Apps against Violence against women: A systematic review of 171 apps and some ethical reflections

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mHealth:
Ethical, legal and social aspects in the technological age
2. What are Anti-VAW Apps and why review them?

- New intervention strategy: Anti-VAW Apps
  - Apps with the common aim to help victims, bystanders and/or health workers implement different prevention or response strategies to VAW
- The development and use of mobile technologies as tools against VAW is supported by the *UN Commission on the Status of Women*
- Mobile penetration rate: 66% Anti-VAW App download numbers: > 160 Mio
- Nevertheless: (Currently) complete lack of systematic reviews and/or evaluation of Anti-VAW Apps

3. Methods: How to review mHealth apps?

• Aim: Methodological groundwork for App reviews on mHealth responses to global health concerns, e.g. VAW

• Difficulties:
  ➢ Lack of scientific literature
  ➢ Previous systematic App reviews not applicable to Apps targeting global health issues
  ➢ Different format of sources

Search terms (Engl, Ger, Fr, Span):
"violence against women", "GBV",
"gender based violence", "anti GBV",
"anti gender based violence", "sexual harassment"

Relevance to VAW:
Mention of ≥ 1 of the search terms stated above in the app title and/or description

Eligibility criteria:
- Location of initiation (Europe and Central Asia, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, MENA, Sub-Saharan Africa)
- Year of release (2010-2018)
- Number of downloads (≥ 100)
- Interface language (Engl, Ger, Fr, Span)

Systematic app review:
- Data extraction
- Qualitative content analysis
  (categorization with regards to app function)

Data extraction: Sector (public/private/both), Location of initiation, Target group[s], Year of release, Number of downloads

Based on PRISMA 2009 Flow Diagram, Moher et al. 2009
3. Methods: How to review mHealth apps?

5 categories with regards to app function[s]

- “Savior“ Apps: Emergency call function
- “Avoiding” Apps: Helping users to avoid at-risk situations
- “Education“ Apps: Providing education on VAW and its unacceptability
- “Reporting and evidence building“ Apps: Platform for collection and exchange of users‘ experiences with VAW
- “Supporting“ Apps: Connecting users with organizations/professional resources (i.e. legal, medical, psychological)
- Health integrated apps.
3. Emergency App: “BSafe”

3. Education app: “160 Girls”

3. Reporting App: “Hollaback!”

3. Results: Anti-VAW Apps
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Global Trends 2010-2018
4. Analysis

- Potential advantages
- Potential disadvantages
- Recommended steps
4. Potential advantages

- Raising awareness and supporting removal of taboos, especially in generation of digital
- Empowerment through sharing & connecting (e.g. on social media)
- Lower threshold to report and/or seek help in cases of VAW
- Facilitation of interactions between VAW survivors and existing support institutions
- Opportunity for comparably easy and quick access to information (multilingual)
- Low-cost technology that is easy to implement globally
4. Potential disadvantages I

- Flooding market by for-profit sector, driven by advertisement economy and user engagement? > not necessarily based on scientific evidence, voices of women, intrinsic motivation to end VAW

- Believe in and hype of “quick fixes” might push more complex, long-term, holistic, personal approaches to the side, that would address root causes, personal care, complex social norms & dynamics, interplay of policy and practice

- Knowledge and strategies stay within users’ world of anti-VAW-apps, not necessarily connected to non-digital policy and practice
4. Potential disadvantages II

- Majority are emergency apps: Misrepresentation of VAW as singular, interindividual event that can be overcome through an SOS-call?

- Safety of women at risk? > e.g. link of Hollaback to facebook; App visible on smartphone; data security in general?
5. Recommended steps

- Research: Intervention studies, continuing monitoring of app-market, qualitative interview studies

- Emphasize the argument that health & life, gender justice are at stake: Argue for higher responsibility also in private sector
  - Inclusion of women’s voices into design, etc. process
  - Certification of mHealth technology based on quality standards
  - Open, evidence-based approach looking for the best solution to end VAW
  - Understanding of mHealth as one tool among many others; Integration into existing strategies
  - Keeping complex eco-system in mind: Which social dynamics, political and power structures, etc. are drivers of VAW? What is necessary for long-term prevention?
4. Challenges and open questions

➢ How to increase advantages and decrease disadvantages?
➢ Can the technology and the obtained information be integrated into more complex intervention strategies and change of social norms, etc.?
➢ Should apps target other parts of the population (not only women experiencing violence)?
➢ How can women’s voices be integrated into development, design, implementation and evaluation?
➢ How can more complex apps be supported (given market & marketing-paradigms in the private sector?)
Thank you for your attention

META-Website:
https://www.en.meta.med.uni-muenchen.de/index.html