TELEHEALTH IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19: BENEFITS AND BARRIERS OF DIGITAL HEALTH IN IMPROVING EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING – DATA ANALYSIS, A GLOBAL SURVEY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

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BACKGROUND
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital Telehealth system has skyrocketed as it complies with the social distancing protocols. Our nonprofit Tohid Health Organization comprises of physicians/residents/fellows from the USA, UK, Pakistan and UAE, established a global WhatsApp 24/7 daily Helpline. The data of 273 quarries from March to October 2020 has been presented here.

METHODS
This study is a large global project where 240 people queried information on COVID-19 via a phone app, globally. Later on, we conducted a study on the same people via survey on the app to estimate the outcomes of digital health. We also did a literature review, reviewed 40 articles, included 6 in this review.

RESULTS
Among the 273 inquiries, 255 (93.41%) contacted to relieve COVID-19 Pandemic induced panic/anxiety. People asked about symptoms and treatment of COVID, vaccine development, number of cases in their regions, navigation to quarantine centers/hospitals. 2 questions were solely related to psychiatry, 6 to Medicine, 2 to pulmonology, 2 hematology, 3 hepatology, 2 Ob/Gyn, and 3 gastroenterology.

Our literature review showed COVID-19 psychosocial helpline by psychiatrists provided psychological support to the general population and medical staff 1, 2. A COVID-19 telephone helpline showed increased psychosocial support to the people. 3 Our non-profit organization “Tohid Health” is continuing its phone app to provide health information. The COVID-19 pandemic is on going and our data is continuing. In the next phase we will look at the impact of these services.

CONCLUSION
During Covid-19 Pandemic, digital health has increased access to mental health care. Benefits of digital/tele-health include reduced risk of infection. The drawbacks include poor patient-doctor relationship, lack of familiarity to technology use, reimbursement concerns, and lack of confidentiality.

Fig 1: Participants field of questions

- Panic/Axiety
- Psychiatry
- Medicine
- Pulmonology
- Hematology
- Hepatology
- Ob/Gyn
- Gastroenterology

35.9% tele-health saves times in waiting areas
36.8% comfort in using in tele-mental-health
44.4% reported lack of physical interaction with doctor as disadvantage
66.2% reported to continuing online health services after pandemic
67.1% responded that online-health resources are beneficial to alleviate COVID-19 pandemic-induced stress/anxiety

Fig 2: Results of survey responses (n=107)

- Panic/Antxiety
- Psychiatry
- Medicine
- Pulmonology
- Hematology
- Hepatology
- Ob/Gyn
- Gastroenterology

194.80% 70.7% 70.7% 70.7% 70.7% 70.7% 70.7% 0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

References:
1. Iqbal et al. (2020) COVID-19-related issues on tele-counseling helpline in Bangladesh. Wiley Online Library. https://doi.org/10.1002/app.12457
Figure 1: Participants field of questions

Figure 2: Sample Participants questions response