A New Era for Psychological Assessment

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Abstract:

In Portugal, the prevalence of mental disorders increased since 2003. At the same time, structural barriers to mental health care have been increasing since 2008 in our country, which prevents people from accessing specialized services. Portugal is failing to achieve WHO's recommendations that depart from the assumption that, in a democratic society, access to mental health care must be for all.

Digital health services (e-mental health) are already a reality in countries like Norway and UK to complement existing solutions - with research showing their effectiveness. Thus, e-mental health services hold the promise to improve our healthcare system. Still, several challenges exist to assure a sustainable development on this topic.

1# challenge - the development of appropriate tools for psychological assessment. Every time a new psychological assessment tool is developed, we need to adapt it and collect normative data. This data helps professionals to compare someone's mental status to that of the population that represents the individual. Currently, the lack of normative data in Portuguese-translated instruments can increase diagnostic errors and block access to treatment.

A #2 challenge comes from the evidence that current diagnostics in psychology do not represent the complexity of mental health – which we do need to apprehend for conducting effective diagnostics. For example, many diagnoses, such as anxiety and depression, often co-occur – which calls into question if they are completely independent categories, as initially preconized. There are also disorders whose placement is unclear (e.g., mania, borderline). All these issues, among others, seem to be rooted in the fact that diagnostic

systems were scarcely informed by research, which also lead to random cut-off criteria. An individual can be diagnosed with major depression if he/she meets the 5 minimum criteria (DSM-5), but another individual with 4 criteria don't – even if this last individual shows a more severe expression of the pathology.

The Hierarchical Taxonomy of Psychopathology (HiTOP) is the product of a large international consortium who aimed to build a diagnostic-classification system based on research. Using large, multicentric datasets HiTOP workgroups resorted to complex structural statistical models to identify key mental health dimensions. The HiTOP Self-Report measure (HiTOP:SR) - a comprehensive psychological assessment tool– is the last product of this effort, being the most complete method to assess the full range of mental disorders we have at the moment for free.

Taking advantage from HiTOP:SR, this project aims to place Portugal and Lusófona in the vanguard, inaugurating a new era for psychological assessment FOR.ALL.

Partners: