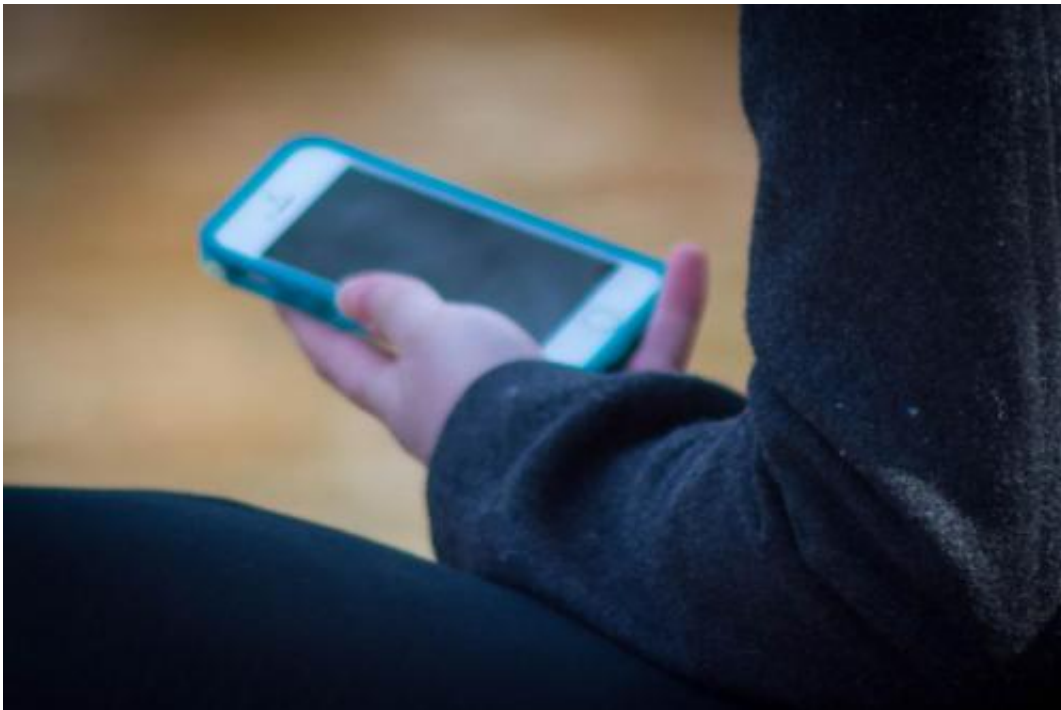


Study finds texting may be more suitable than apps in treatment of mental illness

January 29 2015, by Brian M. Mullen



Texting may be a more suitable treatment aid for those with mental illness than mobile applications. Credit: Ken Scar, Clemson University

Texting may be a more suitable treatment aid for those with mental illness than mobile applications.

This is the key finding of a new study led by researchers from Clemson University in collaboration with researchers from Indiana University and

the Centerstone Research Institute. The study was published in the journal *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the prevalence of [mental illness](#) is growing and 62 percent of those suffering do not receive [treatment](#) for their illnesses.

While there has been much research from the technology community regarding health monitoring and care delivery applications for older adults, [chronic disease management](#) and preventive health, there have been fewer investigations of ways that readily available technologies can be used to assist in the treatment of [mental health disorders](#).

"Cell phone technology is in the hands of millions of Americans and early research indicates that this technology can be useful to help Americans who are suffering from some form of mental illness," said Kelly Caine, assistant professor in Clemson's School of Computing.

Caine and her colleagues surveyed 325 patients currently receiving treatment at community-based outpatient clinics for mental illness to determine their [cell phone](#) ownership and usage patterns.

The results showed that cell phone ownership among these mental health patients was comparable with ownership among a nationally representative, non-patient sample, with the exception that more patients than non-patients shared their mobile phones.

"Among mental health patients, we found that texting was the most popular feature used and downloading apps was the least popular," she said. "The patients often shared phones, which makes providing private, secure messages difficult."

Almost 80 percent of the patients surveyed used texting and many did

not use [mobile applications](#), meaning that texting may be accessible to the majority of patients and may therefore make a more suitable treatment aid.

Furthermore, participants who already were comfortable with texting also reported that they were comfortable with the concept of texting their [mental health](#) provider, implying that texting may be an appropriate feature for mobile health (mHealth) interventions.

"By utilizing a technology that is readily available and familiar to so many Americans, we see huge potential to improve treatment outcomes and provide patients who currently have only limited access to treatment additional treatment options," said Caine.

In the paper, the researches write the cell phones and other mHealth technologies that are designed considering the ownership, usage patterns and needs of patients have the potential to be successful treatment aids.

"When designed from a patient-centered perspective, such as understanding cell phone sharing habits, these technologies have the potential to be useful and usable to the largest number of [patients](#)," Caine said.

Future research will investigate mobile security needs and explore the types of treatment aids that texting can offer.

Provided by Clemson University

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