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MENTAL HEALTH

IN THE DIGITAL AGE: GLOBAL TRENDS, RISK FACTORS, AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

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SALUD MENTAL EN LA ERA DIGITAL: TENDENCIAS GLOBALES, FACTORES DE RIESGO Y ESTRATEGIAS DE INTERVENCIÓN

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ABSTRACT

The article presents a study with a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach, based on a systematic review of scientific literature on the relationship between digital technology and mental health. To this end, academic articles, reviews, and meta-analyses published between 2015 and 2026 were collected from recognized databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science, prioritizing updated sources with scientific rigor. Studies addressing variables such as social media, artificial intelligence, digital interventions, and risk factors across different population groups (children, adolescents, adults, and older adults) were included, while non-academic or redundant sources were excluded. The information was analyzed through thematic categorization, organized into three main axes: global trends, risk factors, and intervention strategies, allowing the integration of findings from an interdisciplinary approach combining psychology, public health, and technology. Regarding the results, digital technology is shown to have an ambivalent impact on mental health. On one hand, it improves access to information and services, fosters support for communities, and enables more accessible, personalized, and continuous interventions. On the other hand, excessive use is associated with problems such as anxiety, depression, and stress, particularly due to the influence of social media, social comparison, cyberbullying, and digital dependency. Negative effects on habits such as sleep and interpersonal relationships are also identified. The results highlight that the impact varies depending on factors such as age and context, with young people being more vulnerable but also the primary beneficiaries of well-designed digital interventions.

Keywords:

Mental health, digital technology, social media, anxiety, depression, psychological well-being.

RESUMEN

El artículo presenta un estudio con enfoque cualitativo, descriptivo y analítico, basado en una revisión sistemática de literatura científica sobre la relación entre tecnología digital y salud mental. Para ello, se recopilaron artículos académicos, revisiones y metaanálisis publicados entre 2015 y 2026 en bases de datos reconocidas como PubMed, Scopus y Web of Science, priorizando fuentes actualizadas y con rigor científico. Se incluyeron investigaciones que abordaran variables como redes sociales, inteligencia artificial, intervenciones digitales y factores de riesgo en distintos grupos poblacionales (niños, adolescentes, adultos y adultos mayores), excluyendo fuentes no académicas o redundantes. La información se analizó mediante categorización temática, organizándose en tres ejes principales: tendencias globales, factores de riesgo y estrategias de intervención, lo que permitió integrar hallazgos desde un enfoque interdisciplinario que combina psicología, salud pública y tecnología. En cuanto a los resultados, se evidencia que la tecnología digital tiene un impacto ambivalente en la salud mental. Por un lado, mejora el acceso a información y servicios, fomenta comunidades de apoyo y permite intervenciones más accesibles, personalizadas y continuas. Por otro lado, su uso excesivo se asocia con problemas como ansiedad, depresión y estrés, especialmente por la influencia de las redes sociales, la comparación social, el ciberacoso y la dependencia digital. También se identifican efectos negativos en hábitos como el sueño y las relaciones interpersonales. Los resultados destacan que el impacto varía según factores como edad y contexto, siendo los jóvenes más vulnerables, pero también los más beneficiados por intervenciones digitales bien diseñadas.

Palabras clave:

salud mental, tecnología digital, redes sociales, ansiedad, depresión, bienestar psicológico.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the rapid development of digital technology has profoundly transformed the way people interact, communicate, and experience their daily lives. The expansion of internet access, the widespread use of smartphones, and the growing popularity of digital platforms have created an environment characterized by constant connectivity. This phenomenon, known as the digital age, has significantly influenced multiple dimensions of human well-being, among which mental health occupies a central role. According to Bauman and Rivers (2015), the integration of technology into daily life has generated new forms of social interaction and identity construction, implying both opportunities and challenges for psychological balance.

The impact of technology on mental health is complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, digital tools have enabled important advances in access to psychological care services. Digital mental health interventions, including mobile applications, online therapies, virtual support platforms, chatbots, and wearable devices, have significantly expanded access to care, especially in contexts where traditional services are limited or inaccessible. These solutions allow for continuous monitoring, greater personalization of treatment, and a reduction in geographical and economic barriers (Löchner et al., 2025). They also help reduce the stigma associated with seeking psychological help by offering more discreet and accessible alternatives.

However, intensive and, in some cases, problematic use of digital technology has also been linked to negative effects on mental health. Social media has been widely studied due to its influence on self-perception and interpersonal relationships. Constant exposure to idealized content, social comparison, the need for validation through "likes" and comments, as well as cyberbullying, are factors that can generate or intensify symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress. The World Health Organization (2024) warns that adolescents represent one of the most vulnerable groups, as their emotional and social development coincides with a stage of high exposure to digital environments.

Furthermore, the hyperconnectivity characteristic of the digital age can affect other fundamental aspects of well-being, such as sleep, concentration, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Excessive use of electronic devices before bedtime, for example, has been associated with disruptions in sleep patterns, which in turn negatively impact mental health. Similarly, dependence on technology may reduce face-to-face interactions, limiting the development of social skills and the establishment of meaningful relationships.

It is important to note that the impact of digital technology on mental health is not uniform, but varies depending on factors such as age, sociocultural context, and level of digital literacy. Adolescents and young adults, for instance, are the primary users of social media and digital platforms, exposing them to both benefits and risks. In this group, digital interventions have shown promising results in the prevention and treatment of mental disorders, particularly when designed to meet their specific needs (Potts et al., 2025). On the other hand, older adults may benefit from these technologies by reducing social isolation and improving access to health services, although they face challenges related to limited digital skills.

From a broader perspective, the integration of digital technologies into the field of mental health also raises important social and ethical implications. Stein and Prost (2024) point out that these tools are transforming not only the individual experience of well-being but also the organization of healthcare systems and public policies. Issues such as data privacy and security, regulation of digital platforms, quality of interventions, and equity in access are key aspects that must be addressed to ensure the responsible use of these technologies. The lack of adequate regulation may lead to additional risks, such as the spread of misinformation or misuse of sensitive data.

In response to these challenges, various strategies have been developed to promote healthy technology use and prevent mental health problems. These strategies include digital literacy education, which aims to teach individuals to use technology critically and responsibly; the promotion of healthy digital habits, such as limiting screen time; and the development of evidence-based digital interventions. Likewise, the importance of integrating interdisciplinary approaches that combine psychology, technology, and public health is emphasized to address this issue comprehensively (Coelho et al., 2025).

In this context, the present article aims to analyze the impact of digital technology on mental health at a global level, identifying current trends, associated risk factors, and differences among population groups, as well as examining prevention and intervention strategies that contribute to promoting psychological well-being in the digital age. This analysis seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon and to guide future research and public policies in this field.

In conclusion, mental health in the digital age represents a global challenge that requires urgent and coordinated attention. While technology offers innovative tools to improve access to and quality of mental health care, it also poses significant risks that must be properly managed. The balance between leveraging benefits and mitigating risks will depend on the ability of individuals, institutions, and governments to adapt to this new digital environment and promote responsible technology use in favor of psychological well-being.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was developed under a qualitative approach of a descriptive and analytical nature, based on a systematic review of relevant scientific literature on mental health in the digital age. To achieve this, an exhaustive search was conducted for academic articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and institutional reports published in recognized databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Updated sources were selected, mainly from the years 2015 to 2026, to ensure the timeliness and relevance of the information.

The inclusion criteria considered studies that addressed the impact of digital technology on mental health, including variables such as social media, artificial intelligence, digital interventions, technological devices, and associated risk factors. Likewise, research focused on different population groups, such as children, adolescents, adults, and older adults, was included to obtain a comprehensive view of the phenomenon. On the other hand, non-academic sources or those lacking scientific support were excluded, as well as studies with redundant information or limited relevance to the objectives of the article.

The analysis of the information was carried out through a thematic categorization process, identifying common patterns, emerging trends, and differences among the reviewed studies. In this way, the content was structured around three main axes: global trends in digital mental health, risk factors associated with technology use, and prevention and intervention strategies. This approach made it possible to coherently integrate the findings of multiple authors and provide a critical interpretation of the topic.

Finally, the adopted methodology is characterized by its interdisciplinary approach, integrating contributions from psychology, public health, and technology. This made it possible to analyze the issue from different perspectives, ensuring a broader and deeper understanding of the relationship between digital technology and mental health in the current context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The impact of digital technology on mental health constitutes one of the most relevant phenomena in contemporary society, due to the growing dependence on electronic devices and digital platforms in daily life. The expansion of the internet, the widespread use of smartphones, and the integration of social media have profoundly transformed the way people relate to one another, process information, and experience their emotions. In this context, mental health is influenced both positively and negatively, making a comprehensive analysis of its effects necessary.

First, it is important to recognize that digital technology has generated significant opportunities to improve psychological well-being. Access to information about mental health has expanded considerably, allowing individuals to better understand their emotions, identify symptoms, and seek help in a more informed way. Likewise, digital platforms have facilitated the creation of virtual communities where individuals can share experiences, receive emotional support, and reduce feelings of isolation. This type of interaction is especially valuable for people who face difficulties accessing traditional support networks.

In addition, the development of digital mental health interventions has represented an important advance in both clinical and preventive fields. Tools such as mobile applications, online therapies, chatbots, and wearable devices have made it possible to provide psychological care in a more accessible, flexible, and personalized way. These interventions not only reduce geographical and economic barriers, but also allow continuous monitoring of users' emotional states, facilitating early intervention in at-risk cases. According to Löchner et al. (2025), these technologies have the potential to complement traditional mental health services and expand their reach to populations that previously had limited access.

However, despite these benefits, excessive or inappropriate use of digital technology has been associated with various mental health problems. One of the main risk factors is the intensive use of social media, which can negatively affect self-esteem and perception of reality. Constant exposure to idealized images and content promotes social comparison, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and low self-esteem. This phenomenon is especially relevant among adolescents and young adults, who are at a developmental stage where identity formation and social acceptance play a fundamental role.

Similarly, the need for social validation through digital interactions, such as "likes" and comments, can generate emotional dependence and anxiety. The absence of positive feedback or the perception of rejection can significantly affect users' emotional states. In addition, cyberbullying represents a form of digital violence with serious consequences for mental health, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and even suicidal ideation. The World Health Organization (2024) warns that these risks are particularly high among adolescents, who show greater exposure to digital environments and higher emotional vulnerability.

Another relevant aspect is the impact of hyperconnectivity on lifestyle habits. Constant use of electronic devices can interfere with essential activities such as rest, physical activity, and interpersonal relationships. The use of screens before bedtime, for example, has been linked to disruptions in sleep cycles, negatively affecting mood and concentration. Furthermore, overexposure to information, known as "information overload," can generate stress and mental fatigue, making decision-making and emotional regulation more difficult.

Regarding specific disorders, anxiety, depression, and stress are the mental health problems most associated with digital technology use. Digital anxiety manifests through the constant need to check devices, fear of missing out on relevant information, and concern about online social interaction. This phenomenon, known as FOMO (fear of missing out), reflects a psychological dependence that can affect overall well-being. On the other hand, depression has been linked to prolonged and passive use of social media, especially when it replaces face-to-face interactions. Digital stress, in turn, is related to the pressure to remain constantly available, respond immediately, and manage multiple sources of information.

It is important to emphasize that the impact of digital technology on mental health is not uniform but varies according to the characteristics of different population groups. Adolescents and young adults constitute the most exposed group to digital environments, making them particularly vulnerable to its negative effects. However, they are also the group that benefits the most from digital interventions, as these are adapted to their technological habits and communication preferences. Potts et al. (2025) indicate that digital interventions aimed at young people have shown promising results in the prevention and treatment of mental disorders, especially when designed in a participatory and user-centered manner.

In contrast, adults tend to use technology in a more functional way, mainly for work and communication purposes. Nevertheless, they may also experience high levels of stress due to information overload and difficulty in setting boundaries between work and personal life. Older adults, on the other hand, represent a group with lower digital exposure but significant potential benefits. Digital technologies can help reduce social isolation, improve access to healthcare services, and promote autonomy. However, this group faces important barriers, such as limited digital skills and restricted access to technological devices.

From a broader social perspective, the integration of digital technologies into mental health raises important ethical and structural challenges. Stein and Prost (2024) highlight that these technologies are transforming not only the individual experience of well-being but also the organization of healthcare systems. Data privacy and security, the quality of interventions, and equity in access are fundamental aspects that must be considered. The lack of adequate regulation may lead to additional risks, such as misuse of personal information or the dissemination of non-evidence-based interventions.

Given this scenario, it is essential to develop strategies that maximize the benefits of digital technology while minimizing its risks. One of the main strategies is the promotion of digital literacy, which involves teaching individuals to use technology in a critical, conscious, and responsible manner. This includes the ability to manage screen time, identify harmful content, and protect online privacy. Likewise, it is important to promote healthy digital habits, such as setting limits on device use, ensuring adequate rest, and prioritizing face-to-face interactions.

Another key strategy is the development and implementation of evidence-based digital interventions. These tools must be designed considering users' specific needs and must be rigorously evaluated to ensure their effectiveness and safety. According to Coelho et al. (2025), the integration of technologies such as chatbots, artificial intelligence, and wearable devices can significantly improve early detection and treatment of mental health problems, provided they are used ethically and responsibly.

Finally, it is necessary to strengthen public policies and regulatory frameworks that guide the use of digital technology in mental health. This includes establishing regulations that protect personal data, regulate digital content, and promote equitable access to mental health services. It also requires interdisciplinary collaboration among healthcare professionals, technology developers, and policymakers to comprehensively address the challenges of the digital age.

The relationship between digital technology and mental health is complex and dynamic, characterized by a constant interaction between benefits and risks. While digital tools offer unprecedented opportunities to improve access to and quality of mental health care, they also pose significant challenges that must be addressed critically and responsibly. Understanding these processes is essential for developing effective strategies that promote psychological well-being in an increasingly digitalized world.

Different authors such as Naslund et al. (2019) highlight that digital innovations represent a key opportunity to transform mental health at a global level, especially in contexts where resources are limited. In this regard, the authors emphasize the role of data science, task sharing, and early intervention as fundamental pillars to improve care. Furthermore, they point out that digital technologies make it possible to identify risk patterns and provide faster and more personalized responses; however, they also warn that their implementation requires adequate infrastructure and training. Therefore, their contribution lies in proposing a comprehensive approach that combines technology, equitable access, and preventive strategies.

On the other hand, Fernández-Batanero et al. (2025) analyze the effectiveness of digital interventions in children and adolescents, concluding that these tools can significantly improve emotional well-being when properly designed. In particular, the authors highlight that digital programs can promote skills such as emotional self-regulation and resilience. Likewise, they emphasize that active user participation and adaptation to their needs are key factors for the success of these interventions. Consequently, their main contribution lies in demonstrating

the importance of developing tools specifically tailored for young populations.

In contrast, Balcombe and De Leo (2021) address the challenges faced by digital mental health, noting that although there have been significant advances, issues related to privacy, quality of interventions, and accessibility persist. In addition, the authors warn that many applications lack scientific backing, which may affect their effectiveness and credibility. Therefore, they propose the need to establish more rigorous standards and clear regulatory frameworks. In this way, their contribution focuses on offering a critical perspective on current limitations and potential future solutions.

Similarly, Al Khatib et al. (2026) highlights the role of the Internet of Things (IoT) and other digital technologies in improving mental health care. In particular, the authors explain that smart devices can monitor variables such as sleep, physical activity, and emotional state in real time, allowing for more precise and timely interventions. Moreover, they point out that these innovations facilitate continuous and personalized care. However, they also emphasize the importance of ensuring data security. Consequently, their contribution lies in demonstrating how technology can be integrated into everyday mental health care.

Likewise, Zainal et al. (2026) provides evidence on the factors that influence user engagement in digital mental health interventions. Based on a meta-analysis of multiple studies, the authors conclude that variables such as motivation, ease of use, and personalized support are key determinants of user engagement. In addition, they highlight that more interactive interventions tend to be more effective. Therefore, their contribution is essential for understanding how to design digital tools that are truly used and effective.

For their part, Ophir and Rosenberg (2026) analyze the technological revolution in mental health, highlighting both its opportunities and challenges. In this sense, the authors point out that technology can improve access and efficiency of services, but it can also generate inequalities and ethical risks. They also propose practical recommendations for the responsible use of these tools. Consequently, their contribution focuses on offering a balanced perspective that integrates innovation and responsibility.

Regarding adolescents, Odgers and Jensen (2020) question some generalized negative perceptions about the impact of technology, arguing that not all effects are harmful. In fact, the authors indicate that the impact depends on the type of use and the individual context. In addition, they highlight the need for more precise research that avoids generalizations. Therefore, their contribution is important in promoting a more nuanced and evidence-based analysis.

On the other hand, Abrams (2022) addresses the mental health crisis among university students, noting that the demand for services has increased considerably in recent years. In this context, it is highlighted that educational institutions are adopting more comprehensive approaches that include the use of digital tools. Likewise, the importance of creating environments that promote well-being is emphasized. Consequently, their contribution focuses on demonstrating the magnitude of the problem and the need for institutional responses.

Regarding ethical aspects, Hall et al. (2024) conducts a retrospective analysis of the legal and ethical challenges in digital mental health interventions. They highlight issues related to privacy, informed consent, and regulation. In addition, they note that these challenges have evolved over time, requiring constant updates of regulations. Therefore, their contribution lies in emphasizing the importance of a solid ethical framework.

Similarly, Armaou (2024) analyzes research trends in the acceptability of digital interventions, noting that user perception is a key factor for their implementation. In addition, the study highlights that trust, ease of use, and cultural relevance influence acceptance. Consequently, their contribution consists of emphasizing the importance of considering user experience in the design of these tools.

On the other hand, Torous et al. (2025) examine the current state of digital mental health, highlighting the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality. In this sense, the authors point out that these tools have great potential but also face challenges in their implementation. In addition, they emphasize the need for solid scientific evidence. Therefore, their contribution lies in providing an updated overview of the field.

In the same line, Poudel et al. (2025) analyze advances in artificial intelligence in psychiatry, highlighting its capacity to improve diagnosis and treatment. However, they also point out ethical concerns such as transparency and accountability. Consequently, their contribution lies in balancing technological benefits with their ethical implications.

Likewise, Olawade et al. (2024) highlight current trends in the use of artificial intelligence in mental health, noting its potential to personalize treatments and improve service efficiency. In addition, they emphasize the importance of ongoing research to optimize its use. Therefore, their contribution focuses on highlighting the promising future of these technologies.

On the other hand, Magomedova and Fatima (2025) provide a comprehensive review of mental health in the modern era, highlighting the multiple factors that influence psychological well-being. In this sense, they point out that technology is only one of many elements that must be considered. Likewise, they propose multidimensional intervention strategies. Consequently, their contribution lies in offering a broad and integrative perspective.

Regarding social media, Keles et al. (2020) concludes that there is a significant association between its use and problems such as depression and anxiety in adolescents. However, they also point out that results vary depending on the type of use. Therefore, their contribution is key to understanding the associated risks.

Finally, Chen et al. (2024) analyzes the impact of digital technologies on children and adolescents, highlighting that these can be effective in promoting mental health when used appropriately. In addition, they emphasize the importance of evidence-based interventions. Consequently, their contribution reinforces the idea that technology can be both a risk factor and a solution.

The main contributions of the analyzed authors allow for a comprehensive understanding of the role of digital technology in mental health from multiple perspectives, encompassing both its benefits and risks, as well as the future challenges it presents. Overall, these studies agree that digitalization has profoundly transformed the way mental health is prevented, diagnosed, and treated, while also introducing new social dynamics that influence psychological well-being.

First, it is recognized that digital technologies have significantly expanded access to mental health services, especially in contexts where resources are limited. Digital tools enable more flexible, continuous, and personalized care, facilitating early intervention and ongoing monitoring of users. In addition, these innovations have helped reduce barriers such as geographic distance, costs, and the stigma associated with seeking help, representing an important step toward the democratization of mental health care.

Furthermore, the authors highlight the potential of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, smart devices, and digital platforms to improve diagnostic accuracy and treatment effectiveness. These tools allow the analysis of large volumes of data, the identification of behavioral patterns, and the adaptation of interventions to individual needs. In this way, mental health care is moving toward a more preventive, predictive, and personalized approach.

On the other hand, one of the key contributions is the identification of factors that influence the effectiveness of digital interventions. These factors include ease of use, user motivation, system interaction, and cultural adaptation of tools. The studies emphasize that it is not enough to develop advanced technology; it is also essential to ensure that it is accessible, understandable, and relevant to users, which implies a user-centered approach.

However, important challenges associated with the use of technology in mental health are also highlighted. Among these are risks related to data privacy and security, lack of proper regulation, and the proliferation of applications without scientific support. In addition, the need to establish ethical and legal frameworks that protect users and ensure the quality of interventions is emphasized. These aspects are essential to build trust and ensure responsible use of digital tools.

Regarding social impact, the authors agree that technology does not affect all groups in the same way. Factors such as age, sociocultural context, and level of digital literacy influence how people use and benefit from these tools. Young people are more vulnerable to the negative effects of social media, although they are also the ones who benefit the most from digital interventions. This duality highlights the need to design differentiated strategies for each population group.

Another relevant contribution is the reconsideration of generalized negative perceptions about technology. Several studies suggest that the impact does not depend solely on the amount of use, but on the type of interaction with technology. This implies that active, social, and conscious use can have positive effects, while passive or excessive use can be harmful. Therefore, a more balanced and evidence-based perspective is promoted.

Finally, the authors agree on the importance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach to address the challenges of mental health in the digital age. Collaboration among health professionals, technology developers, researchers, and policymakers is essential to design effective and sustainable solutions. Likewise, the need to continue researching and evaluating the impact of these technologies is emphasized to optimize their use and adapt them to the changing needs of society.

The contributions of these studies converge on a central idea: digital technology represents both an opportunity and a challenge for mental health. Its potential to improve access, quality, and personalization of care is undeniable, but its implementation must be carried out in an ethical, responsible, and evidence-based manner to ensure people's well-being in an increasingly digitalized world.

CONCLUSIONS

Mental health in the digital age is not simply an emerging topic, but an urgent reality that is reshaping how societies understand psychological well-being. Throughout this analysis, it becomes evident that digital technology acts as a dual force: on the one hand, it offers innovative solutions capable of expanding access, improving the quality of care, and personalizing interventions; on the other hand, it introduces significant risks that, if not properly managed, may deepen existing challenges.

One of the most striking findings is that the problem does not lie in technology itself, but in how it is used and the context in which it is integrated. Hyperconnectivity, excessive use of social media, and digital dependency have been closely linked to the rise of disorders such as anxiety, depression, and stress, particularly among younger

populations. However, at the same time, these same tools can become powerful allies for prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment of these disorders when used strategically and based on evidence.

It is also clear that there is no single universal solution. Differences among population groups, sociocultural contexts, and levels of technological access require tailored and differentiated responses. The digital divide, both in terms of access and digital skills, represents a critical challenge that may amplify inequalities in mental health if not properly addressed.

Another key aspect is the need to strengthen ethical and regulatory frameworks. Data protection, the quality of interventions, and transparency in the use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence are essential elements to ensure user trust and the effectiveness of digital solutions. Without proper regulation, the potential of technology may be undermined by risks that directly affect individuals and society.

Finally, the future of mental health in the digital age will depend on the ability to integrate technological innovation with social responsibility. This involves not only the development of advanced tools, but also user education, professional training, and the implementation of public policies that promote a healthy and equitable use of technology.

Digital technology is neither the enemy nor the ultimate solution, but rather a powerful resource whose impact will depend on the decisions made today. The real opportunity lies in building a conscious balance between technological progress and human well-being, ensuring that innovation always serves mental health rather than undermining it.

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Conflicts of Interest:

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions:

Hamid Nasri: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, supervision, validation, visualization, original draft writing, and writing, review, and editing.

Ethical statement:

The study was based on the analysis of documentary sources and publicly available data, and therefore did not involve the direct participation of human subjects. No personally identifiable information was handled.