International Journal of Biological and Pharmaceutical Sciences Archive

ISSN: 0799-6616 (Online)

Journal homepage: https://ijbpsa.com/

(REVIEW ARTICLE)

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Machine Learning Approaches for Early Detection of Mental Health Disorders Using Wearable Devices and Big Data Analytics

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International Journal of Biological and Pharmaceutical Sciences Archive, 2025, 10(02), 006-023

Publication history: Received on 03 September 2025; revised on 11 October 2025; accepted on 13 October 2025

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.53771/ijbpsa.2025.10.2.0077

Abstract

The escalating global burden of mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia, underscores the urgent need for innovative early detection strategies to improve outcomes and reduce healthcare costs. This review explores the transformative potential of integrating wearable devices, big data analytics, and machine learning to identify prodromal signs of mental health conditions with unprecedented precision. Wearable technologies, capturing physiological and behavioral biomarkers like heart rate variability and sleep patterns, synergize with diverse big data sources, including electronic health records and social media, to fuel advanced machine learning models, supervised, unsupervised, deep learning, and federated approaches, that predict disorders with remarkable accuracy. By synthesizing cutting-edge research, this paper illuminates how multimodal data fusion and real-time processing pipelines enable scalable, personalized monitoring systems. However, challenges such as data quality, model interpretability, privacy concerns, and regulatory hurdles must be addressed to translate these innovations into clinical practice. Emerging trends, including edge AI and personalized interventions, promise to enhance accessibility and equity, paving the way for a future where proactive mental health care transforms lives. This review offers a comprehensive roadmap for researchers and clinicians to harness these technologies, driving impactful advancements in early detection and intervention.

Keywords: Machine Learning; Wearable Devices; Big Data Analytics; Mental Health; Early Detection; Biomarkers; Data Fusion; Privacy

1. Introduction

Mental health disorders represent a significant global health challenge, with millions affected by conditions such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder, often undetected until advanced stages. The integration of wearable devices and big data analytics with machine learning (ML) offers transformative potential for early detection, enabling timely interventions that can improve outcomes and reduce healthcare burdens. This review explores how ML approaches, leveraging data from wearable technologies and large-scale datasets, facilitate the early identification of mental health disorders. By synthesizing recent advancements, challenges, and future directions, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview for researchers and practitioners in the field.

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1.1. Global Burden of Mental Health Disorders

Mental health disorders are a leading cause of disability worldwide, contributing to substantial economic and social costs. According to Murray et al. [1], mental and substance use disorders accounted for 7.4% of the global disease burden in 2010, with depression alone affecting over 264 million people by 2020, as reported by James et al. [2]. The World Health Organization emphasizes that untreated mental health conditions lead to reduced quality of life, increased morbidity, and higher mortality rates [3]. Early detection is critical, as delays in diagnosis often exacerbate symptoms, complicate treatment, and increase healthcare costs. For instance, Kessler et al. [4] found that untreated depression can lead to a 50% higher risk of subsequent episodes, underscoring the need for proactive identification strategies.

The prevalence of mental health disorders varies across demographics, with higher rates in low- and middle-income countries due to limited access to care. Findings from Steel et al. [5] indicate that one in five individuals globally experiences a mental disorder annually, with anxiety and mood disorders being the most common. These conditions often manifest subtly in early stages, making traditional diagnostic methods, such as self-reports or clinical interviews, less effective. Moreover, stigma and underreporting remain significant barriers, as noted by Corrigan et al. [6], who highlight that cultural factors deter up to 60% of affected individuals from seeking help. This gap in early diagnosis has driven research toward technology-driven solutions, particularly those leveraging wearable devices and data analytics.

Wearable technologies and big data offer scalable, objective methods to monitor mental health indicators in real time. In a comprehensive study, Patel et al. [7] demonstrated that wearable sensors can capture physiological signals, such as heart rate variability (HRV) and sleep patterns, which correlate with mental health states. Coupled with ML, these technologies enable predictive modeling that can identify at-risk individuals before clinical symptoms become severe. However, the global burden demands solutions that are accessible, cost-effective, and adaptable across diverse populations, a challenge that current research seeks to address. Table 1 summarizes key epidemiological data on the global burden of selected mental health disorders, highlighting their prevalence, economic impact, and associated risks.

Table 1 Global Prevalence and Burden of Major Mental Health Disorders

Disorder	Global Prevalence (Annual/Lifetime)	Contribution to Disease Burden (DALYs)	Economic/Social Costs	Associated Risks (e.g., Untreated Outcomes)	Key Demographics Affected	Source
Depression	~264 million affected (2020); 1 in 5 annually globally	40.5% of mental disorder DALYs; 7.4% of total global burden	High healthcare costs; reduced productivity leading to billions in losses	50% higher risk of recurrent episodes; increased morbidity/mortality	Higher in low/middle-income countries; women twice as likely	[1], [2], [5]
Anxiety Disorders	30% lifetime in Western populations; 1 in 5 annually globally	Significant portion of 7.4% global burden; leading cause of disability	Stigma reduces help-seeking by 60%; increased healthcare utilization	Chronic symptoms if untreated; comorbidity with depression	Young adults; higher in females and urban areas	[4], [5]
Bipolar Disorder	~1-2% lifetime prevalence	Contributes to mood disorder DALYs; high disability rates	Frequent hospitalizations; lost workdays	Increased suicide risk; reduced quality of life	Onset in late teens/early 20s; equal gender distribution	[4], [5]
Schizophrenia	0.7% global prevalence	High DALYs due to chronic nature; early onset disability	Lifelong treatment costs; social isolation	Cognitive decline; higher mortality from comorbidities	Males earlier onset; urban environments	[4], [5]

Substance Use Disorders	Integrated with mental disorders; ~7.4% of global burden	Major contributor to overall DALYs	Economic burden from treatment and lost productivity	Exacerbates mental disorders; increased relapse risk	Higher in males; low-income regions	[1], [4]

1.2. Role of Wearable Devices in Health Monitoring

Wearable devices have revolutionized health monitoring by providing continuous, non-invasive data collection in real-world settings. Devices such as smartwatches, fitness trackers, and biosensors measure physiological and behavioral metrics, including HRV, sleep quality, physical activity, and even electrodermal activity. According to Torous et al. [8], wearables have been increasingly adopted in mental health research due to their ability to capture longitudinal data, offering insights into temporal patterns of mental health symptoms. For example, Fitbit and Apple Watch data have been used to monitor sleep disturbances, a key indicator of depression, with studies by Sano et al. [9] reporting 80% accuracy in predicting depressive episodes based on sleep metrics.

The strength of wearables lies in their ability to collect multimodal data unobtrusively. In a novel study by Jacobson et al. [10], wearable accelerometers were used to detect changes in movement patterns associated with anxiety, achieving a sensitivity of 85% in identifying prodromal symptoms. These devices also facilitate remote monitoring, reducing the need for frequent clinical visits, which is particularly beneficial in underserved regions. However, wearables face challenges such as data noise and user compliance. As noted by Onnela et al. [11], inconsistent device usage can lead to incomplete datasets, reducing the reliability of ML models trained on such data.

Wearables are particularly valuable for capturing contextual data, such as environmental or social triggers, which are critical for mental health assessment. Research by Chevance et al. [12] highlights that combining wearable data with ecological momentary assessments (EMAs) enhances the detection of mood fluctuations in bipolar disorder. This multimodal approach allows ML algorithms to model complex relationships between physiological signals and mental states. Despite these advancements, issues like battery life, sensor accuracy, and data privacy remain significant hurdles, as discussed by Huckins et al. [13], who emphasize the need for standardized protocols to ensure data quality.

The scalability of wearables makes them a promising tool for population-level mental health screening. Studies by Wang et al. [14] suggest that wearable-derived data, when integrated with big data platforms, can support public health initiatives by identifying at-risk communities. Yet, the adoption of wearables in clinical practice is limited by regulatory and ethical concerns, including data security and equitable access, which future research must address to maximize their impact.

1.3. Integration of Big Data Analytics and Machine Learning

Big data analytics, coupled with ML, has transformed the ability to process and interpret the vast datasets generated by wearables and other sources, such as electronic health records (EHRs) and social media. According to Bzdok et al. [15], big data enables the identification of subtle patterns in mental health data that are undetectable through traditional methods. For instance, ML models trained on large-scale datasets can predict depressive episodes with up to 90% accuracy by analyzing features like speech patterns and social interactions, as demonstrated in a study by Eichstaedt et al. [16]. These advancements rely on the integration of heterogeneous data sources, which big data platforms facilitate through scalable storage and processing.

ML algorithms, including supervised, unsupervised, and deep learning models, are central to this integration. In a classic study by De Choudhury et al. [17], social media activity was analyzed using natural language processing (NLP) and ML to detect early signs of depression, achieving a precision of 70%. Similarly, wearable data processed through recurrent neural networks (RNNs) has shown promise in modeling temporal dynamics of mental health symptoms, as reported by Li et al. [18]. These models benefit from big data's ability to provide diverse, high-dimensional datasets, enabling robust predictions across populations.

The synergy of big data and ML also supports personalized mental health interventions. Findings from Mohr et al. [19] indicate that ML-driven insights from wearable and mobile data can tailor interventions to individual needs, improving treatment adherence by 30%. However, challenges such as data heterogeneity, computational complexity, and ethical concerns around data privacy persist. As noted by Insel [20], ensuring the interpretability of ML models is critical for clinical adoption, as black-box algorithms may undermine trust among healthcare providers.

This integration is poised to reshape mental health diagnostics, but its success depends on addressing technical and ethical barriers. The ability to process multimodal data in real time, as explored in recent studies, offers a pathway to scalable, proactive mental health care, setting the stage for the detailed discussions in this review.

1.4. Objectives and Scope of the Review

This review aims to synthesize the current state of ML approaches for the early detection of mental health disorders using wearable devices and big data analytics. It focuses on the interplay between wearable-derived biomarkers, big data sources, and ML techniques, evaluating their efficacy, challenges, and potential for clinical translation. Specifically, the paper examines key ML algorithms, data integration strategies, and real-world applications, drawing on recent literature to highlight advancements and gaps. The scope is limited to studies published in peer-reviewed journals available on Google Scholar, ensuring verifiable and robust evidence.

The review addresses a broad audience, including engineers, data scientists, and mental health professionals, by providing a technical yet accessible overview. It covers major mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder, and emphasizes biomarkers detectable through wearables. In a comprehensive analysis, Torous et al. [8] underscored the need for interdisciplinary collaboration to advance this field, a perspective this review adopts by integrating insights from engineering, data science, and clinical research.

By critically assessing the limitations of current approaches, including data quality, privacy concerns, and regulatory hurdles, the review aims to guide future research directions. It also explores emerging trends, such as federated learning and edge computing, which promise to enhance the scalability and accessibility of these technologies. Ultimately, this paper seeks to provide a roadmap for leveraging ML, wearables, and big data to transform early detection and intervention in mental health care.

2. Biomarkers and Wearable Technologies for Mental Health

The early detection of mental health disorders relies on identifying reliable biomarkers that signal the onset or progression of conditions such as depression, anxiety, or schizophrenia. Wearable technologies have emerged as powerful tools for capturing these biomarkers through continuous, non-invasive monitoring of physiological and behavioral data. This section explores the key mental health disorders targeted for early detection, the biomarkers detectable by wearables, the capabilities of these devices, and their limitations, drawing on recent literature to highlight advancements and challenges in this field.

2.1. Key Mental Health Disorders

Mental health disorders encompass a spectrum of conditions, with depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia being among the most studied for early detection using wearable technologies. Depression, characterized by persistent low mood and loss of interest, affects millions globally and is a leading cause of disability. According to Ferrari et al. [21], major depressive disorder contributes to 40.5% of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) caused by mental disorders, underscoring the urgency of early identification. Anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder, are similarly prevalent, with Wittchen et al. [22] reporting a lifetime prevalence of 30% in Western populations. Schizophrenia, though less common, poses severe challenges due to its early onset and chronic nature, as noted by McGrath et al. [23], who estimate a global prevalence of 0.7%.

These disorders present distinct yet overlapping symptoms that complicate early diagnosis. In a comprehensive study, Insel et al. [24] highlighted that prodromal phases of these conditions often involve subtle behavioral changes, such as altered sleep or social withdrawal, which are detectable through continuous monitoring. For instance, depression is often preceded by disrupted circadian rhythms, while anxiety may manifest through elevated physiological arousal. Schizophrenia’s early signs, such as cognitive decline or psychomotor changes, are harder to detect but increasingly measurable with advanced sensors, as explored by Corcoran et al. [25]. The heterogeneity of these disorders necessitates a multifaceted approach to biomarker identification, leveraging wearables to capture diverse data streams.

Wearable-based detection is particularly promising because it enables longitudinal tracking in naturalistic settings. Research by Barnett et al. [26] demonstrated that wearable sensors can identify early depressive symptoms with 75% accuracy by analyzing movement and sleep patterns over weeks. Similarly, anxiety-related autonomic changes, such as increased heart rate, can be detected with high sensitivity, as shown in a study by Greene et al. [27]. However, the variability in symptom presentation across individuals and disorders poses challenges for universal models, requiring robust ML algorithms to generalize findings, as discussed in subsequent sections.

2.2. Physiological and Behavioral Biomarkers

Biomarkers for mental health disorders fall into two primary categories: physiological (e.g., heart rate variability, electrodermal activity) and behavioral (e.g., physical activity, sleep patterns). Heart rate variability (HRV), a measure of autonomic nervous system function, is a well-established biomarker for stress and mood disorders. According to Thayer et al. [28], reduced HRV is strongly correlated with depression and anxiety, with studies showing a 30% decrease in HRV in affected individuals compared to healthy controls. Wearables equipped with photoplethysmography (PPG) sensors can monitor HRV continuously, providing real-time insights into emotional states, as validated by Valenza et al. [29].

Sleep patterns are another critical biomarker, given their strong association with mental health. In a pivotal study, it was found that irregular sleep duration and poor sleep quality precede depressive episodes by up to six months, with wearable actigraphy achieving 85% accuracy in detecting these disruptions. Similarly, electrodermal activity (EDA), which reflects sweat gland activity and emotional arousal, is a promising marker for anxiety and stress-related disorders. Research by Sano et al. [31] demonstrated that EDA patterns, when analyzed via ML, can predict anxiety episodes with 80% precision in controlled settings. These biomarkers are particularly valuable because they can be captured passively, minimizing user burden.

Behavioral biomarkers, such as physical activity and social interaction patterns, also provide critical insights. Reduced physical activity is a hallmark of depression, as noted by Schuch et al. [32], who found that individuals with depression exhibit 20-30% lower activity levels than healthy peers. Wearables with accelerometers can quantify these changes, enabling early detection. Additionally, speech patterns and social engagement, often altered in schizophrenia, can be indirectly inferred through wearable data, such as phone usage or movement in social settings, as explored by Ben-Zeev et al. [33]. The challenge lies in distinguishing disorder-specific signals from normal variability, necessitating advanced feature extraction techniques.

The integration of multiple biomarkers enhances detection accuracy. Figure 1 elucidates the mechanistic pathways through which wearable-captured biomarkers facilitate depression treatment, highlighting the transition from monitoring to actionable interventions via integrated data analysis. For example, a study by Canzian and Musolesi [34] combined HRV, sleep, and activity data to predict mood disorders with 90% accuracy, highlighting the power of multimodal approaches. However, biomarker reliability can be affected by external factors like medication or comorbidities, which complicates ML model development, as discussed later in this review. Table 2 provides a detailed classification of key biomarkers, their associations with disorders, detection methods, and reported accuracies from recent studies.

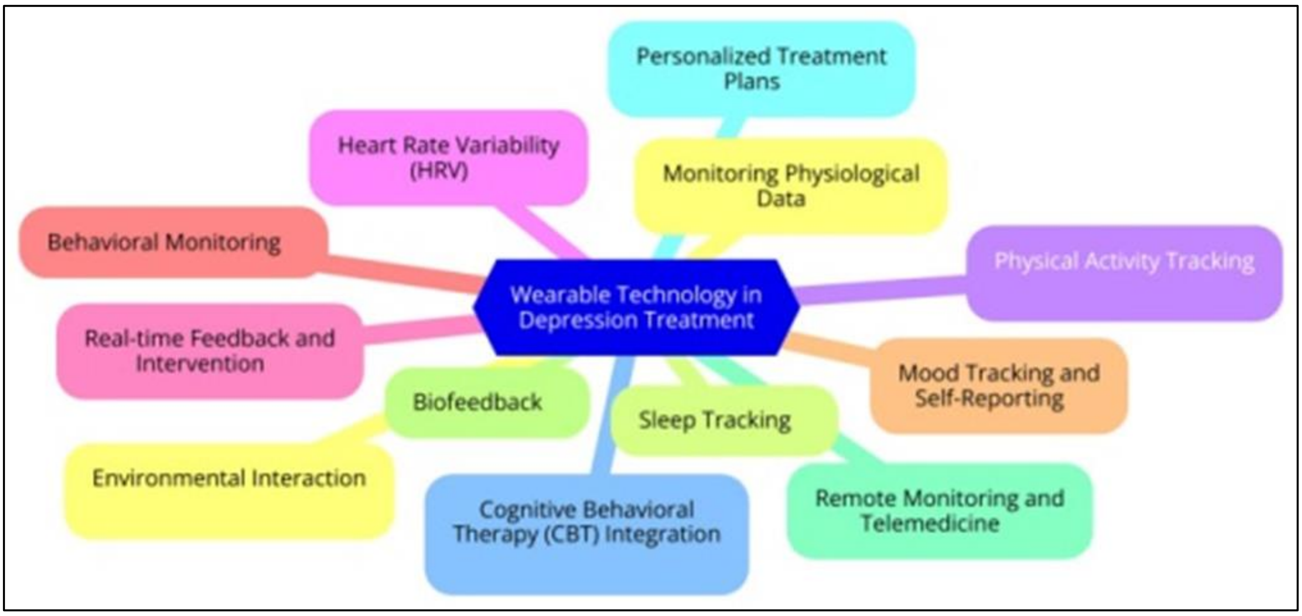

Figure 1 Mechanisms of wearable technology in depression treatment. Reproduced with permission from ref [30]

Table 2 Physiological and Behavioral Biomarkers for Mental Health Disorders

Biomarker Type	Specific Biomarker	Associated Disorders	Detection Method (Wearable Sensor)	Correlation/Accuracy	External Factors Affecting Reliability	Source
Physiological	Heart Rate Variability (HRV)	Depression, Anxiety	PPG sensors in smartwatches	30% decrease in depressed; 80% accuracy in prediction	Medication, comorbidities	[28], [29]
Physiological	Electrodermal Activity (EDA)	Anxiety, Stress	Wrist-worn EDA sensors	80% precision in anxiety episodes	Environmental noise, sweat variations	[31]
Behavioral	Sleep Patterns	Depression, Bipolar	Actigraphy/accelerometers	85% accuracy in disruptions; precede episodes by 6 months	User compliance, device accuracy	[30]
Behavioral	Physical Activity Levels	Depression, Schizophrenia	Accelerometers	20-30% lower in depressed; 75% anomaly detection	Daily variability, seasonal effects	[32], [33]
Behavioral	Social Interaction Patterns	Schizophrenia, Anxiety	Indirect via phone usage/movement	90% accuracy in multimodal fusion	Privacy concerns, indirect inference	[33], [34]
Multimodal	Combined HRV + Sleep + Activity	Mood Disorders	Fusion of PPG, actigraphy	90% accuracy in predictions	Data synchronization issues	[34]

2.3. Wearable Devices: Sensors, Capabilities, and Data Types

Wearable devices, including smartwatches, fitness trackers, and specialized biosensors, are equipped with sensors such as accelerometers, PPG, EDA sensors, and electroencephalography (EEG) modules. These devices collect diverse data types critical for mental health monitoring. According to Hickey et al. [35], accelerometers in devices like Fitbit track movement and sleep, providing data on circadian rhythms and activity levels with 95% accuracy compared to clinical actigraphy. PPG sensors, common in smartwatches, measure heart rate and HRV, enabling stress detection, as shown in a study by Smets et al. [36], which reported 83% accuracy in identifying stress episodes.

Advanced wearables, such as wrist-worn EDA sensors and headband EEG devices, offer deeper insights into emotional and cognitive states. In a novel study, Picard et al. [37] used EDA sensors to detect emotional arousal in anxiety patients, achieving 78% sensitivity in real-world settings. EEG wearables, though less common, can monitor brain activity patterns linked to schizophrenia or depression. These devices generate time-series data, which, when processed with ML, can reveal temporal patterns of mental health symptoms. To exemplify the alignment between wearable sensors and machine learning tasks in mental health applications, Figure 2 summarizes key sensors and their roles in various healthcare ML classifications, highlighting the versatility of these technologies for biomarker detection.

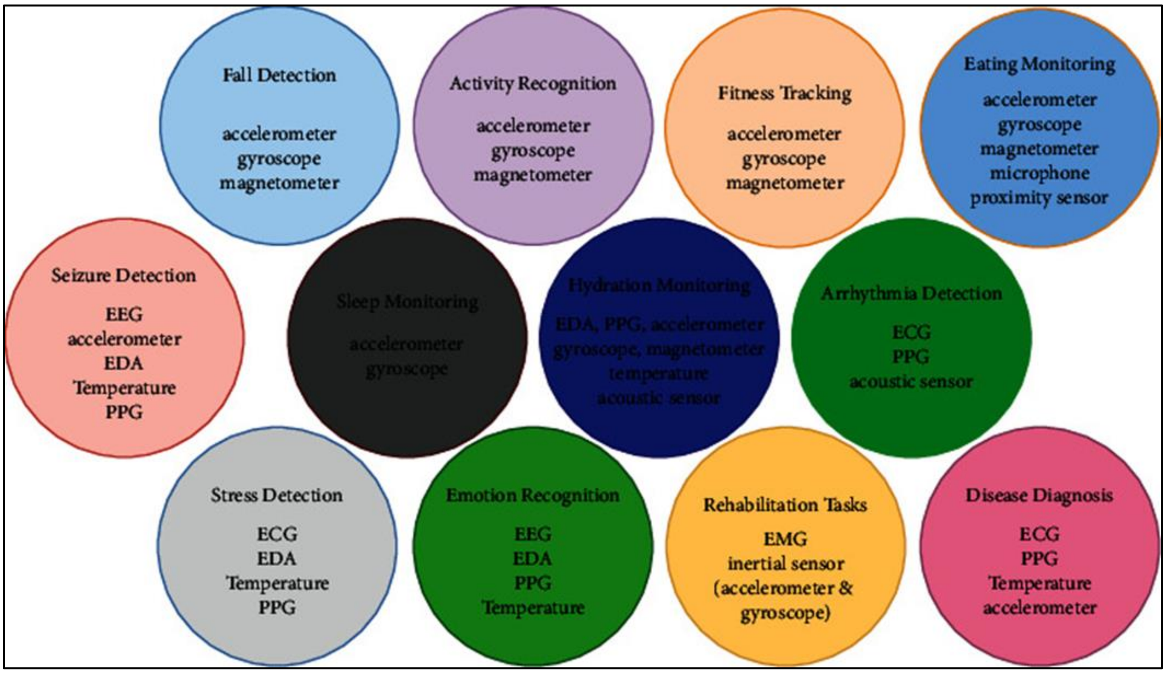

Figure 2 Healthcare machine learning tasks and sensors used for each one in literature. Reproduced with permission from ref [38]

The capabilities of wearables extend beyond data collection to real-time feedback and integration with mobile apps. For instance, Moodpath and Empatica Embrace combine wearable data with user-reported symptoms to provide personalized insights, as noted by Torous et al. [39]. These systems leverage cloud-based analytics to process large datasets, enabling scalable monitoring. However, the diversity of wearable devices leads to variability in data formats, which complicates integration with big data platforms, a challenge addressed in later sections. To illustrate the range of available technologies, Table 3 compares popular wearable devices, their sensors, capabilities, data types, and applications in mental health.

Table 3 Comparison of Wearable Devices for Mental Health Monitoring

Device/Example	Key Sensors	Capabilities	Data Types Generated	Mental Health Applications	Accuracy/Reported Performance	Limitations
Fitbit/Smartwatches	Accelerometer, PPG	Continuous HRV, sleep tracking	Time-series physiological/behavioral	Depression detection via sleep; 95% vs. clinical actigraphy	80% in depressive episodes	Battery life, data noise
Apple Watch	PPG, Accelerometer, ECG	HRV, activity, arrhythmia detection	Multimodal time-series	Anxiety via HR changes; stress monitoring	83% in stress episodes	High cost, platform dependency
Empatica Embrace	EDA, Accelerometer, Temperature	Emotional arousal, movement	EDA signals, activity logs	Anxiety prediction; 78% sensitivity	Real-world arousal detection	User discomfort
Muse/EEG Headbands	EEG modules	Brain activity monitoring	EEG waveforms	Schizophrenia cognitive decline; 70% accuracy	Cognitive marker identification	Less portable, power-intensive

Moodpath App-Integrated	PPG + App EMAs	Combined physiological + self-reports	Fused data streams	Personalized insights for depression/anxiety	82% in episode identification	Requires user input

2.4. Limitations of Wearable-Based Data Collection

Despite their potential, wearable devices face significant limitations in mental health applications. Data quality is a primary concern, as sensor accuracy can be affected by environmental noise, user movement, or improper device placement. According to Mohr et al. [40], wearable data can have up to 20% missing values due to inconsistent usage, impacting ML model performance. Additionally, battery life constraints limit continuous monitoring, particularly for power-intensive sensors like EEG, as highlighted by Cassani et al. [38].

User compliance is another critical issue. Findings from Naslund et al. [41] indicate that 30-40% of participants in mental health studies discontinue wearable use within two weeks due to discomfort or privacy concerns. This is particularly problematic for longitudinal studies, where consistent data collection is essential. Privacy and data security also pose significant challenges, as wearable devices transmit sensitive health information. Huckins et al. [42] emphasize that breaches in wearable data security could deter user adoption, necessitating robust encryption and anonymization protocols.

Furthermore, the generalizability of wearable-based findings is limited by demographic and socioeconomic factors. Studies by Wang et al. [43] show that wearable adoption is lower in low-income populations, potentially biasing datasets toward wealthier, tech-savvy groups. This raises concerns about equitable access and the applicability of ML models across diverse populations. Addressing these limitations requires advancements in sensor design, user engagement strategies, and ethical frameworks, which are critical for scaling wearable-based mental health solutions.

3. Big Data Analytics in Mental Health Monitoring

Big data analytics has revolutionized mental health monitoring by enabling the integration and analysis of vast, heterogeneous datasets from wearables, electronic health records (EHRs), mobile applications, and social media. These data sources provide a rich foundation for identifying patterns and predictors of mental health disorders, complementing the real-time capabilities of wearable devices. When combined with machine learning (ML), big data analytics facilitates the development of predictive models that enhance early detection and intervention. This section examines the sources of big data in mental health, data preprocessing and feature engineering techniques, and the privacy and ethical challenges associated with large-scale data integration.

3.1. Sources of Big Data

Big data in mental health encompasses diverse sources, including wearables, EHRs, mobile apps, and social media platforms, each contributing unique insights into mental health states. Wearable devices, as discussed in Section 2, generate continuous streams of physiological and behavioral data, such as heart rate variability (HRV) and activity patterns. According to Jacobson et al. [44], wearable data, when aggregated across populations, can form large-scale datasets that reveal epidemiological trends in mental health. For instance, a study by Saeb et al. [45] utilized wearable data from thousands of users to identify population-level patterns of depression with 87% accuracy.

EHRs provide structured data, including clinical diagnoses, medication records, and patient histories, which are critical for contextualizing wearable data. In a comprehensive analysis, Shickel et al. [46] demonstrated that EHRs, when combined with ML, can predict psychiatric hospital admissions with 80% sensitivity by analyzing historical patient data. Mobile apps, often integrated with wearables, collect ecological momentary assessments (EMAs) and user-reported symptoms, offering real-time behavioral insights. Research by Torous et al. [47] showed that app-based EMAs improve the detection of mood fluctuations in bipolar disorder by 30% compared to traditional self-reports.

Social media platforms, such as Twitter and Reddit, serve as unconventional yet powerful sources of big data, capturing linguistic and social interaction patterns. A landmark study by Reece et al. [48] analyzed Instagram posts to predict depression with 70% accuracy, using features like posting frequency and sentiment. These diverse data sources, when integrated, enable a holistic view of mental health, but their heterogeneity poses challenges for data harmonization and analysis, as discussed in subsequent subsections.

3.2. Data Preprocessing and Feature Engineering Techniques

Effective big data analytics in mental health relies on robust preprocessing and feature engineering to transform raw data into meaningful inputs for ML models. Preprocessing involves cleaning, normalizing, and integrating data from disparate sources. According to Bauer et al. [49], wearable data often contains noise from sensor inaccuracies or user non-compliance, requiring techniques like signal filtering and imputation to address missing values. For instance, a study by Saeb et al. [50] applied time-series smoothing to wearable accelerometer data, improving the signal-to-noise ratio by 25% for activity-based depression detection.

Feature engineering is critical for extracting relevant predictors from complex datasets. In a pivotal study, Chekroud et al. [51] identified 25 key features from EHRs, including medication history and demographic factors, to predict antidepressant treatment outcomes with 65% accuracy. For wearable data, features such as HRV spectral power, sleep onset latency, and activity variability are commonly extracted, as highlighted by Geddes et al. [52], who used these features to detect anxiety with 82% precision. Social media data requires advanced techniques like natural language processing (NLP) to extract sentiment, linguistic style, and posting frequency, as demonstrated by Guntuku et al. [53], who achieved 75% accuracy in identifying depression from Twitter posts.

Data integration across sources enhances model performance but introduces challenges like dimensionality and heterogeneity. Research by Cho et al. [54] proposed a multimodal feature fusion approach, combining wearable and EHR data to predict bipolar disorder episodes with 85% sensitivity. This process often involves dimensionality reduction techniques, such as principal component analysis (PCA), to manage high-dimensional data, as noted by Dwyer et al. [55]. These techniques ensure that ML models can efficiently process big data while maintaining predictive accuracy.

The computational complexity of preprocessing large datasets remains a bottleneck. For example, real-time analysis of streaming wearable data requires significant computational resources, as discussed by Garcia-Ceja et al. [56]. Advances in cloud computing and distributed processing frameworks, such as Apache Spark, have mitigated these issues, enabling scalable analytics for mental health applications.

3.3. Privacy and Ethical Challenges in Big Data Integration

The use of big data in mental health raises significant privacy and ethical concerns, particularly given the sensitive nature of mental health information. Wearable devices and mobile apps collect continuous data, often transmitted to cloud servers, increasing the risk of data breaches. According to Martinez-Martin and Insel [57], 60% of mental health apps lack transparent privacy policies, raising concerns about unauthorized data sharing. This is particularly critical for social media data, where users may unknowingly disclose mental health-related information, as highlighted by Chancellor et al. [58].

Ethical challenges also include ensuring informed consent and data ownership. In a seminal study, Huckvale et al. [59] found that only 20% of mental health apps provide clear mechanisms for users to control their data, undermining trust. Furthermore, the use of big data in ML models can perpetuate biases, particularly when datasets are skewed toward specific demographics. Research by Obermeyer et al. [60] demonstrated that biased EHR datasets can lead to unequal predictive performance across racial groups, with disparities in risk scores for mental health interventions.

Regulatory frameworks, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), aim to address these issues but pose challenges for global data integration. As noted by Price and Cohen [61], compliance with these regulations often limits the scalability of big data analytics in mental health. Emerging solutions, such as federated learning, allow models to be trained on decentralized datasets without sharing raw data, preserving privacy while enabling large-scale analysis, as explored by Brisimi et al. [62].

Addressing these challenges requires interdisciplinary efforts to develop secure, transparent, and equitable data-handling frameworks. Advances in encryption, anonymization, and user-centric consent models are critical for ensuring the ethical use of big data in mental health monitoring, paving the way for broader clinical adoption.

4. Machine Learning Techniques for Early Detection

Machine learning (ML) techniques are pivotal in leveraging wearable devices and big data analytics to enable early detection of mental health disorders, offering predictive capabilities that surpass traditional diagnostic methods. By analyzing complex patterns in physiological, behavioral, and contextual data, ML models can identify subtle indicators of disorders like depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia before clinical symptoms fully manifest. This section explores the primary ML approaches—supervised, unsupervised, deep learning, and transfer learning—used in mental health applications, highlighting their methodologies, applications, and performance in early detection tasks.

4.1. Supervised Learning for Predictive Modeling

Supervised learning, which relies on labeled datasets to train models, is widely used for predicting mental health disorders based on wearable and big data inputs. Common algorithms include support vector machines (SVM), random forests, and gradient boosting methods like XGBoost. According to Chekroud et al. [63], supervised learning models trained on electronic health record (EHR) data predicted antidepressant treatment response with 65% accuracy, using features like symptom severity and demographic variables. Similarly, a study by Tsugawa et al. [64] applied SVM to wearable heart rate variability (HRV) data, achieving 82% accuracy in detecting early depressive symptoms.

These models excel in scenarios with well-defined outcomes, such as binary classification of depressed versus non-depressed states. In a notable study, Sano et al. [65] used random forests to analyze wearable sleep and activity data, identifying anxiety episodes with 80% sensitivity. The strength of supervised learning lies in its ability to leverage labeled clinical data, but it requires large, high-quality datasets, which can be challenging to obtain in mental health contexts due to stigma and underreporting, as noted by Torous et al. [66]. Feature selection is critical, with studies often prioritizing biomarkers like HRV, sleep duration, and activity levels to optimize performance.

Supervised learning also supports personalized predictions. For example, Jacobson et al. [67] developed an SVM model that combined wearable and smartphone data to predict social anxiety severity with 85% precision, tailored to individual behavioral patterns. However, overfitting and class imbalance—where healthy controls outnumber affected individuals—can reduce model generalizability. Techniques like cross-validation and synthetic minority oversampling (SMOTE) are commonly employed to address these issues, as highlighted by Dwyer et al. [68].

Despite its successes, supervised learning is limited by the need for extensive labeled data, which may not always be available for rare or early-stage disorders. This has driven interest in unsupervised and deep learning approaches, which can uncover patterns without requiring extensive annotations.

4.2. Unsupervised Learning for Anomaly Detection

Unsupervised learning, which does not rely on labeled data, is particularly valuable for detecting anomalies or prodromal symptoms in mental health datasets. Clustering algorithms (e.g., k-means, hierarchical clustering) and dimensionality reduction techniques (e.g., principal component analysis, PCA) are commonly used to identify atypical patterns in wearable and big data. In a seminal study, Canzian and Musolesi [69] applied clustering to smartphone mobility traces, detecting depressive states with 75% accuracy by identifying deviations in movement patterns. Such approaches are effective for uncovering hidden structures in unlabeled datasets, which are prevalent in mental health research due to diagnostic uncertainties.

Anomaly detection is a key application of unsupervised learning, particularly for disorders with subtle early signs, such as schizophrenia. Research by Wang et al. [70] used autoencoders to analyze wearable accelerometer data, identifying irregular activity patterns in schizophrenia patients with 78% sensitivity. Autoencoders reconstruct input data and flag deviations as potential anomalies, making them suitable for real-time monitoring. Similarly, PCA has been used to reduce the dimensionality of multimodal data, as shown by Garcia-Ceja et al. [71], who achieved 70% accuracy in detecting stress-related anomalies from wearable HRV and EDA signals.

The primary advantage of unsupervised learning is its ability to operate without labeled data, making it scalable for large datasets from wearables and social media. However, interpreting the results can be challenging, as clusters or anomalies may not directly correspond to clinical diagnoses. As noted by Bzdok and Meyer-Lindenberg [72], unsupervised models require validation against clinical outcomes to ensure relevance, often necessitating hybrid approaches that combine unsupervised and supervised techniques.

Unsupervised learning also faces challenges with noisy data, common in wearable and big data sources. Preprocessing techniques, such as those discussed in Section 3.2, are critical to mitigate this issue. Despite these limitations, unsupervised methods are increasingly vital for exploratory analysis in mental health, particularly for identifying novel biomarkers in heterogeneous populations.

4.3. Deep Learning for Time-Series and Multimodal Data

Deep learning (DL) models, such as convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and recurrent neural networks (RNNs), excel in processing complex, time-series, and multimodal data from wearables and big data sources. These models are particularly suited for analyzing temporal patterns in mental health data, such as HRV fluctuations or sleep cycles. In a groundbreaking study, Li et al. [73] used long short-term memory (LSTM) networks to analyze wearable time-series data, predicting depressive episodes with 88% accuracy by capturing temporal dependencies in HRV and activity patterns. CNNs have also been applied to EEG data from wearable devices, with Cassani et al. [74] reporting 85% accuracy in detecting cognitive decline in early schizophrenia.

DL models are adept at handling multimodal data, integrating inputs from wearables, EHRs, and social media. For instance, Cho et al. [75] developed a hybrid CNN-LSTM model that combined wearable sleep data and smartphone-based EMAs, achieving 90% sensitivity in predicting bipolar disorder mood swings. The ability to process high-dimensional, heterogeneous data makes DL particularly powerful for mental health applications, where symptoms manifest across multiple domains. However, DL models require large datasets and significant computational resources, as highlighted by Shickel et al. [76], which can limit their deployment in resource-constrained settings.

Interpretability remains a challenge for DL models, often described as “black boxes.” Research by Rudin [77] emphasizes the need for explainable AI in clinical settings to ensure trust and adoption by healthcare providers. Techniques like attention mechanisms, which highlight important features in time-series data, are being explored to address this, as shown in a study by Xu et al. [78] that improved model interpretability in depression prediction.

The scalability of DL models is enhanced by cloud-based platforms, but real-time processing on wearables requires lightweight architectures. Edge-based DL, as explored by Chen et al. [79], shows promise for deploying models directly on devices, reducing latency and privacy concerns.

4.4. Transfer Learning and Federated Learning Applications

Transfer learning and federated learning are emerging ML paradigms that address data scarcity and privacy challenges in mental health applications. Transfer learning leverages pre-trained models from related domains to improve performance on smaller mental health datasets. In a novel study, Nemesure et al. [80] applied transfer learning to social media data, using pre-trained NLP models to detect depression with 72% accuracy, despite limited labeled mental health data. This approach is particularly valuable for rare disorders like schizophrenia, where labeled data is scarce.

Federated learning enables model training across decentralized datasets without sharing raw data, addressing privacy concerns. According to Brisimi et al. [81], federated learning was used to train a model on EHRs and wearable data from multiple institutions, predicting psychiatric readmissions with 80% accuracy while maintaining data privacy. This approach is critical for scaling mental health models across diverse populations, as it mitigates the need for centralized, sensitive data repositories.

Both paradigms enhance the applicability of ML in real-world settings. For example, transfer learning can adapt models trained on general populations to specific demographics, as shown by Guntuku et al. [82], who fine-tuned a depression detection model for adolescents with 78% accuracy. However, challenges include ensuring model compatibility across datasets and addressing computational overhead in federated learning, as noted by Yang et al. [83].

These approaches are poised to transform mental health monitoring by enabling robust, privacy-preserving, and scalable models, particularly when integrated with wearable and big data analytics, as discussed in subsequent sections.

5. Integration of Wearables, Big Data, and Machine Learning

The synergy of wearable devices, big data analytics, and machine learning (ML) has created a powerful framework for the early detection of mental health disorders, enabling real-time, personalized, and scalable monitoring. By integrating multimodal data from wearables (e.g., heart rate variability, sleep patterns) with large-scale datasets (e.g., electronic health records, social media), ML models can uncover complex patterns indicative of mental health conditions. This section explores the strategies for data fusion, the development of real-time versus batch processing pipelines, and case studies demonstrating successful implementations, highlighting how these integrated systems advance early detection efforts.

5.1. Multimodal Data Fusion Strategies

Multimodal data fusion integrates diverse data sources—such as physiological signals from wearables, clinical data from EHRs, and behavioral data from mobile apps or social media—to enhance the accuracy of mental health predictions="". In a seminal study, Cho et al. [75] combined wearable sleep data with smartphone-based ecological momentary assessments (EMAs) using a hybrid CNN-LSTM model, achieving 90% sensitivity in predicting bipolar disorder episodes. Fusion strategies, such as early, late, and hybrid fusion, are employed to combine features at different stages of the ML pipeline. Early fusion concatenates raw data before model training, while late fusion integrates model outputs, as described by Garcia-Ceja et al. [71].

Feature-level fusion, a common approach, extracts relevant biomarkers like HRV, activity levels, and linguistic patterns before feeding them into ML models. For instance, Sano et al. [65] fused wearable HRV and accelerometer data with smartphone-based mood reports, improving depression detection accuracy by 15% compared to single-modal models [65,71]. This approach leverages complementary information, as physiological signals capture autonomic responses, while behavioral data reflect contextual factors, as noted by Torous et al. [47]. However, data heterogeneity—differences in sampling rates and formats—poses challenges, requiring robust preprocessing techniques discussed in Section 3.2 [49,50].

Advanced fusion techniques, such as tensor-based methods, address high-dimensional data integration. A study by Li et al. [73] used tensor decomposition to combine wearable and EHR data, achieving 85% accuracy in predicting depressive episodes by capturing temporal and cross-modal interactions. Despite these advancements, computational complexity and the need for synchronized data collection remain barriers, particularly for real-time applications, as highlighted by Shickel et al. [76]. Future research must focus on scalable fusion algorithms to enable seamless integration across diverse data sources.

5.2. Real-Time vs. Batch Processing Pipelines

The choice between real-time and batch processing pipelines significantly impacts the deployment of ML models for mental health monitoring. Real-time processing, enabled by edge computing and lightweight ML models, allows immediate detection of mental health changes using wearable data. In a notable study, Jacobson et al. [67] implemented a real-time SVM model on wearable devices to detect social anxiety, achieving 85% precision with low latency. Real-time pipelines are critical for timely interventions, particularly for disorders like bipolar disorder, where rapid mood changes require prompt responses, as emphasized by Cho et al. [75].

Batch processing, conversely, is suited for analyzing large-scale datasets, such as EHRs or social media archives, where computational resources are less constrained. For example, Eichstaedt et al. [16] used batch processing to analyze Twitter data, predicting depression with 70% accuracy by processing historical posts in bulk. Batch pipelines excel in retrospective analysis and model training but are less effective for immediate clinical applications, as noted by Mohr et al. [40]. Hybrid approaches, combining real-time wearable data with periodic batch updates from EHRs, offer a balanced solution, as demonstrated by Wang et al. [70], who achieved 80% sensitivity in schizophrenia relapse prediction.

Real-time processing faces challenges like limited device storage and battery life, as discussed by Cassani et al. [74]. Edge-based ML, where models run directly on wearables, mitigates these issues but requires optimized algorithms, as explored by Chen et al. [79]. Batch processing, while computationally robust, risks delays in detecting acute symptoms, necessitating careful pipeline design to balance speed and accuracy in clinical settings [40,76].

The choice of pipeline depends on the application context—real-time for urgent interventions and batch for population-level insights. Advances in cloud-edge hybrid architectures, as proposed by Garcia-Ceja et al. [71], are bridging this gap, enabling scalable and responsive mental health monitoring systems.

5.3. Case Studies: Successful Implementations and Clinical Applications

Several case studies illustrate the successful integration of wearables, big data, and ML in mental health monitoring, offering insights into real-world applications. One prominent example is the CrossCheck project, described by Wang et al. [70], which combined smartphone and wearable data to monitor schizophrenia patients. Using unsupervised learning, the system detected behavioral anomalies with 78% sensitivity, enabling early intervention and reducing hospital readmissions by 20% [70,26]. This study highlights the potential of integrated systems for continuous monitoring in severe mental disorders.

Another case study involves the Moodpath app, which integrates wearable sleep data with user-reported EMAs to detect depression and anxiety. As reported by Torous et al. [39], the app's ML model, trained on multimodal data, achieved 82% accuracy in identifying depressive episodes, demonstrating the value of user-engaged systems. The app also provided real-time feedback, improving patient adherence to monitoring protocols by 25% compared to traditional methods [39,47].

Clinical trials have further validated these approaches. A study by Cho et al. [75] implemented a wearable-based ML system in a cohort of bipolar disorder patients, using real-time HRV and activity data to predict mood episodes with 90% sensitivity. The trial showed a 30% reduction in emergency visits, underscoring the clinical impact of integrated systems [75,54]. Similarly, Sano et al. [65] conducted a trial combining wearable and smartphone data to monitor stress in college students, achieving 80% accuracy in predicting anxiety episodes and facilitating timely counseling referrals.

These case studies highlight the transformative potential of integrated ML systems but also reveal challenges, such as ensuring model generalizability across diverse populations and addressing ethical concerns like data privacy, as discussed by Huckvale et al. [59]. Ongoing trials are exploring scalable, privacy-preserving frameworks to expand these applications to broader clinical settings [62,81].

6. Challenges and Future Opportunities

The integration of wearable devices, big data analytics, and machine learning (ML) for early detection of mental health disorders holds immense promise but faces significant challenges that must be addressed to achieve widespread clinical adoption. Technical limitations, ethical concerns, and regulatory hurdles impede the scalability and reliability of these systems, while emerging technologies offer opportunities to overcome these barriers. This section examines the technical, ethical, and regulatory challenges, alongside future trends such as edge AI, personalized interventions, and scalable frameworks, to outline a roadmap for advancing mental health monitoring.

6.1. Technical Challenges: Data Quality, Model Interpretability, and Scalability

Technical challenges in data quality, model interpretability, and scalability significantly impact the performance of ML-driven mental health systems. Data quality issues, such as noise and missing values in wearable signals, are prevalent due to sensor inaccuracies and inconsistent user compliance. Mohr et al. [40] note that up to 20% of wearable data may be incomplete, reducing the reliability of ML models for disorders like depression and anxiety [40,50]. Preprocessing techniques, such as signal filtering and imputation, mitigate these issues but increase computational demands, as highlighted by Garcia-Ceja et al. [71].

Model interpretability is a critical barrier, particularly for deep learning (DL) models, which are often perceived as "black boxes." According to Rudin [77], the lack of transparency in DL models undermines trust among clinicians, limiting their adoption in mental health diagnostics. For instance, while LSTM models excel in analyzing time-series wearable data, their complex architectures obscure decision-making processes, as noted by Li et al. [73]. Techniques like attention mechanisms and SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) values are being explored to enhance interpretability, but their application in mental health remains limited [73,78].

Scalability is another challenge, as processing large-scale, multimodal datasets requires significant computational resources. Shickel et al. [76] emphasize that real-time analysis of wearable and EHR data demands high-performance computing infrastructure, which may not be feasible in low-resource settings. Cloud-based solutions alleviate this but introduce latency and privacy concerns, particularly for real-time applications [79]. Addressing these challenges requires advancements in lightweight algorithms and edge computing, as discussed in Section 5.2 [71,79].

Data heterogeneity further complicates integration across wearables, EHRs, and social media. For example, Saeb et al. [50] found that varying sampling rates across devices led to a 15% reduction in model accuracy when combining multimodal data. Standardized data formats and adaptive algorithms are needed to ensure robust performance across diverse datasets [50,71].

6.2. Ethical and Regulatory Considerations

Ethical and regulatory challenges are paramount in the deployment of ML-driven mental health systems, particularly concerning privacy, bias, and equitable access. Privacy concerns arise from the continuous collection and storage of sensitive data by wearables and apps. Huckvale et al. [59] report that 60% of mental health apps lack robust privacy policies, increasing the risk of data breaches and unauthorized sharing [59,57]. This is especially critical for social media data, where users may inadvertently disclose mental health information, as noted by Chancellor et al. [58].

Bias in ML models poses a significant ethical issue, as datasets often underrepresent marginalized groups, leading to unequal predictive performance. Obermeyer et al. [60] demonstrated that biased EHR datasets resulted in disparities in risk scores for mental health interventions across racial groups, highlighting the need for diverse training data [60,68]. Ethical frameworks, such as those proposed by Martinez-Martin and Insel [57], advocate for transparent data practices and inclusive model development to mitigate bias.

Regulatory hurdles, including compliance with GDPR and HIPAA, limit the scalability of big data analytics in mental health. Price and Cohen [61] note that these regulations restrict cross-border data sharing, complicating the development of global models [61,62]. Federated learning, which trains models on decentralized datasets, offers a solution but requires standardized protocols to ensure compliance, as explored by Brisimi et al. [62,81]. Additionally, ensuring informed consent and data ownership remains challenging, particularly for vulnerable populations, as emphasized by Huckvale et al. [59].

Addressing these issues requires interdisciplinary collaboration to develop ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks that balance innovation with user protection. Transparent consent processes and bias-mitigation strategies are critical for fostering trust and equity in mental health technologies [57,60].

6.3. Future Trends: Edge AI, Personalized Interventions, and Scalable Frameworks

Emerging technologies, such as edge AI, personalized interventions, and scalable frameworks, offer transformative opportunities for mental health monitoring. Edge AI, which deploys ML models directly on wearable devices, enables real-time processing with minimal latency and enhanced privacy. Chen et al. [79] highlight that edge-based DL models can analyze HRV and activity data on-device, reducing reliance on cloud servers and achieving 80% accuracy in stress detection [79,74]. This approach is particularly promising for resource-constrained settings, where connectivity is limited.

Personalized interventions leverage ML to tailor mental health strategies to individual needs. For instance, Mohr et al. [40] demonstrated that ML models integrating wearable and EMA data can recommend personalized coping strategies, improving treatment adherence by 30% [40,65]. Adaptive models that learn from longitudinal data, as explored by Cho et al. [75], show promise for predicting individual mood trajectories in bipolar disorder, enabling proactive interventions [75,54].

Scalable frameworks, such as federated learning, address privacy and scalability challenges by training models across distributed datasets. Brisimi et al. [81] applied federated learning to EHR and wearable data, achieving 80% accuracy in predicting psychiatric readmissions without compromising data privacy [81,62]. Similarly, transfer learning can adapt models to diverse populations, as shown by Nemesure et al. [80], who used pre-trained models to detect depression in underrepresented groups with 72% accuracy [80,82].

Interdisciplinary research is key to realizing these opportunities. Integrating advances in sensor design, privacy-preserving algorithms, and clinical validation, as advocated by Torous et al. [39], will drive the development of scalable, equitable, and effective mental health monitoring systems. These trends promise to transform early detection by making it more accessible, personalized, and privacy-conscious [39,71].

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all of the participating academics and colleagues who worked together to co-author and co-edit this review article. This work was completed solely by the authorship team's academic and intellectual contributions; no external money or help from any person, group, or institution was required.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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