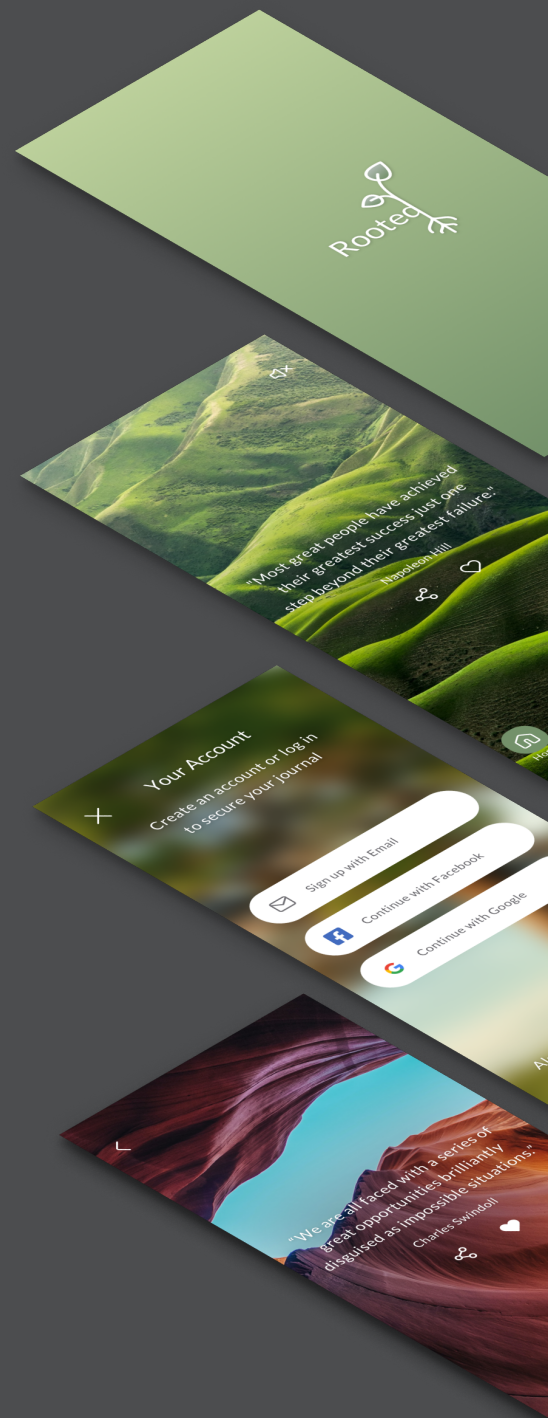


Rooted App Secondary Research

By Yolanda Sutherland



Secondary Research Report

Prescriptions for anxiety, depression, and insomnia medications dramatically increased when COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March 2020. The sudden, increased use of medications to treat depression, anxiety, and sleep disorders demonstrates the significant impact COVID-19 may be having on America's mental health.

The stress caused by COVID-19 is having a negative effect on people's mental health. In a national survey released by the [American Psychiatric Association](#) in March, 36% of respondents said that COVID-19 was seriously impacting their mental health, echoing the 34% increase in anti-anxiety medication prescriptions between mid-February and mid-March reported by [Express Scripts](#).

The APA survey also revealed that 48% of respondents were anxious about getting infected; almost half are worried about running out of food, medicine, or supplies; and 57% reported concern that COVID-19 will seriously affect their finances. Corresponding findings from a recent review of the [psychological impact of quarantine](#) revealed adverse psychological effects such as stress, depression, irritability, insomnia, fear, confusion, anger, and frustration resulting from longer quarantine duration, fear of getting infected, running out of supplies, and fear of resulting financial loss.

New data released by the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) in September 2020 also show that nearly one-third of Americans report having symptoms of clinical anxiety or depression. The negative impact of COVID-19 on mental health may increase as the duration of the pandemic and self-quarantine continue.

Emerging research suggests that mobile health applications (mHealth apps) can [effectively treat anxiety](#) and [depression](#) and offer advantages over in-person treatment. Specifically, mHealth platforms support autonomy and empowerment, which, for people with anxiety and depression, can be [barriers](#) to seeking and completing in-person treatment. Further, mHealth interventions may be more accessible because users tend to keep their mobile devices nearby throughout the day—mHealth apps can make mental health interventions more accessible and portable.

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Effective mHealth apps must include evidence-based therapeutic content, such as psychoeducation, relaxation, mindfulness, meditation, problem-solving, or cognitive restructuring. Other critical factors to their adoption include positive publicity, provider endorsement, and transparency about privacy and efficacy. Emerging research suggests that gamifying (e.g. point scoring, competition with others, rules of play) mHealth apps could increase their appeal to adolescents.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is an effective, research-based form of psychotherapy designed to manage anxiety and depression and boost well-being as quickly as possible—relative to psychoanalysis, which focuses on healing childhood trauma that influences the present moment. CBT has a cognitive component that focuses on changing thoughts that negatively impact our feelings and behaviors and a behavioral component that focuses on developing actions that promote positive feelings and behaviors. CBT is rooted in the interplay between our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in the present moment.

Another therapeutic approach, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), is grounded in the idea that we can relieve suffering by focusing our thoughts on the present moment. MBSR treatment has been integrated into some CBT programs and is called the "third wave" of CBT. Together, CBT with MBSR strategies can effectively relieve anxiety and depression.

Gratitude, the quality of being thankful, and appreciating and showing kindness, can promote positive feelings and behaviors. There is empirical evidence that gratitude and dispositional optimism support subjective, emotional well-being. Gratitude also stimulates the part of the brain associated with self-benefit and life-satisfaction. Supporting the principles of CBT and MBSR, practicing habitual gratitude can relieve symptoms of clinical anxiety and depression, which a third of Americans report experiencing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If our thoughts can influence our emotions and behaviors, then positive thoughts can promote positive feelings and behaviors. I propose to design a mHealth app that employs positive psychology, gratitude, and prompting to encourage habitual mindfulness and positive and supportive ways of thinking and behaving.