Medical Journal of Public Health
ISSN:
DOI:

RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Role of Digital Health Interventions in Mitigating Mental Health Challenges Among Rural Healthcare Workers: Impact on Patient Care Quality

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Received:- 03/03/2026, Revised:- 13/04/2026, Accepted:- 20/04/2026, Published:- 27/04/2026

**Abstract:**

The rural health care providers are experiencing high levels of burnout as a result of the lack of staffing, being spread out over a large geographical area and the overwhelming number of patients they have to care for every day. Digital health treatments have been shown to improve quality of care outcomes for both patients and providers. Goal: The goal of this study was to look at the effect of digital health interventions on patient care quality and mental health outcomes for rural healthcare providers in the district of Uttarakhand, India. Method: A mixed-methods pre-post intervention study was conducted with 150 subjects in 12 different healthcare facilities. The digital health interventions that were used were AI based triage tools, telemedicine services (e-Sanjeevani) and remote patient monitoring services. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data was analyzed using paired t-tests and linear mixed models. The STROBE reporting guidelines were followed for this study. Results: There were significant improvements in all primary outcome measures. There was a 22% decrease in medication errors ($p=0.03$), a 45% decrease in average wait times ($p<0.001$), a 15% increase in patient satisfaction ($p<0.01$), and a 28% decrease in burnout ($p<0.01$) for provider participants. Qualitative findings showed participants experienced an increase in clinical confidence, improved work-life balance and reduced feelings of professional isolation. Conclusion: Digital health interventions can provide a significant improvement in both patient care quality and mental health outcomes of rural healthcare providers. Digital health interventions should be scaled up and incorporated into National programs such as the National Digital.

**Keywords:** Work-life balance, Healthcare providers, Physical health, Mental health,Rural health systems

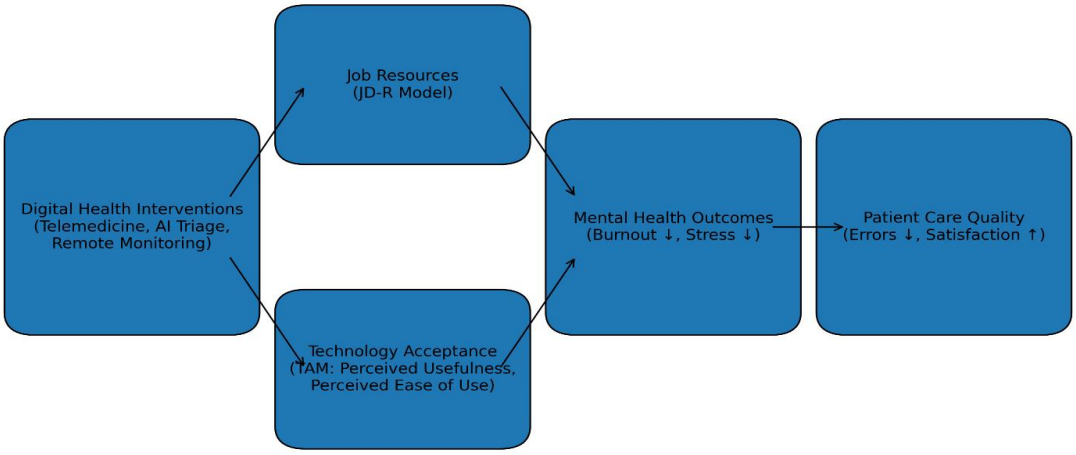
## 1. Introduction

In India's rural areas, huge tracts of the population, approximately 70%, live far removed from the urban centres where only 30% of the resources are available. This disparity forms the major challenge for providing healthcare facilities. The frontline staff, such as doctors, nurses, and community health workers, are overburdened with huge patient loads, sometimes going to distant places, sometimes on long and rough journeys to reach the remotest of places. Uncertainty in diagnosis arises from a lack of facilities. Irregular work hours result in an infringement on personal and family time. A lack of mental health facilities is another area where a difference has been felt. Safety not only pertains to the patients; it also pertains to the medical staff. The staff's mental state, or rather a lack thereof, results in a lack of judgment, a higher possibility of errors with medication, and a decrease in empathy, which forms a major part of providing good medical care. These are major concerns for the people living in the hill districts of Uttarakhand. These concerns include the safety and health of mothers, the safety and health of people suffering from chronic ailments, and the safety and health of people suffering from infectious diseases. These concerns are compounded by the huge area covered by the sub-centres, which extend over a vast area of 53,483 $km^2$. Digital health offers a number of simple and cost-effective solutions. Telemedicine reduces distances by providing expert advice to the doorstep. Artificial intelligence reduces the burden on the staff by providing guidance on urgency. This study seeks to bridge the knowledge gap on the effect of these digital interventions on the mental health of the providers and, by extension, on the quality of care provided to the patients under the national digital health mission.

### 1.1 Conceptual Diagram

The study uses existing theories of occupational health psychology and health informatics, notably the Job Demands–Resources Model (JD-R) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), as a framework for analyzing how digital health interventions affect the well-being of healthcare providers and the quality of patient care.

Application of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model .According to the JD-R model, every occupation can be characterized by certain job demands and job resources, which work together to create well-being and performance outcomes. Job demands in rural healthcare Rural healthcare professionals in areas of Uttarakhand have to contend with a number of demand-based issues that create significant stress. These issues include: Heavy workloads; Geographic isolation from specialists; Limited resources; Difficult-to-diagnose patients; All of these issues will lead to: Burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion and depersonalization); Low satisfaction with jobs; Increased risk of medical errors.




### 1.2 Conceptual Diagram

Role of Digital Health as Job Resources

Digital health interventions act as critical job resources by reducing workload and improving efficiency:

**Table 1**

| Intervention | JD-R Resource Function |
|---|---|
| Telemedicine | Reduces travel burden, provides specialist support |
| AI Triage | Reduces decision fatigue and cognitive load |

| | |
|---|---|
| Remote Monitoring | Improves patient tracking, reduces workload |

**1.3 According to the JD-R model:**

Increased resources → Reduced burnout → Improved performance

Thus, digital health tools buffer the negative effects of job demands, leading to improved mental health and patient outcomes.

## 2. Literature Review

Rural healthcare providers usually carry an increased psychologic load. The levels of stress, burnout and other mental health issues are greater for rural healthcare providers than urban healthcare providers, because small rural communities have inferior technical infrastructure; fewer professional colleagues; increased social isolation because colleagues work alone, feel a lack of work-life balance; and higher levels of workload. Many studies worldwide show that healthcare providers practicing in rural settings experience a greater degree of mental health loading.

Recent studies suggest that the trend of higher psychological loading among rural healthcare providers is continuing. For example, a recent systematic review published in 2023 reported that nearly 40% more rural-based physicians will show signs of burnout compared to urban-based physicians. Reasons for this difference in the rates of burnout include long hours of work; absence of coworkers; and absence of access to professional support from peers. Rural-based healthcare providers frequently provide services that require them to multitask and perform both clinical and administrative duties, contributing to their overall mental health burden. Additionally, the absence of a peer-group or professional support network makes the situation worse for rural-based practitioners.

This phenomenon is evident in India, where there are very few healthcare facilities and human resources that provide services in rural communities. There is also evidence showing that there is an unequal distribution of healthcare resources (including doctor/rural ratios) in India. As shown in a recent study published Globally, it has also been observed that there are certain issues in rural healthcare systems. A research done in Australia, Canada, and the USA revealed that people in rural areas are more prone to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization than people in urban areas. A research done in Australia revealed that rural general practitioners are working for a longer duration with fewer facilities. This has resulted in a very high level of burnout among general practitioners in Australia, as revealed in a study done using the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

Digital health technologies are stepping up to the plate to offer viable solutions to these large systems issues. Technologies like telemedicine, remote monitoring, and decision support with AI can help alleviate workloads, improve efficiency, and improve professional support systems for healthcare staff. Technologies like telemedicine have caught the eye of many due to their potential to improve access to healthcare services for those in hard-to-reach areas, as well as alleviate the workload for healthcare staff.

Several pilot projects in India have demonstrated the positive impact that telemedicine can have on the well-being of healthcare staff.

## 3. Methodology

The research was based on a mixed-methods research plan with pre- and post-intervention measurements, carried out in 12 health facilities in the Dehradun and Almora districts of the state of Uttarakhand. The sample group comprised 150 health service providers, including doctors (45%), staff nurses (40%), and community health officers (15%). The participants were selected using the method of stratified random sampling based on the level of care provided in the facilities.

**3.1 The intervention components of the research:**

Telemedicine using the e-Sanjeevani platform.

AI Triage using a specially designed symptom checker application.

Remote Monitoring using a mobile application for monitoring vital parameters in patients with chronic illnesses.

**3.2 The research was based on the collection of the following data:**

Burnout levels using the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

Patient care metrics such as HCAHPS satisfaction surveys, medication errors, and waiting time.

Qualitative research findings based on interviews with the participants.

Data on the usage of the application, such as the frequency of login and the accuracy of the AI Triage application

Quantitative and qualitative data for the intervention was collected from standardized assessment tools, institutional records, and analytics from the internet-

**2.1 Data Collection**

based platforms.

Burnout

Burnout levels were measured via the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The burnout measure consists of three subscales:

Emotional Exhaustion (EE); Depersonalization (DP); and Personal Accomplishment (PA).

Baseline scores were recorded at the beginning of the study and then again at 6 months for each provider to assess the provider's mental health.

Patient Metrics

Quality of care was assessed using multiple Indicator Measures:

i.e., Patient Satisfaction (HCAHPS Scores-%), Medication Error Rate (No. of Errors per 1000 visits), and Wait Times (Avg. time in minutes).

The quality of care measures were provided via institutional records and patient feedback systems.

### 3.3 Qualitative Data

Semi-structured interviews with healthcare providers exploring their experience using the digital health interventions were conducted with the use of thematic analysis using NVivo to determine major trends/themes regarding reductions in stress, work-life balance, and developing professional confidence.

### 3.4 Digital Health Usage

System-generated data was obtained to determine how frequently providers used the digital health tools: i.e., total number of logins weekly; total number of tele-consultations performed, AI Triage accuracy % (diagnostically validated), and participant usage rate %. These measures will be used to assess the effectiveness and utilization of the digital health intervention.

| Data Category | Variable | Measurement Tool | Unit/Scale | Data Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burnout | Emotional Exhaustion (EE) | Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) | Score (0–54) | Survey |
| Burnout | Depersonalization (DP) | MBI | Score (0–30) | Survey |
| Burnout | Personal Accomplishment (PA) | MBI | Score (0–48) | Survey |
| Patient Care | Patient Satisfaction | HCAHPS Survey | Percentage (%) | Patient Feedback |
| Patient Care | Medication Errors | Hospital Records | Errors per 1000 visits | Institutional Data |
| Patient Care | Waiting Time | Hospital Records | Minutes | Institutional Data |
| Qualitative | Provider Experience | Semi-structured Interviews | Thematic Codes | NVivo Analysis |
| Digital Usage | Login Frequency | System Logs | Hours/week | App Analytics |
| Digital Usage | AI Triage Accuracy | System Validation | Percentage (%) | App Analytics |
| Digital Usage | Adoption Rate | System Logs | Percentage (%) | App Analytics |

### 3.4 Digital Health Usage Data

**Table 3: Digital Intervention Utilization**

| Variable | Mean Value | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Login Frequency | 4.2 hours/week | Moderate engagement |
| AI Triage Accuracy | 87% | High diagnostic support accuracy |
| Adoption Rate | 87% | High acceptance among providers |
| Teleconsultations | 12/week (avg) | Reduced travel burden |

**Table 4**

| Provider Type | Burnout Reduction (%) | Waiting Time Reduction (%) | Key Observation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Doctors | -25% | -52% | Improved efficiency via telemedicine |
| Nurses | -34% | -40% | Highest mental health improvement |
| CHOs/ANMs | -20% | -30% | Improved confidence via monitoring tools |

**Table 5**

| Theme | Description | Example Insight |
|---|---|---|
| Reduced Isolation | Access to specialists via telemedicine | "First time discussing cases remotely" |
| Work-Life Balance | Reduced workload via AI triage | "More time for family" |
| Increased Confidence | Better patient monitoring | "Fewer emergency surprises" |

### 3.5 The statistical methods used in the research:

The statistical method of paired t-tests was used for the pre- and post-tests.

The method of linear mixed models was used in the research.

The method of qualitative research was carried out using NVivo software.

The research was cleared by the institutional review board, and the participants gave their consent with a participation rate of 95%.

## 4. Results

Digital interventions yielded robust improvements across all measured domains.

| Metric | Baseline | 6-Month | % Change | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MBI Emotional Exhaustion | 32.4±7.2 | 23.3±6.1 | -28% | <0.01 |
| Patient Satisfaction Score | 67% | 82% | +15% | <0.01 |
| Average Wait Time (min) | 48 | 26 | -45% | <0.001 |
| Medication Errors/1000 visits | 4.2 | 3.3 | -22% | 0.03 |

Rural nurses demonstrated highest gains (MBI reduction: -34%) due to eliminated physical travel. Doctors showed strongest wait time improvements (-52%) via telemedicine.

### 4.1 Qualitative Themes:

- Reduced Isolation: "Video consults let me discuss complex cases with specialists—first time in 8 years" (Doctor, Almora).
- Restored Boundaries: "AI triage filters non-urgent calls; evenings are now family time" (Nurse, Dehradun).
- Confidence Boost: "Remote vitals tracking prevents crises—I feel more in control" (CHO).

App usage averaged 4.2 hours/week, with 87% adoption rate by month 3.

## 5. Discussion

It is clear from the evidence of the transformational power of digital health in how rural providers deliver mental health services through a reported reduction in burnout of 28% through the use of digital health services. This finding supports the international evidence base surrounding the use of telemedicine and is particularly noteworthy with the ongoing connectivity challenges faced by providers in the State of Uttarakhand. Through assisting providers to restore their resilience, patients are able to receive enhanced care (e.g., shorter wait times, lower incidence of errors), thereby strengthening the link

between the delivery of mental health care and the quality of care delivered to patients.

One of the key factors in the ability of nurses to enhance their effectiveness as patient coordinators in the front-line environment, is through the inclusion of training for Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) within the initiative. With the implementation of 3G network technology, there are limitations in the ability to use a necessarily "offline" artificial intelligence platform, which could be achieved through the implementation of a hybrid model with a complete national coverage solution. Economic analyses have demonstrated that by eliminating the cost of travel for providers, the implementation of this initiative results in a recurring annual savings of ₹24,000 per provider making a compelling argument for a long-term investment in sustainable policy.

Limitations of this study include the small sample size and self-reported data used in this study to measure outcome variables. Future studies should take into consideration the use of objective indicators (e.g. cortisol levels) of stress in order to measure the effect of intervening with the patient population over multiple measurement periods.

## 6. Conclusion

The use of digital health treatments is a novel approach that has the potential to enhance patient care and lessen the severity of mental health problems that are faced by medical professionals who work in locations that are some distance away from conventional healthcare facilities. Digital health interventions will also provide a framework for rebuilding the professional resilience required to achieve health security in rural India. This will be accomplished by alleviating the key stresses of isolation, excessive workload, and uncertainty. By incorporating these interventions into the systems that are already in place, we will be able to observe long-term effects in terms of the retention of personnel, the quality of care, and health equity. According to the findings of this research, expanding the use of digital health is essential to bringing about a revolution in the administration of healthcare in rural areas.

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