

Cognitive Computing in Mental Healthcare: a Review of Methods and Technologies for Detection of Mental Disorders

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Received: 22 March 2022 / Accepted: 24 June 2022 / Published online: 5 July 2022 © The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2022

Abstract

Mental disorders are closely related to defcits in cognitive control. Such cognitive impairments may result in aberrations in mood, thinking, work, body functions, emotions, social engagements and general behaviour. Mental disorders may afect the phenotypic behaviour like eye movements, facial expressions and speech. Furthermore, a close association has been observed within mental disorders and physiological responses emanating from the brain, muscles, heart, eyes, skin, etc. Mental disorders disrupt higher cognitive function, social cognition, control of complex behaviours and regulation of emotion. Cognitive computation may help understand such disruptions for improved decision-making with the help of computers. This study presents a systematic literature review to promulgate state of art computational methods and technologies facilitating automated detection of mental disorders. For this survey, the relevant literature between 2010 and 2021 has been studied. Recommendations of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model were adopted for identifcation, screening, validating and inclusion of research literature. The self-diagnosis tools for detection of mental disorders like questionnaires and rating scales are inconsistent and static in nature. They cannot encompass the diversity of mental disorders, inter-individual variability and impact of emotional state of an individual. Furthermore, there are no standard baselines for mental disorders. This situation mandates a multi-faceted approach which may utilise data from physiological signals, behavioural patterns and even data obtained from various online portals like social media to efficiently and efectively detect the prevalence, type and severity of mental disorders.

Keywords Mental disorder · Machine learning · Physiological signals · Systematic literature review · Modalities · Mental health

Introduction

Cognitive computing promulgates the development of computer systems which can model human behaviours like perception, attention and thoughts. Cognitive computing systems can collect and process individual, social and healthcare data for better disease diagnosis and patient engagement. It offers a combination of multidisciplinary technologies like artificial intelligence, deep learning, machine learning, big data analytics and natural language processing systems to identify types and symptoms of a disease. A mental disorder is a medical condition that infuences the normal behaviour of a person. A mental disorder

 \boxtimes Jaiteg Singh Jaitegkhaira@gmail.com may impair the physical, emotional and social well-being of a person. Impairment to memory, attention and cognitive control is fundamental to any mental disorder. Furthermore, it may result in aberrations in mood, thinking, work, body functions, emotions, social engagements and general behaviour either once, recurrently or even permanently. Researchers have reported more than four hundred and ffty types of mental disorders with discrete symptoms. Few of the prominent mental disorders are depressive disorder, mood disorder, personality disorder, addictive disorder, sleep disorder, post-traumatic disorders, dementia, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia along with stress and anxiety disorders [[1\]](#page-14-0).

More than 10.7% of the world's population is suffering from aforementioned mental disorders, most prominent being depression and anxiety which add more than 548 million to the global burden of the diseases [[2](#page-14-1), [3](#page-14-2)]. The repercussions of mental disorders are diverse, including but not limited to low employee productivity, high suicide rates, early mortality, dangerous driving,

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early dropping out of education, poverty, disability, physical pain and being prone to other diseases like infections and cardiovascular diseases [\[4](#page-14-3)[–9\]](#page-14-4). The prevalence of mental disorders also leads to loss of economic growth and places a burden on the economic well-being of the patient as well as the caregivers [\[10](#page-14-5)]. This makes early detection of mental disorders imperative not just for health but also for development. This has led to the inclusion of mental health as one of the targets in Goal 3 of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [\[11\]](#page-14-6). Subsequently, research community has laid emphasis on early detection of mental disorders in order to deploy suitable therapeutic measures.

Clinical assessment methods for detecting mental disorders rely on patients' self-reporting and the expertise of the examiner. These methods lack precision due to social stigma, lack of knowledge, subjective bias of the examiner, time-intensive nature of the examination and lack of consistency [\[12](#page-14-7)]. To eliminate subjective bias and to reduce examination time, different rating scales for measuring mental disorders have been developed. These scales are used to measure the severity of the mental disorder as a function of perceived symptoms as inferred from the assessee $[13–15]$ $[13–15]$ $[13–15]$ $[13–15]$. However, the rating scales have some inherent limitations; they are inconsistent in handling the heterogeneous nature of mental disorders and results obtained from diferent scales are diferent. The rating scale cannot encompass all the symptoms associated with a particular disorder and they did not take into consideration the effects of examination environment, emotions and demographics in the rating scales [\[16\]](#page-14-10).

This has led to exploration of novel detection techniques which could handle the heterogeneous nature of the mental disorders, eliminate subjective bias and include the efects of emotions along with demographics like age and gender on detection mechanism. As a result, mental disorder detection techniques based on machine learning and biomarkers have emerged. It is because human cognition is closely associated with the biological processes of an individual. The electrical activity of the nervous system controls almost every aspect of the human body including heart signals, sweat glands and even human cognition. Thus, any changes in human mental states like mood changes, emotional changes or mental disorders may greatly afect the activity of the brain, heart, skin, facial expressions, speech and even other biological

processes like respiration and temperature. Various research studies have shown that the activity and power of diferent EEG bands, inter-hemispheric symmetry and statistical features like peak, variance, entropy and energy are contrasting between healthy individuals and people sufering from mental disorders. For example, depressed persons have increased beta values in their brain waves as compared to healthy persons [\[17](#page-14-11)[–22](#page-14-12)]. Similarly, there is a diference in statistical features of heart rate variability and other ECG characteristics like peak and median frequency of healthy and non-healthy individuals [\[23–](#page-14-13)[28](#page-15-8)]. The skin conductance response and statistical characteristics of electrodermal activity are also diferent for healthy and non-healthy individuals [[29–](#page-15-11)[31](#page-15-12)]. Electromyography (EMG) is a procedure to measure muscle movements and motor neuron activity. It has been observed that mental stress may result in a diferent EMG activity in healthy and non-healthy individuals [[32–](#page-15-2)[34\]](#page-15-13). Recent studies also investigated correlation between mental disorders and eye movements [\[35](#page-15-14)[–38](#page-15-15)]. This has led to exploration of objective methodologies which aim to automatically decipher human cognition by machine learning with the help of biological signals of an individual. Table [1](#page-1-0) highlights diferent cognitive tasks that are related to diferent biological processes.

Modalities like EEG, GSR, EMG, ECG, facial expressions, eye movements, online handwritten signals and speech can facilitate extraction of prominent features to be used as biomarkers. Such biomarkers could further be used for automatic detection of mental disorders using machine learning algorithms. In reference to the previously stated arguments, a systematic literature review is required to promulgate state of art research contributions in this domain. Furthermore, it may help contemporary researchers to investigate numerous multidisciplinary open research problems from the amalgamation of psychology, sociology, machine learning, computer science and behavioural sciences. The following research questions were formulated to attain the goal of this study:

1. Which physiological and behavioural modalities can facilitate the detection of mental disorders using machine learning?

Table 1 Relation of human cognitive tasks with biological processes

- 2. Which prominent features of these modalities can be used in detection of mental disorders using machine learning?
- 3. Which are the most suited machine learning algorithms to exploit these modalities for detecting mental disorders?
- 4. What are the prominent challenges in detection of mental disorders using biomarker modalities?

The rest of this manuscript is organised as follows: the ["Survey Methodology"](#page-2-0) section elaborates the adopted methodology and the novelty of this survey in comparison to previously published literature, the ["Diferent Approaches](#page-2-1) [of Mental Disorder Detection"](#page-2-1) section provides a discussion on diferent modalities used to detect mental disorders, the ["Discussion](#page-8-0)" section offers a summarisation of most prominent features and most suited machine learning algorithms to detect mental disorders using these modalities and the "[Research Challenges"](#page-11-0) section concludes contemporary research gaps, key fndings and research challenges.

Survey Methodology

This section elaborates the adopted methodology for conducting the systematic literature survey. For this survey, the relevant literature from 2010 to 2021 has been studied based on the previously stated research questions. Recommendations of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model were adopted for identifcation, screening, validating and inclusion of research literature as shown in Fig. [1](#page-2-2) [\[55](#page-15-16)]. The articles were searched using keywords like detection + mental disorders, analysis+mental disorders, prediction+mental disorders, identifcation+mental disorders, modalities+mental disorders, machine learning+mental disorders, physiological signals+mental disorder and verbal and non-verbal behaviour, from databases like ScienceDirect, IEEEXplore, Springer-Link, ACM Digital Library, Taylor & Francis Online and Wiley Online Library. Pre-screening exclusion was done based on duplication and article language. Articles published in English language were only considered for screening. Screening and exclusion were based on the relevance to the survey as inferred from the title, abstract and conclusion of the article. Post-screening exclusion of articles was based on user-defned inclusion criteria like articles should have a minimum of fve citations per year and should be published in 2010 or later.

Mendeley was used for aggregation, fltering and removal of articles to build a consolidated library of relevant research articles.

Numerous surveys on detection of mental disorders using physiological and behavioural patterns have been

Fig. 1 Survey methodology

published in recent past. During literature evaluation, it was observed that existing literature is primarily investigating one mental disorder based on a single modality. To the best of our knowledge, multiple physiological signals along with behavioural patterns for detection of mental disorders using machine learning techniques have not been explored to the desired extent. Table [2](#page-3-0) offers a comparison of existing literature with this survey:

Different Approaches of Mental Disorder Detection

Physiological signals and human behaviour provide various biomarkers with respect to diferent mental states and disorders. These signals or behavioural aspects are called modalities. Data from these modalities can be used in the detection of mental disorders. Features from multiple modalities in collaboration with machine learning algorithms can be used to determine the prevalence, type and severity of mental disorders. A modality can be used either as unimodal or multimodal approach. Types and usage of unimodal and multimodal approaches are detailed as under:

Table 2 Comparison of current survey with previous surveys

Table 3 Contemporary studies which have employed EEG

Table 4 Contemporary studies which have employed EDA/GSR

Unimodal Approach

In unimodal approach, a single modality is used as a standalone diferentiator for classifcation. Various modalities have been used in unimodal approach for detection and classifcation of mental disorders, mood changes and emotional states of an individual. The following subsections provide an overview of contemporary works which have utilised a

Table 5 Contemporary studies which have employed ECG

	Ref Focus of study	Summary
	[78] Stress	Poincare plot analysis, approximate entropy, correlation dimension, DFA and recurrence plot analysis were used to calculate mean, median, StdDev, 25 th and 75 th percentile from ECG for detection of mental stress using LDA classifier
[79]	Stress	Mean, variance, StdDev, Band power and pnN50 extracted from HRV were used with kNN. Long-term and short- term signals were employed
	[80] Stress	Low-frequency range (0.04–0.5 Hz) of ECG and HRV signals was used. Features like mean, entropy, covariance, StdDev and power of selected wavelet, max wavelet coefficient and min wavelet coefficient of two groups of selected frequency range—HF $(0.14 \text{ to } 0.5)$ and LF $(0.05-0.14)$ —were used with kNN classifier
	[81] Stress	Mean, StdDev, RMSSD, absolute power of low- and high-frequency bands, entropy and correlation dimension were extracted from RR interval of ECG signals. Multiple classifiers like NB, SVM, MLP, AB and C4.5 were used for classification. Only short-term signals were employed
$\lceil 42 \rceil$	Depression	Features from HRV in time and frequency domains like mean heart rate, SDNN, pNN50, power ratio of low- and high- frequency bands and peak frequency of low- and high-power bands as well as non-linear features from Poincare plot like LLE and Sample Entropy were used with SVM
[28]	Bipolar disorder	Mean RR, RMSSD, pNN50, LF Peak, HF Peak and non-linear features like Poincare Plot, approximate entropy and Shannon entropy to predict future mental states in bipolar disorder patients using SVM
$\lceil 82 \rceil$	Stress	RR interval, QT interval and ECG-derived respiration were used with SVM Classifier
	$[46]$ Stress	Time-domain RR features like mean, max, min, SDNN and pNN50 as well as frequency-domain features derived from power of low- and high-frequency band were used with SVM and C5 classifiers
[83]	Depression	Multiple time-domain features related to RR interval as well as some frequency domain along with some non-linear features were used with SVM
	[84] Depression	HRV features and features of low-frequency and high-frequency spectrums as well as Poincare plot, multiscale entropies and correlations derived from DFA were used with Bayesian Networks
[85]		Depression and stress Multiple features derived from RR intervals of ECG were used with LSTM to distinguish stress and depression
	[50] Panic disorders	Mean heart rate, SDNN, RMSSD, approximate entropy and power of various frequency bands computed from the ECG signal were used with Logistic Regression, ANN, Gradient Boost and SVM
	[86] Depression	A hybrid QRS detection algorithm approach was used in detection of the peak values and calculation of heart rate. Matlab or Xilink is used for detection of depression
	[87] Depression	ECG time-domain features and frequency-domain features were used for diagnosis of depression using SVM

single modality for detection or prediction of mental disorder type or severity.

Electroencephalogram (EEG)

EEG captures the brain waves corresponding to diferent activities happening within the central nervous system. It is acquired through electrodes placed on the scalp. Diferent features of EEG in time domain and frequency domain can be extracted to analyse the type of signal. Most prominent features include statistical features in time and frequency domain such as mean, median, variance, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis along with time-domain features like peak amplitude and energy. Frequency-domain features include diferent frequency bands in EEG signals like delta, theta, alpha, beta and gamma. The features of EEG signals have been classifed using machine learning methods to detect diferent mental disorders. Table [3](#page-4-0) provides an overview of research studies which have explored the use of only EEG signals in detection of mental disorders.

Electrodermal Activity (EDA) or Galvanic Skin Response (GSR)

EDA or GSR refers to the electrical response of human skin with respect to variation in sweat secretion. It is expressed in terms of Skin Conductance Response (SCR) and Skin Conductance Level (SCL). The changes in electrodermal activity due to any mental disorder or during a mental stress task are a potential biomarker of mental disorders. Table [4](#page-5-0) provides an overview of research studies which have explored the use of EDA or GSR signals for detection of mental disorders.

Electrocardiogram (ECG)

Electrocardiogram captures the electrical activity in the heart. It is composed of a P-Wave followed by a QRS Complex which is followed by a T-Wave. The peak of the signal is the R of the QRS complex. The time between two successive R peaks is referred to as RR interval. Since the brain modulates the electrical activity of the human body, hence the ECG of an individual also refects the changes in mental state. Diferent features of ECG have been used with machine learning algorithms to discriminate between normal and aberrated ECGs and therefore can be utilised for automatic detection of mental disorders. Prominent features include statistical measures like mean, median and standard deviation as well as other features like heart rate variability (HRV), root mean sum of squares of diferences between normal to normal beat intervals (RMSSD), proportion of successive normal to normal beat intervals that difer more than *k* ms (pNNk), standard deviation of successive diferences (SDSD), low-frequency band (LF), high-frequency band (HF) and ratio of LF to HF. Table [5](#page-5-1) provides an overview of research studies which have explored the use of ECG signals only in detection of mental disorders.

Verbal and Non‑verbal Behaviour

Verbal and non-verbal behaviour is closely correlated with physical, mental and emotional state of an individual. Any mental impairment or emotional change refects in the behaviour of an individual. The analysis of changes in facial expressions, eye movements and speech in the presence of unfavourable mental states can provide biomarkers for mental disorder detection. Table [6](#page-6-0) provides an overview of research studies which have explored the use of human behaviour in detection of mental disorders.

Online Handwritten Signals

The exploration of novel bias-free methods for detection of mental disorders has led to research in various newer paradigms; with online handwritten signals being a prominent one. The benefts of this approach are that handwriting is a common daily task and does not need any specialised training for participants. As can be seen in Table [7,](#page-7-0) various studies have explored the use of online handwritten signals related to time, space and pressure in the feld of sentiment analysis, emotion recognition and by extension mental disorder detection.

Multimodal Approach

In multimodal approaches, two or more modalities are used for detecting mental disorders. There are two prominent approaches for fusion of multiple modalities—feature level fusion and decision level fusion. In feature level fusion, the features from multiple modalities are collected to form a single feature-set. A single classifer is then run on this featureset to make decisions. On the other hand, in decision level fusion, multiple classifers are run independently on featuresets of individual modalities. The results of these multiple classifers are then studied to form a single decision. Table [8](#page-8-1) provides an overview of research studies which have adopted a multimodal approach and used more than one biological signal in detection of mental disorders.

Table 7 Contemporary studies which have employed online handwritten signals

	Ref Focus of study	Summary	
[96]	disorder	Major depressive The study used a digitising tablet with an online software for data analysis. Various features such as in-air time/stroke, stroke width and pressure applied were analysed between depressed and control subjects. MANOVA and correlation analysis found statistically significant differences between the groups	
[97]	Depression, anxiety, stress	This study presented a publicly available database "EMOTHAW" for mental disorder detection using handwriting and drawing. Features like pen positions, timestamp, pressure applied and altitude were used with Decision Tree and Random Forest classifiers to identify mental state	
[47]	Stress, emotional state	This study proposed a database based on online handwritings and signatures for detection of mental stress and happy/ sad mood states. Features like time taken, pen velocity and acceleration. Altitude, pressure, etc. were used and multiple experiments were performed for detection of stress and emotional state utilising KNN and Random Forest classifiers	
	$[51]$ Moods in depression	The study used handwriting features collected from persons suffering from depression disorder. An ANOVA Test revealed statistically significant differences between negative and positive moods	
[44]	Depression	This study used stroke data obtained in Uchida-Kraepelin test to categorise data into low-risk and high-risk groups. Logistic Regression analysis along with various statistical tests was utilised to analyse the data	
[98]	Depression, anxiety, stress	This study adopts a novel methodology and used data collected from sensors collected during an online writing and drawing session. Features like pen displacement, positioning, timestamps, pen contact, altitude and pressure have been extracted via Principal Component Analysis. AutoML, an automatic knowledge discovery process, was used for different binary-class classification problems to categorise data as anxious, stressful or depressed	

Discussion

This section discusses the various fndings obtained after extensive analysis of selected literature. Various fndings obtained from the survey are discussed in the following subsections. As stated in the "[Diferent Approaches of](#page-2-1) [Mental Disorder Detection](#page-2-1)" section, physiological signals like EEG, GSR, ECG and EMG and behavioural patterns like handwriting, speech, eye movements and facial expressions have been extensively used for detection of mental disorders like depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and mental stress. Table [9](#page-9-0) provides a summary of diferent studies that have been discussed. The table shows the correlation between mental disorder studied, modalities used for detection and associated machine learning algorithms.

Different Biomarkers Used in Mental Disorder Detection

The diferent modalities used in mental disorder detection are EEG, ECG, EDA/GSR, EMG, eye movements, speech, online handwritten signals and facial expressions. Figure [2](#page-11-1) illustrates the use of diferent modalities in detecting mental disorders using machine learning. It can be inferred that in the selected corpus of related research studies, physiological signals like EEG, ECG and GSR have been most popular amongst researchers while behaviour-based modalities such as speech, facial expressions and eye movements have been explored less often. It has been observed that almost 31% of the publications opted for EEG as a modality while ECG and GSR were preferred by 25% and 19% of researchers respectively. On the contrary, facial expressions and speech have been recommended

by just 8% of the total research publications. One reason for this can be that behaviour of a person is voluntary and can be controlled by the person, thereby not revealing the true results [\[106–](#page-17-16)[108\]](#page-17-17). Second reason can be that the experimental environment can change the normal behaviour of the person [[109](#page-17-18)]. Another reason can be that behavioural changes vary to a great extent between individuals and can be subjective [[110](#page-17-19)]. Still, research studies indicate that behavioural modalities provide important insights into mental disorder detection.

Features Used in Mental Disorder Detection

Table [10](#page-12-0) provides an overview of the most prominent features of physiological and behavioural signals used along with detailing the type of mental disorder they have been used for.

Prominent Machine Learning Algorithms Employed in Mental Disorder Detection

The research studies included in the selected corpus have used different algorithms with various biomarkers for automatic classifcation and detection of mental disorders. However, the prominent ones are Support Vector Machines, k-nearest neighbour, Logistic Regression, Decision Trees, Naïve Bayes, Linear Discriminant Analysis, Random Forest, Artifcial Neural Networks and CNN. As seen in Fig. [3,](#page-13-0) amongst the selected corpus of articles, SVM has been used about 24% of the times with k-nearest neighbour, Logistic Regression, Decision Trees and Naïve Bayes algorithms with around 8–10% usage. This can be due to the fact that SVM provides a fne balance between complexity and performance and therefore has been used as a baseline in most of the research studies. Also, Artifcial Neural Network–based algorithms have been collectively used by about only 17% of the studies despite their high efficiency. Also, some algorithms like AdaBoost, Bayes Net, Radial Basis Function Network, Quadratic Discriminant Analysis, Partial Least Square, Gradient Boost and Gaussian Mixture Model have been used very sparsely as seen in Fig. [3](#page-13-0) because of their high complexity when dealing with multifeature data.

Research Challenges

The traditional methods of mental disorder detection like questionnaires rely on information provided by the individual. Besides being static in nature, these methods also cannot efectively verify the authenticity of the collected data. Hence, robust methods are required to identify or correct fabricated or tampered data. The research community has recommended the use of biomarkers related to various physiological and behavioural modalities like EEG, GSR, EMG, ECG, facial expressions, eye movements and speech for detection of mental disorders. While these approaches are objective in nature, behaviour can be faked or controlled by an individual. An individual who is conscious can easily manipulate his or her facial expressions, speech and eye movements. This mandates the requirement of methods, which can segregate genuine and controlled behaviour. Furthermore, emotional state of an individual plays a major role in the collection of data that has originated from human response, be it physiological or behavioural in nature [\[111](#page-17-20)]. Therefore, it becomes important to incorporate the efect of emotions on signals and further onto the analysis. Investigating this entire domain from the purview of decision intelligence may open numerous diferent research tracks related to mental health and diagnosis. Quantifcation of emotive feedback of respondents is also a major challenge for limited experimentation to diagnose mental disorders through facial expressions. Also, physiological responses vary between individuals due to human morphology and demographic factors like gender, race and age [[112\]](#page-17-21). This variability needs to be managed to produce efficient and usable results. Furthermore, the experimental setups mentioned in the literature

Table 10 Diferent features used in mental disorder detection

Table 10 (continued)

Fig. 3 Percentage of algorithms from corpus which was used for detection of mental disorders

surveyed are inconsistent. For instance, diferent studies have mentioned diferent upper or lower bandwidths for frequency bands of EEG and ECG signals. Furthermore, the results obtained depend hugely on what features have been selected and which algorithm has been implemented. The selection of features-algorithms pair should be optimum to attain best results. Furthermore, collecting data from individuals sufering from mental disorders presents an ethical challenge [\[113\]](#page-17-22). That could be the reason for limited availability of standardised and annotated publicly available datasets pertaining to mental disorders.

Conclusion

Mental disorders are one of the leading contributors to global burden of diseases. They are one of the emerging challenges of the society. They can lead to lack of attention at work, dropping out of education, bad social behaviour and even suicide. So, there is a need for self-diagnostic methods which can automate the detection of mental disorders. The self-diagnosis tools for detection of mental disorders like questionnaires and rating scales are inconsistent and static in nature. They cannot encompass the diversity of mental disorders, inter-individual

variability and impact of emotional state of an individual. Furthermore, there are no standard baselines for mental disorder datasets available. Stress of one person can be anxiety for another person and even depression for a third person. Hence, a multi-faceted approach is recommended where one can utilise data from physiological signals, behavioural patterns and even data obtained from various online portals like social media to efficiently and effectively detect the prevalence, type and severity of mental disorders.

Declarations

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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