

Digital Therapy in Rehabilitation Service for Mental Health Patients during COVID-19 Pandemic: Opportunity and Challenges



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Abstract

This article is based narrative review of digital therapy in mental health services in Indonesia. It's because the demands of the order of life that are developing so fast make people be able to adjust themselves well. Some people can survive well and win in life's fierce competition, while others do not survive, then become stressed, traumatized, depressed, and then in turn experience mental disorders. Many strategies to handle mental problems such as using technology. Digital therapy in mental health services has recently become increasingly prominent, related to efforts to reach more people who are in need but do not have access to more practical breakthroughs. Digital therapy is considered a more practical breakthrough because anyone who needs it can access it. On the other hand, mental health issues are not very familiar in the community. Stigma and judgment are still high in people with mental health disorders or people who do not understand whether they have experienced mental health problems, what are the signs, what to do when experiencing mental health disorders, and what are the impacts if left unchecked.

Keywords

COVID-19;
digital therapy;
mental health;
rehabilitation;
well-being;

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1 Introduction

The problem of mental health disorders is very close to the life of everyone, in children and youth cases of mental health disorders are also starting to appear frequently. Millennials and Gen Zs are more prone to mental health problems than any other generation. Around 6 in 10 of them feel various kinds of mental health issues like stress, anxiety, depression, etc. Especially in the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, almost all age stages are affected. Children have to take part in online learning which is stressful in itself, not being able to meet and play with friends, tedious tasks. In adults, the existence of health protocol rules such as the necessity to use masks, maintain social distance, wash hands, implement lockdowns, the PSBB which limits people's movements, and the ferocity of the COVID -19 virus creates pressure and stress on everyone (Dunlop & Holosko, 2006).

Digital therapy during the COVID -19 period will be a reliable solution in mental health because clients do not need to come to a therapist conventionally face to face. Some people call digital therapy digital psychotherapy because it deals with psychosocial problems. "Digital psychotherapy presents an excellent opportunity for the treatment of patients experiencing mood and anxiety disorders". With a rapidly established evidence base to support it, digital psychotherapy has been accepted as an effective and practical way to provide mental healthcare to patients (Murni & Astuti, 2015). This digital therapy service cannot be taken lightly. This is an effective vanguard, both for preventing or overcoming psychiatric problems. This paper will discuss digital therapy, which is an alternative that can be said to be very appropriate in the COVID-19 pandemic situation and also in areas far from direct services (Whitelaw et al., 2020; Killgore et al., 2020). Digital therapy can be a solution in the prevention and handling of psychological problems, which is carried out through the digital world, which is expected to help the wider community to obtain appropriate services in addition to institutional services. This digital therapy is carried out by professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals that are relevant to mental health problems (Nevid et al., 2005). Digital therapy has various advantages and needs to be further developed, on another area it needs to be introduced to the community so that many people can get mental health services properly, even though they cannot access institutional services.

2. Mental Health Problems in Indonesia

Disorders of mental health is a condition that is sometimes not realized when it is still at a mild level. At an advanced stage, they become sufferers called people with mental disabilities, in the realm of health they are called people with mental problems (ODMK) and people with mental disorders (ODGJ). ODGJ or people with mental disabilities are still considered a shame or a disgrace to their families or relatives whose family members have mental or mental health problems. Lubis et al. (2015), state that most Indonesians think that mental or mental health disorders cannot be cured so sufferers deserve to be ostracized. The lack of knowledge about mental or mental health, makes Indonesian people judge that people with mental or mental health disorders are different from people with physical illnesses that can be cured or are difficult to cure. So that the labeling of people with mental or mental health disorders as "weird people". Mental health is still a significant health problem in the world, including in Indonesia. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2016, there are about 35 million people affected by depression, 60 million people affected by bipolar, 21 million affected by schizophrenia, and 4.5 million affected by dementia.

In Indonesia, based on data from the 2018 Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) released by the Indonesian Ministry of Health on its website, which explains the proportion of households with household members (ART) who experience schizophrenia or psychosis in Indonesia has increased significantly. Previously in 2013,

only 1.7% in 2018 rose to 7%. The coverage of treatment for people with schizophrenia or psychosis in 2018 was 84.9% who received treatment but only 48.9% took medication regularly. The prevalence of emotional mental disorders in the population aged over 15 years in 2013 was 6% and in 2018 it rose to 9.8%. This is also one of the factors that continue to increase sufferers of mental health or psychiatric disorders in Indonesia. In line with the opinion of [Rodríguez-Rey \(2020\)](#), that there are several psychological impacts when a pandemic occurs and is felt by the community, namely post-traumatic stress disorder (post-traumatic stress disorder), confusion, anxiety, frustration, fear of affection, insomnia and feeling helpless. The most severe conditions are the emergence of xenophobic cases and also cases of suicide. After all, they are very afraid if they will be infected with a deadly virus, or despair because they have been infected they experience various severe mental stresses. In the case in July 2020, a COVID-19 patient in Surabaya, East Java, committed suicide by jumping from the 6th floor of the Surabaya Haji General Hospital. The victim is suspected of being depressed because he has taken swab tests seven times and the results are always positive ([detik.com, July 30, 2020](#)).

Conditions that come and change suddenly will make people unprepared to deal with them. In line with [Fitria & Karneli \(2020\)](#), that the psychological condition experienced by many people, especially in Indonesia, is the fear of being infected. The Association of Indonesian Mental Medicine Specialists (PDSKJI) surveyed mental health through an online self-examination, which obtained 2364 respondents in 34 provinces. The results show as many as 69% of respondents experienced psychological problems. As many as 68% of respondents experience anxiety, 67% experience depression, and 77% experience psychological trauma, even 49% of respondents who experience depression think constantly about death (<http://pdskji.org/hom>, 14 May 2020). The data illustrate that mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and trauma due to the COVID-19 pandemic are felt by Indonesian people at this time ([Moazzami et al., 2020](#); [Souri & Hasanirad, 2011](#)). The pressures of life that are getting heavier from the health, social, psychological, and economic aspects are the causes that can increase the number of people with mental health disorders.

3. Conventional Service for Mental Health

Rehabilitation services for people with mental disabilities usually begin with medical treatment at a mental hospital. However, it can be illustrated that a mental disorder must be handled comprehensively by various professions, across sectors. How not mental disorders are not only medical matters but social factors, namely relationships with the environment, which greatly affect a person's mental condition. Rehabilitation services for mental health in Indonesia are provided by primary care providers as well as support services. The Ministry of Health with a mental health specialist profession known as a psychiatrist as the main service provider. The services provided are psychiatric rehabilitation services, also known as psychosocial rehabilitation. Another profession that supports psychiatric rehabilitation services is social rehabilitation carried out by social workers, as stipulated in Law no. 8 of 2014 concerning Mental Health. It is also mentioned that the services provided by the psychiatrist and social workers are inseparable and continuous. Psychiatric rehabilitation services at the hospital will then be followed by social rehabilitation services at the rehabilitation service institution ([Shaw & Hill, 2011](#)). Rehabilitation services for mental health in Indonesia are carried out on an institutional basis as well as on a family and community basis. Carried out by government and community service agencies.

Institution-based rehabilitation service institutions carry out direct face-to-face rehabilitation with clients because on average the clients who enter the institution are those who are already in a severely disturbed mental health condition. This condition is triggered by various factors such as not understanding mental health disorders, stigma, and stereotypes so that people with mental health disorders are hidden, another factor is a wrong understanding of healing so that many people are treated like physical detention. Rehabilitation service institutions also have preventive service programs in the form of mental health education for the community ([Kunderevych et al., 2022](#)). However, these preventive services have not become a top priority. This condition is very unfortunate because preventive efforts can prevent mental health disorders in a person, or if there is a disorder it will be detected early so that it does not become more severe ([Siradjuddin, 2017](#)).

Certain conditions, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, can cause agency-based services to be reduced. People cannot access the institution, or it is difficult to access the institution because of strict requirements and health protocol rules. Therefore, family and community-based services are important to do. However, the existing obstacle is that neither the family nor the community has the necessary competencies. Social rehabilitation services carried out by government-owned social rehabilitation service agencies specifically refer to the social rehabilitation program for people with mental disabilities launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The term for those who have mental health disorders is in the realm of the social work profession. The Social Rehabilitation carried out is a social function recovery program which of course restores mental health through Social Rehabilitation Assistance (ATENSI) activities consisting of activities: 1) support for meeting the needs of a decent living, 2) social care and/care, 3) Family support, 4) Therapy Physical, Psychosocial Therapy, Mental Spiritual Therapy, Occupational Therapy, 5) Vocational training and entrepreneurship development, 6) Social Assistance and Social Assistance, 7) Accessibility support. Social Rehabilitation Assistance Activities are Social Rehabilitation programs that are carried out after people with mental disabilities have completed the psychiatric rehabilitation process. Those with less severe mental health disorders and undergoing outpatient or home treatment can take part in this ATENSI program on a family and community basis carried out by community-owned rehabilitation service institutions.

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4. Digital Therapy in Rehabilitation Service for Mental Health

In the era of revolution 4.0, mental health rehabilitation service institutions should think of other innovative services. On the other hand, in the COVID-19 pandemic situation when many meetings are limited and people's access to institutions is also difficult, then one of the services that deserve to be developed is digital therapy. Digital therapy can be a solution that therapy can still be done even though the client and therapist do not meet in person because the distance is far or close but difficult to do. Today's digital therapy is considered a more practical breakthrough because anyone who needs it can access it, as long as they use digital devices ([Kilbride et al., 2021](#); [Wilhelm et al., 2020](#)). Another illustration of the conditions of this new era, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic situation that has been going on for more than a year, is the phenomenon of the use of gadgets, smartphones, the internet, and so on, which has changed very significantly, on the one hand, the use of gadgets if not supervised properly. goodwill causes bad effects, including content that can no longer be dammed. On the other hand, the closeness of everyone with the use of gadgets,

smartphones, and the internet can be a way to provide services through the use of these digital media. Many problems caused by cyberspace, are approached and resolved also through cyberspace.

Social work is a profession that is concerned with mental health issues related to the ability to function socially. Social workers work hand in hand with the main professions in the mental health world (such as psychiatrists, psychologists, and nurses), developing ideas for solutions to various issues that can interfere with the mental health of individuals, families, and communities. The social work profession also faces challenges in line with the 4.0 industrial revolution that demands the use of technology in service practices. Consequently, social workers must have competence in the use of digital technology and have digital literacy skills (the term gasket must be abandoned if we do not want to be left behind and cannot take part). The competencies possessed are not only how to use digital technology but also other skills in the process of providing information and communicating. Because this technology changes the relationship that was previously face-to-face into a digital relationship, of course, it will bring some adjustments that must be made. Social work professionals begin to explore the interface between and integration of social work practice and technology (Coe & Menon, 2008). This digital therapy service can be an effective front line to prevent or overcome mental problems.

Digital therapy is part of digital technology whose operating system runs automatically using a computerized system. Digital therapy is the use of software, mobile applications, wearables, and other digital techniques as therapeutic interventions to treat various medical, and psychosocial disorders. Collectively these devices and techniques are known as digital therapy. The application of digital technology in therapy services requires the use of gadgets as well as computers, laptops, and other digital equipment as well as the internet or social media. Digital Therapy is the best choice when face-to-face conventional therapy services are not possible or are chosen because of a breakthrough that benefits those in need. This digital therapy is carried out by professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals relevant to mental health problems. However, mental health practitioners can also develop digital therapy when they have experience in dealing with mental health disorders and mastery of digital technology (Holm-Hadulla & Koutsoukou-Argyraki, 2015; Zhai & Du, 2020). Digital therapy during the COVID-19 period can be a reliable solution in building community mental health because clients do not need to come to the therapist and consult conventionally face-to-face. Some people call digital therapy digital psychotherapy because it deals with psychosocial issues. "Digital psychotherapy presents an excellent opportunity for the treatment of patients experiencing mood and anxiety disorders". With a rapidly established evidence base to support it, digital psychotherapy has been accepted as an effective and practical way to provide mental healthcare to patients. There are several forms of media applications that can be used to organize digital therapy, including:

- Chat messages (currently there are various application options, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Line, and so on);
- Audio sending (e.g. Voice Note);
- Communication by telephone (conventional telephone, telephone with certain applications);
- Communication via web camera (such as video call, zoom meeting, google meeting, and so on).

In the era of revolution 4.0 where everything focuses on digitalization and IoT, it is time for psychosocial rehabilitation and mental health services to also follow developments. People's access to the internet and social media is very high. In Indonesia, cellular phone ownership reaches 84% of the total population. The use of smartphones in rural areas has reached more than 50, 39% of the total rural community. Other survey results show that people in the 20-29 year age group have the highest smartphone penetration rate (75.95%). A study conducted by the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kemkominfo) found that 98% of children and adolescents know about the internet and 79.5% of them are internet users. The Association of Internet Service Providers (APII) has the most internet users in the age range of 15-19 years, and the second range is the age of 20-24 years. The results of various research reports, studies, and mentoring, show that internet media can be a medium with multiple accesses. This condition can be used to develop therapeutic services through the use of digital media. Some of the reasons why therapy through digital media can be the right choice in rehabilitation services by mental health institutions in the current situation in Indonesia, and also in the global society in general, are empirical conditions as follows:

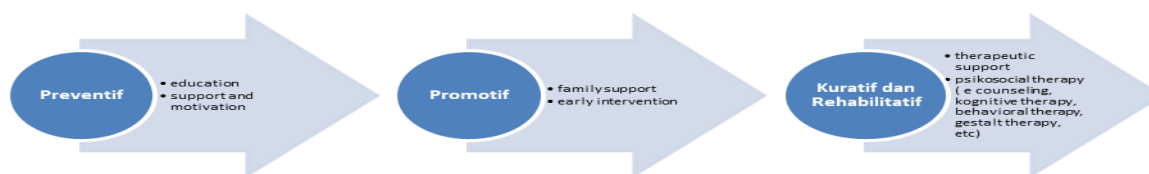
- People who feel embarrassed to talk or consult about mental health can access this service easily and freely, not being hampered by shame. A person does not want to go to professional services such as psychiatrists, social workers, and psychologists for various reasons. Issues that are considered very personal so they are embarrassed to go to service institutions. Stigma and judgment are also still high in mental health disorders, so a person will try to ignore his condition and even close himself off. Another thing is the awkward feeling. Digital therapy is more personal, in the sense that someone who feels awkward dealing directly with the therapist, then accessing therapy through digital media is considered safer, more comfortable, and more private.
- For people who do not understand and do not know about mental health disorders and their services, digital therapy can be a solution to easily offer the information needed. On the other hand, people who understand, but because they are busy, do not have free time to go to therapeutic services, thus ignoring the signs of mental health disorders. The result in certain cases can be fatal because in addition to hurting yourself it can also result in other people. For busy people, digital therapy can also be the right choice because of its practicality.
- Another aspect is that mental health services are considered expensive services so many do not prioritize them. Digital therapy services are generally provided free of charge, with no need to pay, so they can be accessed without having to pay a fee. Access to digital therapy as a therapeutic intervention for mental health disorders, but of course not for those with severe categories. In low-income communities, digital therapy, which is available on gadgets with a standard system, can be an option because there is no need to pay for more expensive professional services or transportation costs to reach them, which of course costs more to access services.
- This service is provided by professional and comprehensive people so that people do not need to hesitate because they will get professional service. Services are provided based on principles that are firmly held by professionals, including the principles of acceptance and confidentiality. Anyone can access this service, without worrying about the secret of the problem.
- Client confidentiality will be maintained professionally. One example of the use of digital therapy by professionals, for example, the use of Instagram media by a psychiatrist who every day posts motivational sentences to strengthen mental health for those who happen to have problems. Or posts related to tips or light therapies in dealing with stress.
- The practicality of digital therapy is that it is flexible, at any time according to the wishes or needs of the users. There is no specific practice time, so whenever the community needs it, it will always be well served. Digital therapy can also be an option because of its practicality, therefore at the beginning, it was also aimed at young people because psychiatric treatment and services were not very attractive to young people. Digital therapy is a service that is personal and practical, that is, it can be directly accessed when someone needs it and does not need to go to therapy services.
- Increase access to services that are hampered due to distance, disability, or the severity of the client's condition. Services can still be provided even though they are not facing to face. Thus also increasing the fast response of the service with the ease of monitoring the client's condition in real-time. Improve access to services when faced with changing client schedules. Provide more cost-effective services.
- Facilitate communication economical and efficient service. Talking about institutional services, it will usually be related to the limited human resources for implementing services and the limited budget. Digital therapy can be a solution for both problems. Digital therapy services can cut the cost of institutions to conduct home visits. Also, digitally programmed therapies only require one therapist or counselor to respond to clients who access the therapy.

5. Digital Therapy: Opportunity and Challenges

The practice of social work using digital media has been known for a long time. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2015), Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and Clinical Social Work Association (CSWA), have formulated standards for the use of technology in social work practice. 4 (four) major points emphasized that the use of electronic technology in social work practices is aimed at:

- Provide information to the public
- Design and deliver services
- Gather, manage, store and access information about clients
- Educate and supervise social workers

Referring to the 4 standards mentioned above, it appears that the use of digital media is used to provide information to the public which is education as part of the prevention program. Digital media is also for services and service processes, starting from the intake process, assessment, plan of intervention, intervention, and termination. This digital therapy service is an important breakthrough that can be done by rehabilitation institutions in the mental health sector, both owned by the government and the community. The service continuum can span preventive, promotive, curative, and rehabilitative purposes.



Picture 1. Continuum of rehabilitation in mental health

Therapy services using digital media are almost the same as direct services with therapists, except that clients are dealing with digital media as an intervention communication medium. This digital therapy service combines technological sophistication and human resources who understand IT so that it can create various intervention systems that can be used in various fields. The domains touched may include cognitive, affective, or behavioral areas, although some references primarily target cognitive and behavioral areas. Most digital therapy practices rely on the cognitive behavioral therapy method. It focuses on the idea of improving the patient's behavioral and lifestyle patterns through regular guidance (Weightman, 2020).

Rehabilitation services carried out by government mental health institutions have implementation guidelines that regulate the changes that must be achieved after the completion of the rehabilitation process (Stevens & Stoykov, 2003; Katz et al., 1999). So usually the three domains are targeted, namely changes in the cognitive aspect, the affective aspect, and the behavioral aspect. Service institutions carried out by the dominant community see changes in the behavioral aspect, namely the existence of adaptive behavior. The following touches on various areas that can be done with digital therapy media:

Cognitive touch can be in the form of sharing information and services:

- Tips for identifying negative thoughts;
- Tips to get rid of negative thoughts or dispute irrational beliefs;
- Guidelines for thought stopping;
- Guidelines for doing cognitive therapy, for example, reality therapy;
- E-counseling service.

A touch on the behavioral field can be in the form of education:

- Tips for eliminating maladaptive behavior;
- Tips for improving adaptive behavior;
- Guide to self-care;
- Reminders to do something or not to do something (eg reminder to take medication, a reminder to exercise, a reminder to chat with people around or reminder to pray, and so on).

Touch on the affective plane

- Ways to do catharsis

- Guide to self-talk
- Guide to relaxation

Seeing the many benefits that digital therapy can provide, therefore, there is no longer any reason for families or members of the wider community to be "lazy" in maintaining their mental health. These alternative services need to be developed throughout the archipelago and even throughout the world so that many citizens will be helped early in building their mental health. On the other hand, it minimizes individuals whose rights are violated and difficulties in receiving mental health services. There will be no more abandoned people, no more ODGJs in shackles. No more children who take shortcuts to commit suicide because they are not covered by services. Community members whose family members have mental disorders will be able to provide appropriate treatment, and as early as possible so that the person concerned has the opportunity to recover faster.

E-counseling is a new way to communicate quickly and effectively via the internet. E-counseling is one of the breakthroughs in helping counselors to solve problems remotely without meeting face-to-face with the counselor. E-counseling is a manifestation of a combination of advances in science about counseling guidance services and mastery of technology. E-counseling is often referred to as e-therapy, online therapy, and cyber counseling. E counseling is a therapeutic process that includes writing in addition to face-to-face meetings with counselors. The response or assistance provided by the counselor depends on the information provided. The counselee does not need to send his entire life story, simply by selecting the information that is felt in the situation that is a problem. E-counseling will be increasingly needed today, when many people are experiencing psychological and economic pressure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, on the other hand, access to services is very limited due to social restrictions and health protocols (Hadi, 2020). Mental health issues continue to roll, loneliness, violence, stress, and depression are also other issues as a result of limiting activities outside the home. Some cases that arise such as the demand for online chat in Germany continues to increase during the pandemic.

What is the quality of digital therapy in the form of e-counseling? At least, there are two reviews about the quality of the methodology of e-therapy that helps mental health problems found in 14 studies, although not very convincing but e-therapy plays a role in the field (Kraus et al., 2010). Research on e-counseling has been carried out in 92 studies which have been reported in 64 papers, that online counseling has helped around 9764 clients (Kraus et al., 2010). This of course has grown a lot in the current era of digitalization. Research published in the Journal of Affective Disorders, in 2014, far from before the current COVID-19 pandemic, shows that the results of online therapy do not differ much from conventional face-to-face therapy. The results of the study broke the doubts of many who questioned the effectiveness of online therapy.

In the implementation of digital therapy, certain knowledge and skills are needed which of course must be possessed by the therapist, in addition to basic knowledge and skills. This is a challenge in itself. What is needed?

- If digital therapy is in the form of an online telephone, then a therapist who provides services must have good hearing;
- Communication and language skills. This is different from face-to-face services, because the therapist (helper) does not deal directly with the client, so he cannot see how the client is speaking and expressing himself. For this reason, clear and understandable pronunciation, as well as a wealth of language are needed to make the client comfortable and understandable. Moreover, if the client is a child, teenager, or early adult, which often has its richness of language;
- If digital therapy is in the form of certain social media, knowledge, and skills in using applications of various types of social media, each of which has a different character. In addition, in this case, the ability to understand the expression of feelings and emotions is needed with the icons provided in each application. The wrong use of emojis can lead to misunderstandings;
- The instructions are easy to understand and follow to do so that the goals of therapy are achieved. The most important thing is that digital therapy must be easy to use, for example, the instructions are clear and easy to understand. Because if it is convoluted or considered difficult, people tend not to try and use it;
- To target the wider community, use a system that can be used in simple mobile apps. Many people are

not very familiar with the use of gadgets, they only use gadgets to make calls and WA, for example. Therefore, the simplicity of the tool or system used is important because it can target lower-class people who are often untouched by services;

- It is clear for what problem the therapy is used, its criteria or characteristics. Characteristics of general and specific symptoms need to be displayed so that people who use it are not wrong or even become malpractice;
- If it is paid, it must be explained from the beginning and it is clear how much the payment is and how to pay it. This misunderstanding in the payment process will cause delays in the therapy process;
- There is a risk in the use of technology that must be watched out for, for example, cybercrime, therefore it must pay attention to how the service is kept confidential. There is a possibility of technology access failure and service interruption. The high price of technology should also be watched out for. Risk of inability to access technology, limited computer knowledge, cyberbullying, electronic identity theft, and compulsive behavior regarding technology use;
- Digital services are also inseparable from ethics. Whatever profession that provides services, of course, must adhere to ethics in providing services. For example, the social work profession has standards for the use of technology in social work practices that have been agreed upon by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and Clinical Social Work Association (ASWB). CSWA). (Reamer, 2015, 2018).

6. Conclusion

Adjustment is the right word to describe social rehabilitation services for mental health in Indonesia today, especially during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Services must still be carried out properly and the form of services adjusted. The use of digital therapy can be an important solution in mental health services in Indonesia and throughout the country. Various obstacles encountered in direct face-to-face services, as well as crucial issues such as high costs, stigma, the difficulty of access, and long distances, become obstacles for someone to access mental health services. However, it needs to be designed seriously, such as ease of access, the practicality of use, confidentiality, and effectiveness of the services provided. Therefore, social work professional organizations must make rules or standards on how to use digital therapy media properly. Because in the future digital services may be more prominent and needed in line with changes that occur in human life and technological developments. Institution-based social rehabilitation services that are now carried out by the government and community-owned social rehabilitation centers do not mean they are no longer needed, but they can become innovative service providers with the sophistication of digital technology, designing programs to reach more and wider people who need mental health services.

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