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Letter to the editor

Addressing the mental health implications of ChatGPT dependency: The need for comprehensive policy development

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into our daily lives prompts an urgent dialogue on its mental health implications. Among the speculative concerns is the concept of ChatGPT-Dependency Disorder (CDD), a term proposed to describe a condition where individuals become excessively dependent on ChatGPT for social interaction, decision-making, and emotional support. It is important to clarify that CDD is not currently recognized by established mental health organizations such as the American Psychiatric Association or the World Health Organization. Instead, it is introduced here as a hypothetical condition to illustrate the potential for AI technologies to impact mental health significantly. Such dependence, if it were to occur, could potentially lead to a range of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, social isolation, and diminished real-life social skills (Kalam et al., 2024).

As we navigate this digital age, scrutinizing the intersection of AI use and mental well-being within our community is critical. Mardikaningsih et al. (2023) have issued a stark warning about the potential dangers of relying on AI for mental health support without professional assistance. They highlight that patients may receive incorrect or potentially harmful guidance and caution that the use of AI could be particularly risky in cases of severe mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, which can increase the risk of suicide attempts. This urgency underscores the need to develop informed mental health policies to address these emerging challenges. Unfortunately, existing research into the mental health implications of AI and ChatGPT remains limited. In the rush to embrace the vast potential of these technologies, the academic and research communities have, perhaps inadvertently, prioritized studies focused on exploring AI capabilities rather than first thoroughly investigating their psychological impacts (Ahmad et al., 2024; Garcia, 2023; Iyengar and Upadhyay, 2024). While there is undeniable value in maximizing the benefits of ChatGPT and AI tools, it is equally important to understand and mitigate any adverse effects these technologies may have on mental health. This enthusiasm for exploring the utility of AI and ChatGPT has outpaced a crucially needed foundation of evidence regarding their effects on mental health. We are at a critical juncture where the absence of robust mental health policies regarding AI usage risks exacerbating mental health issues within our communities. Therefore, I strongly advocate for the following policy-driven actions:

- **AI Ethical Design Principles:** Promote the adoption of ethical design principles in AI development that specifically consider mental health impacts. This could involve guidelines that minimize addictive features in technology, promote meaningful human interactions, and ensure AI systems are transparent and accountable.
- **Development of Regulatory Frameworks:** There is an urgent need for the creation of regulatory frameworks that guide the ethical development and deployment of AI technologies like ChatGPT. These frameworks should prioritize the protection of mental health and well-being, ensuring that technologies are designed with user safety and psychological impacts in mind.
- **Institutional Policies for Responsible Use:** Educational, workplace, and healthcare settings should implement policies to govern the responsible use of AI. These policies must encourage balanced engagement with AI technologies, promoting digital well-being and providing guidelines to prevent dependency and overreliance.
- **National Mental Health Strategy Inclusion:** The inclusion of digital and AI-related mental health concerns in national mental health strategies is paramount. This initiative would ensure that issues of AI dependency are recognized as significant mental health concerns, warranting public health interventions, awareness campaigns, and resource allocation for research and support services.
- **International Collaboration for Global Standards:** Given the global nature of AI technologies, there is a pressing need for international collaboration to develop global standards and policies. These efforts should aim to address the mental health impacts of AI and foster a unified approach to mitigate risks and promote healthy digital ecosystems.

As we move forward with these foundational policies, it is crucial to recognize that the landscape of AI technology is perpetually evolving, as are the social contexts in which these technologies operate. This dynamic nature of AI calls for not only initial policy frameworks but also a sustained commitment to revisiting and refining these strategies. Such adaptability can be achieved through active engagement with the community, ongoing monitoring of AI's impact on mental health, and incorporating feedback from a diverse range of stakeholders. Moreover, as we deploy these initial measures, the importance of establishing robust mechanisms for evaluating their effectiveness becomes paramount. These mechanisms must be capable of capturing real-time data and insights, allowing policymakers to make informed adjustments that respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. This proactive approach ensures that our strategies remain effective and relevant, safeguarding the mental health of individuals as they interact with advanced technologies in an increasingly digital world. To further support these efforts, I also strongly advocate for the following policy-driven actions:

- **Regular Policy Review Cycles:** Implement predefined cycles for reviewing and updating AI policies and regulations, ensuring they remain current with technological advancements and emerging

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mental health research. These reviews should be scheduled at regular intervals, such as every two years, and include public consultation phases.

- **Stakeholder Feedback Mechanisms:** Develop and maintain active feedback loops with users, mental health professionals, ethicists, and technologists. These mechanisms could include surveys, focus groups, and public forums that allow stakeholders to express their experiences and concerns regarding AI's impact on mental health. This feedback should directly inform policy reviews and updates.
- **Regular Audits of AI Technology and Policy Impact:** Implement scheduled audits of AI systems and associated policies to assess their effectiveness and impact on mental health. These audits should involve analyses of usage patterns, user feedback, and potential psychological effects. Audits could be conducted by independent bodies to ensure impartiality and thoroughness.
- **Public Awareness and Education Campaigns:** Launch initiatives aimed at educating the public about the potential mental health risks and responsible usage of AI technologies. These campaigns could utilize various media platforms to reach diverse demographics and promote digital literacy and resilience.
- **Community-Based Support Systems:** Work towards establishing community-based support systems and services that can provide direct assistance and counseling to individuals facing mental health issues due to AI dependency. This could also include peer support groups facilitated through digital platforms.

The evolution of AI technologies, exemplified by ChatGPT, signifies a transformative shift in our interactions with information and each other. This shift necessitates that our policies and mental health interventions adapt to protect the psychological well-being of individuals in this digital age. It is imperative that not only the psychiatric community but also policymakers, technologists, ethicists, and indeed, the broader society, engage actively in leading the development of comprehensive policies that confront these challenges directly. Encouraging collaboration across these diverse sectors is crucial. By fostering an environment of proactive policy development and implementation, we can collectively ensure that our engagement with AI not only supports but also enhances our mental health, rather than detracting from it. Together, we can harness the positive potential of AI, ensuring it serves as a tool for improving mental health outcomes and the overall quality of life for people around the globe.

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