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Imager - mental imagery-based mHealth Ecological Momentary Intervention to increase resilience
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COVID-19 pandemic caused a worldwide crisis and included unique kinds of stressors in daily life, as well as the heightened prevalence of psychiatric disorders. Hence, there is an urgent need to develop scalable therapeutic strategies to help people maintain and increase psychological well-being. One potential remedy could be Ecological Momentary Interventions (EMI), which allow for delivering treatment in the daily life of patients, for instance, with the use of mHealth apps. Our app - Imager - is based on recent findings that assign reward sensitivity a key role as a resilience factor and employ a transdiagnostic approach - mental imagery, in this case focused on rewarding future events. It has been known as a “cognitive vaccine” against affective disorders. However, to our knowledge, there were no mHealth apps targeting reward sensitivity and based on mental imagery yet. In this study, 95 healthy students were randomly allocated to either Intervention (IG) or Control Group (CG) and used the app for one week. IG received mental imagery training via Imager 3 times per day, while CG filled in surveys about their current mood. Data were analyzed using linear mixed models.

Adherence was high, over 93%. Imager was effective in decreasing depressive symptoms ($\beta=-0.44$, df=93, $p=0.013$), anxiety symptoms ($\beta=-0.1$, df=93, $p=0.01$) and level of stress ($\beta=-0.07$, df=93, $p=0.04$) in healthy students after one week of usage as compared to an active control group. It renders Imager feasible, specifically in group of young individuals, which have been shown to be severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.