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From Research to Reality: An exclusive interview with Sara Močnik, Medical Doctor

Sara Močnik, Medical Doctor, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Resident, and Researcher at the **University of Maribor**, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science –a partner in the **SMILE project**– discusses her recent scientific publication and its implications for SMILE. Her latest study, titled *“Beyond clinical observations: a scoping review of AI-detectable observable cues in borderline personality disorder”*, authored by **Sara Močnik, Urška Smrke, Izidor Mlakar, Grega Močnik, Hojka Gregorič Kumperščak**, and **Nejc Plohl**, and published in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, explores how AI can identify observable cues in Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) ([DOI: 10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1345916](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1345916)). This research aligns with the SMILE project’s mission to enhance digital interventions for young people.

“Digital biomarkers are objective, measurable data collected through devices like smartphones, wearables, and health apps,” explained Močnik. These tools capture physiological and behavioral patterns, providing *“real-time insights into an individual’s emotional and cognitive state”*. While SMILE’s tools currently do not incorporate validated digital biomarkers, they collect valuable data on behavioral patterns and mood responses through the Serious Game and Companion Mobile App. *“By analyzing this data, we aim to identify trends that could lead to the development of validated biomarkers,”* Močnik elaborated, highlighting the potential of SMILE’s ongoing Living Labs to address biases in mental health research: *“By incorporating diverse populations from multiple regions, SMILE can ensure broader gender and demographic representation, overcoming the biases seen in past studies”*.

An intriguing aspect of Močnik’s research is the concept of “social smiles”—smiles used to signal friendliness or align with social norms, even during negative emotional states. *“In individuals with BPD, social smiles can mask internal distress,”* she explained. *“By examining these smiles, we gain a deeper understanding of emotional regulation, highlighting the need for nuanced diagnostic and therapeutic approaches.”*

Read the full interview to explore how Sara Močnik’s research and SMILE’s initiatives are shaping the future of digital mental health interventions: [Interview PDF](#).

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