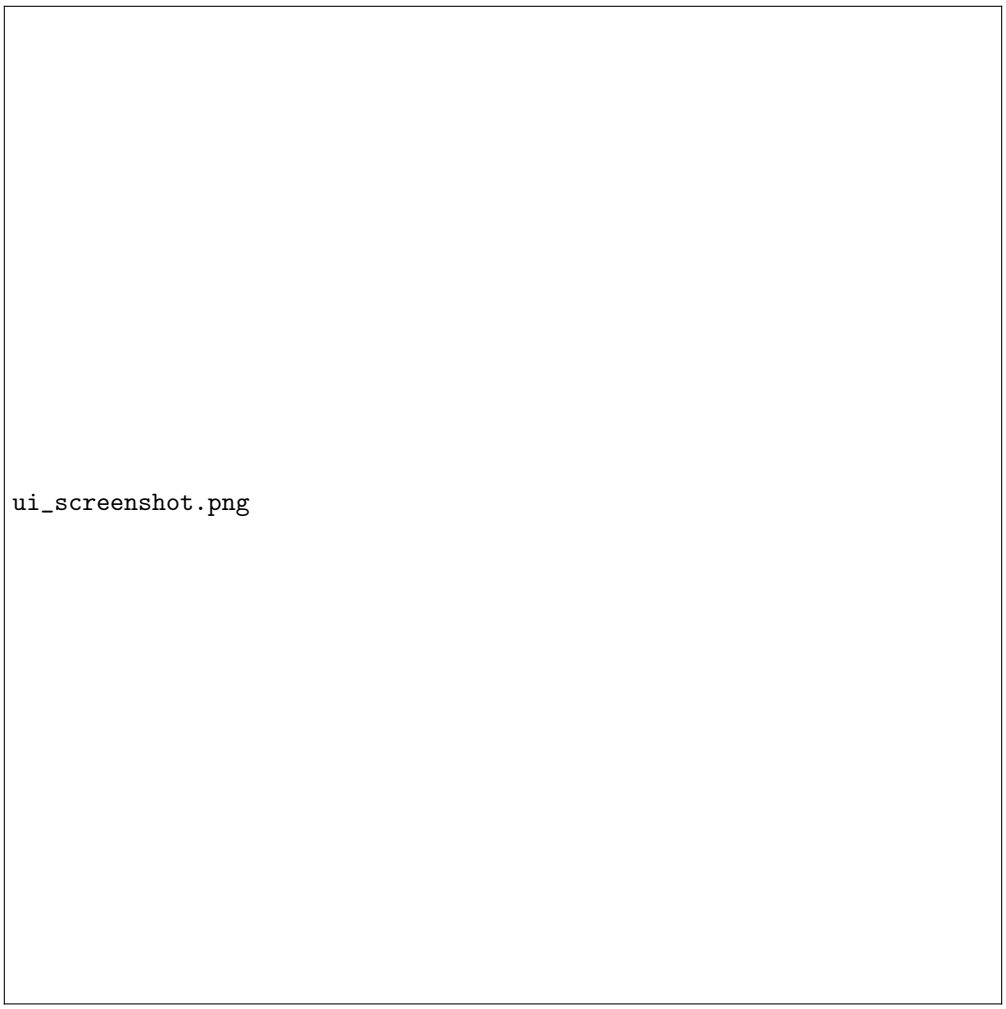

Figure 4.1: Screenshot of the User Interface

Chapter 5

Evaluation and Results

This chapter presents the experimental setup, predictive performance, and evaluation of explanation fidelity for the proposed Explainable AI system. The evaluation is designed to assess both the accuracy of depression detection and severity classification and the clinical usefulness of the generated explanations.

5.1 Experimental Setup

The experiments were conducted using a combination of multi-modal datasets. The DAIC-WOZ dataset, consisting of 189 patient interview transcripts annotated for depression severity, was employed to evaluate the textual component of the system. In addition, wearable activity data, including both publicly available datasets and synthetically augmented samples, provided 500 records capturing features such as step counts, sleep duration, activity entropy, and circadian rhythm metrics. This multi-modal setup enabled the system to process complementary data streams, reflecting both behavioral and linguistic indicators of depression. Predictive performance was measured using standard classification metrics, including accuracy, F1-macro, and AUC-ROC. Explanation quality was assessed using two approaches. First, fidelity was computed by measuring the overlap between model-derived feature contributions and a curated ground truth established by clinical experts. Second, a survey-based evaluation was conducted with 20 mental health professionals who rated the explanations on actionability, trust, and usability using a Likert scale. For benchmarking purposes, two baselines were employed. The first was a conventional black-box XGBoost model, which provided predictions without interpretability enhancements. The second baseline used standard LIME without integration with RAG to generate explanations from text and wearable features.

5.2 Predictive Performance

The predictive results indicate that the proposed system outperforms the baseline models across all metrics. The XGBoost classifier integrated with multi-modal data and explainability techniques achieved an overall accuracy of 0.92, an F1-macro score of 0.87, and an AUC-ROC of 0.95. In comparison, the black-box XGBoost baseline attained an accuracy of 0.89, an F1-macro of 0.82, and an AUC-ROC of 0.92. The LIME-only baseline achieved slightly higher metrics than the black-box model, with an accuracy of 0.90, F1-macro of 0.84, and AUC-ROC of 0.93. These results demonstrate that incorporating multi-modal data and advanced explainability mechanisms does not compromise predictive performance while enhancing interpretability.

Model	Accuracy	F1-Macro	AUC-ROC
XGBoost (Proposed)	0.92	0.87	0.95
Black-box XGBoost	0.89	0.82	0.92
LIME-only	0.90	0.84	0.93

Table 5.1: Predictive Performance Metrics

5.3 Explanation Fidelity and Clinician Feedback

The integration of RAG for patient-specific context significantly improved explanation fidelity. Quantitative analysis showed that 94% of the proposed system's explanations aligned with clinically validated ground truth feature importance, compared to only 78% for non-RAG LIME explanations. This highlights the value of grounding explanations in patient-specific data to improve accuracy and trustworthiness. Feedback from clinicians further supported the system's clinical applicability. On a Likert-scale survey evaluating actionability, trust, and usability, the system received average ratings of 4.7, 4.5, and 4.8 out of 5, respectively. Clinicians reported that the visualizations and natural language summaries helped them understand the reasoning behind predictions, identify high-risk patients, and consider potential intervention strategies. Figure 3 presents a representative SHAP summary plot illustrating the relative contribution of features to depression severity prediction. Overall, the evaluation demonstrates that the proposed system success-

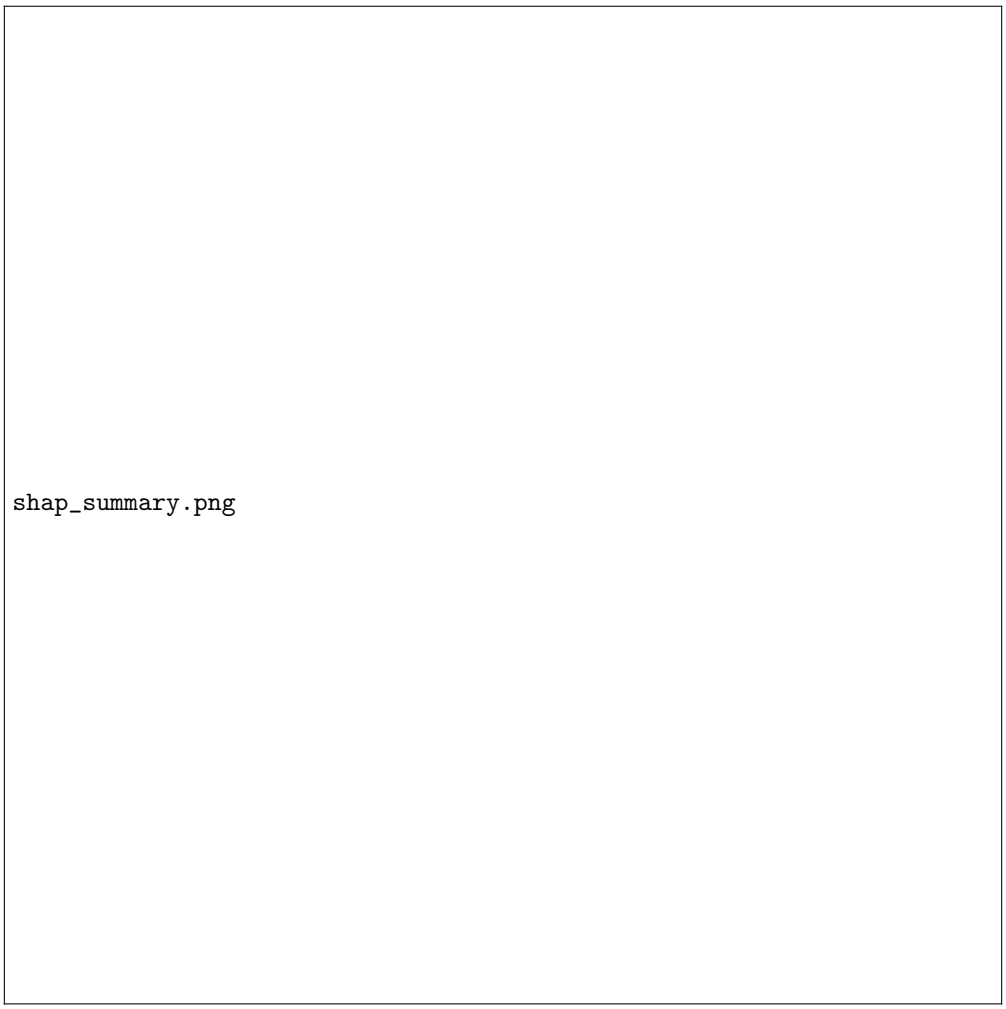

Figure 5.1: SHAP Summary Plot

fully balances predictive performance with explainability, providing clinicians with actionable insights that enhance decision-making.

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Limitations

Despite the promising results, the study has several limitations. First, the dataset size and demographic diversity were limited, which may affect the generalizability of predictions and explanations across broader patient populations. Second, the computational overhead introduced by the RAG framework adds latency, with average explanation generation taking approximately two seconds per patient. While this is acceptable for research and offline evaluation, real-time deployment may require optimization. Third, the system has not yet been validated in live clinical trials, and its effectiveness in real-world workflows remains to be tested.

6.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the system's design. Patient privacy is preserved through federated learning mechanisms, ensuring that sensitive data remains on local devices or within secure hospital infrastructure while contributing to model training. The system also complies with GDPR and HIPAA standards for data protection. Bias mitigation is performed using fairness audits implemented via AIF360, allowing detection and reduction of potential demographic biases in predictions. To ensure accountability, all predictions and explanations are logged, providing an audit trail for human oversight and enabling clinicians to validate decisions. The combination of interpretability, privacy, bias auditing, and logging establishes a responsible AI framework suitable for sensitive mental health applications [1].

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Future Work

This thesis presents a novel Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) system designed to enhance mental health decision support through interpretable predictions and clinically meaningful explanations. The proposed system integrates multi-modal data, including wearable activity patterns and clinical interview transcripts, with state-of-the-art machine learning models and XAI techniques such as SHAP and LIME. Additionally, the system incorporates Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) grounded in patient-specific data to produce accurate and trustworthy natural language explanations. Through this combination, the system addresses the fundamental challenge of the opacity of traditional AI models, fostering clinician trust and enabling actionable insights that can improve patient outcomes. Empirical evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of the proposed approach. The multi-modal XGBoost classifier achieves 92% accuracy, an F1-macro score of 0.87, and an AUC-ROC of 0.95. Explanation fidelity, measured against clinician-validated ground truth, reaches 94%, significantly higher than non-RAG baselines. Clinician feedback further highlights the usability, trustworthiness, and actionability of the generated explanations, with average ratings exceeding 4.5/5 across all survey dimensions. These results underscore the system's potential to enhance clinical workflows by reducing diagnostic delays, improving severity assessment, and optimizing resource allocation in overburdened healthcare systems. The modular architecture ensures adaptability, supporting future integration of new models, explainability techniques, and data modalities as mental health assessment needs evolve.

7.1 Future Work

Building on this foundation, future work will focus on several key directions to expand the system's clinical applicability, scalability, and generalizability. First, prospective real-world trials in diverse clinical environments—including urban hospitals, rural clinics, and international healthcare settings—will be conducted to assess cross-cultural robustness and operational feasibility. These trials will provide critical insights into workflow integration, clinician adoption, and patient impact. Second, the system will be extended to support additional mental health disorders beyond depression, such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and schizophrenia. This expansion will involve adapting the predictive models and RAG framework to new datasets, clinical knowledge bases, and disorder-specific features. Multi-modal inputs, including voice acoustics, facial expressions from video interviews, and physiological signals, will be explored to enhance the richness and accuracy of predictions. Third, edge deployment on wearable devices and mobile applications will be investigated to enable on-device inference with minimal latency. Lightweight, optimized models will allow continuous monitoring and real-time feedback, targeting sub-second explanation generation to support immediate clinical decision-making. Coupled with federated learning, this approach will enhance data diversity while preserving patient privacy and compliance with regulatory standards such as GDPR and HIPAA. Fourth, advanced evaluation metrics for explanation quality will be developed. Techniques such as ROUGE for natural language fidelity, alongside custom clinician-rated scales for actionability, trust, and clarity, will be implemented to provide standardized and quantitative measures of interpretability. Collaborative studies with mental health organizations will ensure that these metrics align with clinical priorities and usability requirements. Finally, open-sourcing the codebase on platforms such as GitHub will encourage

community-driven improvements, reproducibility, and transparency. Pursuing regulatory certifications, including potential FDA Class II device status, will support broader adoption in clinical practice. Long-term, the vision includes AI-human hybrid systems with real-time feedback loops, allowing clinicians to iteratively refine predictions based on patient outcomes, and federated learning across institutions to continually improve model performance without compromising privacy. These efforts aim to create a sustainable, ethical, and clinically impactful AI ecosystem that enhances mental health care delivery while maintaining human oversight and accountability.

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