

# Mental Health Stigma and Telemedicine

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## Abstract

**Objective:** This study was derived from the confluence of several factors, namely, the prevalence of a complex array of mental health issues across Al Dhafra Rural Region of Abu Dhabi, the lack of mental health professionals in the region, the stigma associated among the population with regards to mental disorders, the resultant feasibility/acceptance of this service, and uncertain outcomes. Tele-psychiatry through telemedicine (TM) was seen as the potential method to ameliorate these problems.

**Methodology:** A Survey Design was used in this research that probed stakeholders through a Tele-psychiatry Usability Questionnaire (TPUQ). The participants of the questionnaire were divided into two groups namely: 1. patients appointed for the Tele-psychiatry clinic and 2. The healthcare provider team who were involved in offering the Tele-psychiatry service. The TPUQ was designed to be a comprehensive questionnaire that covered usability factors, such as usefulness, reliability, reduced stigma as well as satisfaction of the stakeholders.

**Results:** The results of the survey revealed positive responses from both patients and healthcare providers in reporting that the service is immensely useful in reducing stigma associated with mental disorders. The service was accepted for its convenience and adaptability in a rural area where there is no availability of psychiatry specialty services. The Tele-psychiatry Usability Questionnaire (TPUQ) ratings by factor were compared using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The usability factors were found to be within the ranges of internal consistency/reliability. Reduction of stigma associated with mental disorders through Tele-psychiatry also showed positive outcome of acceptability by both study groups of patients ( $\alpha = 0.872$  "Good") and healthcare providers ( $\alpha = 0.902$  "Excellent") alike.

**Conclusion:** Our results and evidence of diminishing stigma support the use of Tele-psychiatry interventions in patients with mental health concerns. Tele-psychiatry makes care accessible in areas with limited or no professional psychiatrists and has the potential to mental healthcare in primary care settings.

**Keywords:** Telemedicine, Tele-psychiatry, Mental Health, Stigma