Tracking, disruption of stress-concepts and epistemic categories in mental health

Consumer and medical tools increasingly measure stress via machine learning, promising personalized, timely and cost-efficient mental health care. At the same time these technologies shape users' self-understanding and conceptions of "stress," potentially disrupting social practices of mental health care.

This contribution critically analyzes how different monitoring technologies implicitly envision stress by virtue of their input and algorithms, and how this conceptualization may obscure important aspects of deliberation about mental health. I suggest that an opaque and narrow concept of stress risks individualizing social problems, sidelining relational and embodied knowledge, and may foster superficial engagement with psychological distress by users.

Assuming AI-driven health-tracking will enter practice, this critique not only highlights shortcomings but also serves to inform guidelines for responsible implementation in clinical and preclinical contexts. I briefly outline how psychiatrist-led DESTRESS consortium aims to develop such guidelines in cocreation with clinicians, occupational health professionals, and experience experts.