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# A Vision of a Framework for Evaluating and Rating Online Counseling Applications in China

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# Background

- The current variety of online counseling applications on the market makes it difficult to choose, and there is a certain necessity for the emergence of this phenomenon:
- 1. **COVID-19 epidemic**, due to the prolonged epidemic blocking and controlling in China, the group of users who need to seek enlightenment and counseling is rapidly expanding, and when face-to-face treatments are restricted, the counselors and clients are forced to turn to online psychotherapy
- 2. Development of the use of **digital information and communication technologies (ICTs)**, online counseling has become intelligent, efficient, and diversified
- 3. The innovation of new **therapeutic modalities** such as Internet-delivered cognitive behavior therapy (ICBT) & Digital storytelling(DST)

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# Background

An illustration of a woman with dark, wavy hair sitting on a teal sofa with yellow cushions. She is wearing a white top and blue pants. Above her are three thought bubbles: one containing a brain, one containing a circle, and one containing a square. The background features faint, light green leaf patterns.

Which one to  
choose?

How about the  
Effectiveness &  
Reliability?

# Research method & goal

- Paper review: Search 5 databases, including PubMed, Scopus, ProQuest, CNKI, and Google Scholar

From January 2014 to July 2024, search terms were “application” and “mental health” and “assessment framework” or “assessment tool”. This paper focused on reviewing the relevant literature on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (n=22) and found that the number of literature discussing mental health app assessment was 0.

- Classify and analyze the usability of assessment frameworks and assessment tools to develop a unified Rating rubric

# Results

■ Available frameworks/tools:

1. APA framework
2. MARs & uMARs
3. ORCHA
4. PGCRS (One Mind PsyberGuide)
5. Enlight
6. TEACH-Apps(based on APA)

- Available frameworks/tools for users-----uMARs (Changing professional jargon into words that users can understand)
- Third-party platform/app: ORCHA, One Mind PsyberGuide, TEACH-Apps

# Results

- Compare different frameworks and tools' assessment criteria\*

APA: access and background/privacy and security/clinical foundation/usability/data integration (providing a user-centered approach)

MARs: engagement/Functionality/Aesthetics/Information

ORCHA: Clinical assurance and safety/Data and privacy/Usability and accessibility

PGCRS (One Mind PsyberGuide): credibility/transparency/use experience/professional review

Enlight: Usability/Visual Design/User Engagement/Content/Therapeutic Persuasiveness/Therapeutic Alliance/General Subjective Evaluation of Program's Potential/Credibility Checklist/Evidence-Based Program/Privacy Explanation Checklist/Basic Security Checklist

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\*Similar criteria are labeled using the same color blocks

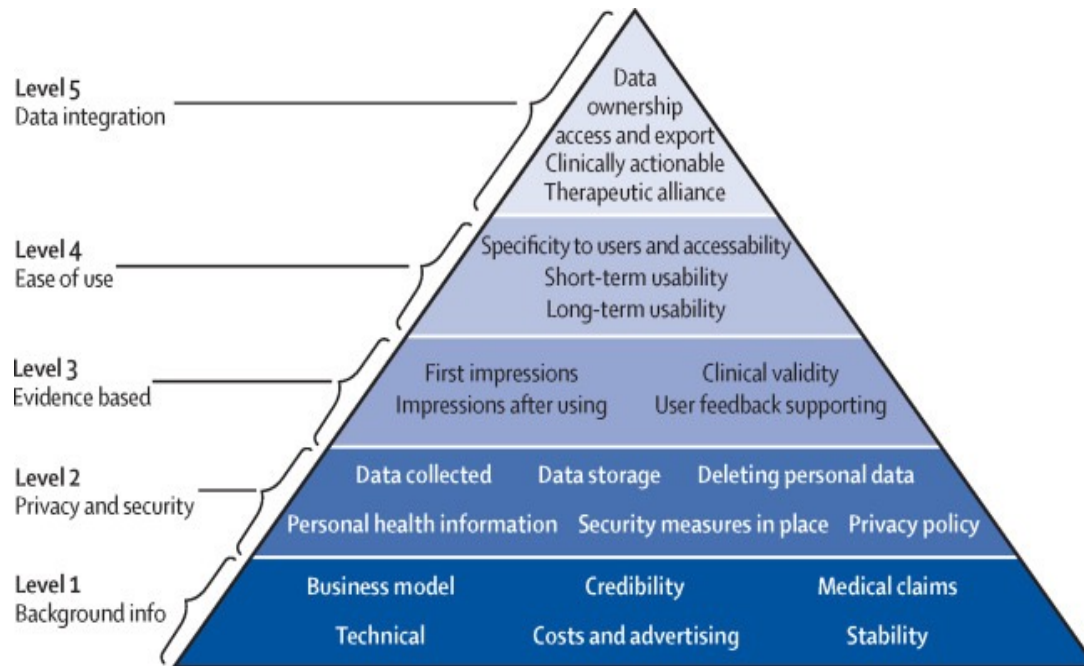


# Results

1. Some frameworks are only at the **conceptual level** and have not been adequately tested in practice
2. Some assessment frameworks or tools **lacked key criteria**
3. Some frameworks have a **high barrier to use**, lack guidance and explanations, and can only be used by psychological practitioners.
4. It is easy to see that individual criteria in some frameworks are **subjective**

# rating rubric

- The rating rubric draws on the existing APA framework but adapts it to user needs.



# rating rubric

- The rating rubric focuses on five key dimensions:
  1. access and background
  2. privacy and security
  3. clinical foundation
  4. usability
  5. data integration-providing a user-centered approach

Level	★★★★★ (Excellent)	★★★★ (very good)	★★★ (good)	★★ (needs improvement)	★ (poor)	Five-star rating
<b>Access and background</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application can be fully utilized on a wide range of devices and platforms</li> <li>The developer of this application updates it frequently (last update within 3 months)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application is compatible with most devices and platforms</li> <li>Developers of this application update more frequently (last update within 3-6 months)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application is only compatible with some devices and platforms</li> <li>Developers of this application update less frequently (last update within 6-12 months)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application has very poor compatibility</li> <li>The application developer updates very infrequently (the last update was over 1 year ago)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The software is completely useless in the access and background part</li> </ul>	★★★
<b>Privacy and security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application has a very clear and transparent privacy policy and is easy to access</li> <li>The application's data usage is clearly defined and the user has full access to all data (full logout and deletion possible)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The program's privacy policy is clear and transparent, but the access portal is difficult to find.</li> <li>The application's data use and purpose are informed and the user has permission to process the data (possibility to withdraw from data collection and delete data)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are no obvious bugs in the program's privacy policy, but the access portal is difficult to find.</li> <li>The application's data purpose is vague and it is difficult for users to find an entry point for their own data processing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application's privacy policy has obvious bugs or there is no access portal.</li> <li>The application is not informed about the purpose of the data and the user is not able to logout and process personal data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The software is completely useless in the privacy and security part</li> </ul>	★★★
<b>Clinical foundation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application's functions are all practicable</li> <li>The application has sufficient relevant evidence (e.g., literature, institutional research, user feedback, etc.) of benefit and effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most of the program's functions are feasible</li> <li>Most of the content of the application has evidence(e.g., literature, institutional research, user feedback, etc.) of benefit and effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most of the application's functions are not feasible, but some of the functions can be implemented.</li> <li>The evidence(e.g., literature, institutional research, user feedback, etc.) of the benefits and effectiveness of the application is poor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The application is basically unable to perform its stated functions.</li> <li>Basically no evidence(e.g., literature, institutional research, user feedback, etc.) was found for the application</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The software is completely useless in the clinical foundation part</li> </ul>	★★★★
<b>Usability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to use app immediately; easy to learn; intuitive; simple</li> <li>This app content and function appropriate for the target group</li> <li>The application is perfectly suited for long-term use</li> <li>The application allows for complete customization.(users can change any modules in this app)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Useable after some time/effort</li> <li>This app content and function most part are appropriate for the target group</li> <li>Most of the functions of the application can be used for a long time, but a few functions do not attract customers to stick to them</li> <li>The application allows for partial customization of content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Useable after a lot of time/effort</li> <li>The functional scope and target groups of the application are Acceptable but unclear/confusing</li> <li>Most of the app's functions are not suitable for long-term use</li> <li>The application allows for minimal and simple customization. (users can change any modules in this app)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No/limited instructions; menu labels/icons are confusing;complicated</li> <li>The functional scope and target groups of the application are Mostly inappropriate/unclear/conf using</li> <li>The application can only be used for a short period of time</li> <li>The application basically cannot be customized. (users can change any modules in this app)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The software is completely useless in the usability part</li> </ul>	★★★★
<b>Data integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Users can freely obtain, access and share all personal data</li> <li>The app resulted in a completely positive behavior change</li> <li>The app is perfect for improving and enhancing the therapeutic alliance(a trusting relationship to achieve the best results). between patients and providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Users can obtain, access and share most personal data</li> <li>The app resulted in some positive behavior changes for the user</li> <li>The app has greatly improved the therapeutic alliance(a trusting relationship to achieve the best results) between patients and providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Users have difficulty obtaining, accessing and sharing personal data and can only obtain a small portion of the data</li> <li>The app had less impact on positive behavior change in the user</li> <li>The app does less to improve the therapeutic alliance(a trusting relationship to achieve the best results) between patients and providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Users basically don't have permission to obtain, access and share personal data</li> <li>The app was almost ineffective in clinical practice.</li> <li>The app does not improve and enhance the therapeutic alliance(a trusting relationship to achieve the best results) between patients and providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The software is completely useless in the data integration part</li> </ul>	★★★
<b>Name</b>	壹心理(One Psychology)					Average rating: ★★★★★

# Further Discussions

## Limitations:

- Lack of empirical research on validity testing
- Still needs to be adapted for practical feedback in the Chinese market

## Future Directions:

- Refine the rating rubric constantly
- Investigating and studying the cultural and regional specificities of China to conduct a cross-sectional comparative study with the application of assessment frameworks in other countries



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