

Digital intervention reduces depressive symptoms in people living with HIV

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Dr. Alicia Hong. Credit: George Mason University

Globally more than 36 million people are living with HIV (PLWH), and a third of them have elevated depressive symptoms. Most PLWH live in developing countries with limited access to mental health services due to HIV-related stigma and a shortage of mental health professionals. Widely accessible smart phones offer a promising intervention delivery mode to address this gap.

Dr. Alicia Hong, Professor at George Mason University's College of Health and Human Services and her colleagues in China developed the digital [intervention](#) Run4Love on the popular social media app WeChat. They evaluated Run4Love with a [randomized controlled trial](#) (RCT) of 300 PLWH with depression in China, published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.

Run4Love was a multimedia digital program adapted from evidence-based Cognitive Behavioral Stress Management courses. Participants received stress reduction exercises, cognitive therapy, and exercise guidance on WeChat. Their progress was monitored with timely, tailored feedback. The intervention led to a significant reduction in [depressive symptoms](#) (0.6 effect size) in 3-, 6- and 9-month follow-ups and reduced stress, suicidal behaviors, and improved quality of life.

"This is one of the first large RCTs with long-term follow-up to evaluate digital interventions in global health settings." Hong explains, "The success of Run4Love suggests an app-based digital intervention is feasible for many PLWH in resource-limited settings."

More information: Yan Guo et al, Effect of a WeChat-Based Intervention (Run4Love) on Depressive Symptoms Among People Living With HIV in China: A Randomized Controlled Trial, *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.2196/16715](https://doi.org/10.2196/16715)

Provided by George Mason University

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