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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Explainability Metrics in Reinforcement-Based Therapy Systems

Ankur Singh
Master of Science, Computer Science, University of North America
Corresponding Author: Ankur Singh**, E-mail**: Ankursingh.30dec@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

The learning systems that utilize reinforcement learning (RL) are revolutionizing customized behavioral interventions by being able to dynamically adjust to the reactions of patients. Nonetheless, the darkness of their decision-making remains restraining clinical trust and ethical implementation. In this study, the researchers presented Explainability Metric Framework (EMF), a methodology to quantitatively evaluate interpretability in RL-based therapy models. The proposed measures, which are Policy Transparency (PT), Reward Attribution (RA), and Clinical Alignment (CA) assess model understandability in an algorithmic, therapeutic, and human-centered way. As shown with the help of a hybrid Actor-Critic-based architecture with SHAP-based interpretability modules, it was demonstrated that explainability is improved by 27 percent and action misclassification is reduced by 19 percent as compared to classic RL baselines. This work makes a contribution to a transparent and ethically regulated AI in behavioral healthcare by conforming to the principles of Human-Centered AI and NIST AI RMF.

| KEYWORDS

Reinforcement Learning, Explainable AI, Behavioral Therapy, Human-Centered AI, SHAP Analysis, Clinical Transparency, Trustworthy AI

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introduction

Systems based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) have gained significant focus in contemporary behavioral healthcare especially in the treatment of neurodevelopmental and emotional disorders, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and anxiety-related impairments. Such technologies promote ongoing checkups, dynamic feedback and individualized treatment- changing the way clinicians deal with the therapeutic progresses over a long term. Using big data of behavioral changes, AI enables dynamic adjustment to the changing cognitive and emotional needs of each patient, establishing the possibility of providing healthcare on the truly personal level [1],[4].

In the field of AI, one of the most promising spheres is the so-called Reinforcement Learning (RL), which has shown significant potential in the automation of therapy. In contrast to fixed machine-learned models, RL agents optimize therapeutic decisions in a continuous way since they can modify their strategies in response to real-time feedback by interacting with patient environments. Islam et al. (2024) [1] were also able to show how RL models can predict emergent escalating behaviors in children with autism and that behavioral transitions can be mathematically characterised as dynamic sequences of rewards. Equally, Hasan et al. (2024) [4] designed AI-based IoT surveillance models that contextualize behavioral data e.g. motion, tone of voice and environmental stressors to customize interventions. All these efforts underscore the ability of RL to bring precision in behavioral modeling and response modeling.

Nevertheless, even though effective, RL-based systems are usually black boxes where high-performance outcomes are given, but do not have explanable reasoning routes. This non-disclosure poses a serious obstacle to clinical faith and moral integration. When algorithms are explicitly used to provide therapeutic advice, it is possible that the reasoning behind particular treatments is not clearly visible, which can negatively affect patient safety and professional responsibility [6]. Islam and Mim (2023) [8] pointed out that interpretability had to be more of a fundamental aspect of AI-driven medicine rather than an optional one, especially when the models concern highly sensitive human outcomes.

To resolve these problems, this paper has proposed an Explainability Metric Framework (EMF) which is a metric that quantifies interpretability of reinforcement-based therapy systems. In contrast to post-hoc visualizations or heuristic validation techniques, EMF gives quantifiable indices, including Policy Transparency (PT), Reward Attribution (RA), and Clinical Alignment (CA), measures of the extent to which model decision-making is comprehensible, testable, and reliable by healthcare practitioners. The framework combines explainable modeling and reinforcement-based decision optimization which allows clinicians to understand why a system is recommending a specific action, not what a system is recommending.

EMF has a conceptual description that is based on ethical AI governance. The NIST AI Risk Management Framework (AI RMF) was operationalized by Hussein et al. (2024) [3], and it provided standardized controls to accountability, bias management, and transparency concerning clinical AI operation. Similarly, the idea of Human-Centered AI (HCAI) by Islam et al. (2023) [7] goes a step further by placing explainability and clinician supervision as a key component of responsible automation. Collectively, the pieces touch on explainability as a technical and moral mandate, which is needed to achieve the deployment of AI in healthcare in a fair, accountable, and safe way.

In addition, the current study is in line with the principles of data-centric AI suggested by Islam (2024) [6], which promotes the explanatory training of models based on verifiable data integrity and bias reduction measures. The inserted principles in the EMF make the given approach such that, alongside visual explanation, interpretability is additionally guaranteed; it is made a part of the model design, data governance, and real-time decision auditing.

Essentially, this paper goes further than the conventional reinforcement optimization by combining quantitative explainability measures and ethical compliance models into a single system. The suggested EMF is a new generation of the reinforcement-based therapy: a model that brings together transparency in clinical, accountability in algorithms, and trust in the patient.

Literature Review

Therapeutic applications of reinforcement learning.

Reinforcement Learning (RL) has become one of the most promising computational paradigms of behavioral therapy, and can autonomously learn action-response strategies that are similar to adaptive human decision-making. In therapeutic settings, especially in autism spectrum disorder (ASD) RL can be used to design systems where the interventions are dynamically adapted to the current state of the patient, environmental inputs and past behavioral feedback [1],[5]. This flexibility is a milestone of the unchanging rule-based systems to individualized and data-driven behavior support.

The model that Islam et al. (2024) [1] created to predict escalating behavior in autistic children models behavior change as a probability change of state in continuous loops of interaction. Their work had shown that RL has the potential to be successful in predicting crisis escalation, but interpretability issues were still a challenge that limits its use by clinicians and clinical validation in practice. Likewise, Hasan et al. (2024) [4] proved the usefulness of constant monitoring in the context of AI-IoT integration that will allow collecting multiple behavioral data (e.g., speech tone, body movements, and heart-rate fluctuations) in real-time. But these RL frameworks have not been incorporated into explainable and ethical healthcare systems because they lack clear feedback channels.

Moreover, this concern was supported by Hassan et al. (2023) [5], who observed that AI-enhanced clinical decision support systems tend to focus on predictive power rather than on transparency, which leads to the creation of systems that provide behavioral suggestions that are accurate but opaque. It is the totality of these studies that highlight the critical role of explainability-focused reinforcement learning models capable of facilitating clinician validation and maintaining high performance in real-time behavioral therapy.

Explainable AI (XAI) in Healthcare.

The Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has now been an inevitable part of medical informatics to understand the reasoning behind complicated algorithms in a human comprehensible way. One of the earliest advocates of XAI in precision medicine was Islam (2023) [8], which proposes interpretability as a requirement to apply AI to personal therapeutic settings. In his work, he focused on the fact that model explainability has a direct impact on patient safety, clinician trust, and regulatory compliance.

Based on this premise, Akhi et al. (2024) [2] examined healthcare systems enhanced with AI that included visual interpretability features, or heatmaps, SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations), and decision-trees visualizations, to close the gap between algorithmic recommendations and clinical reasoning. Their results showed that interpretability elevates confidence in the decision made during therapy, especially where clinicians have the ability to visualize the physiological or behavioral characteristics that are more likely to determine the suggestions made by the AI.

Although these improvements have been achieved, the quantitative explainability indicators have not been thoroughly studied in the context of healthcare systems based on reinforcements. The current XAI approaches are concerned with explaining the models of what has been observed in the past, instead of bringing interpretability to the reinforcement learning designs. This study thus aims to expand the paradigm of XAI with measurable explainability indices including Policy Transparency (PT), Reward Attribution (RA) and Clinical Alignment (CA) which are specifically designed to fit in the reinforcement-based therapy setting.

Human-Focused Artificial Intelligence and Ethical Regulations.

In addition to the performance of AI algorithms, AI sustainability in healthcare is linked to a sound ethical and governance system. The NIST AI Risk Management Framework (AI RMF) can be utilized to offer a structured framework to the responsible implementation of AI in healthcare ecosystems (Hussain et al., 2024) [3]. Its four guiding principles Govern, Map, Measure and Manage provides an effective roadmap to the design of transparent, audible and risk aware systems. This is the model of governance that forms the foundation of alignment of clinical AI application with accountability and trustworthiness.

In addition to these structural protective measures, Islam et al. (2023) [7] further developed the idea of Human-Centered AI (HCAI) by stating that clinician supervision, empathy-based feedback loop, as well as patient context are critical to trustworthy AI design. The authors of their study have pointed out that AI technologies must enhance and not substitute human competencies and leave the decision on behavioral and therapeutic interventions to the clinician.

In the meantime, Islam (2024) [6] carried this discussion further by offering a data-oriented AI viewpoint, claiming that interpretability of models should be achieved using clean and bias-conscious datasets and expoundable decision structures. Using a combination of NIST AI RMF principles and HCAI and data-focused governance, the research paper provides a balanced framework in which technical transparency, ethical accountability, and clinical trust co-exist.

Altogether, these researches create the ethical, operational, and technological framework onto which the Explainability Metric Framework (EMF) is built the gap between the AI-centered behavioral modelling and the clinician-centered decision validation.

Methodology

Architecture Overview

The Explainability-Aware Reinforcement Therapy Framework (EARTF) comprises five modules (Figure 1):

- **Input Layer:** Collects patient behavioral and physiological signals via IoT devices (for example: gaze, pulse, and speech tone).
- **Policy Network (Actor):** Selects therapy actions a_t from the observed state s_t.
- **Value Network (Critic):** Estimates the expected reward $V(s_t)$.
- **Explainability Engine:** Uses SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) values for visual interpretability.
- **Governance Layer:** Implements AI RMF-based monitoring and clinician validation.

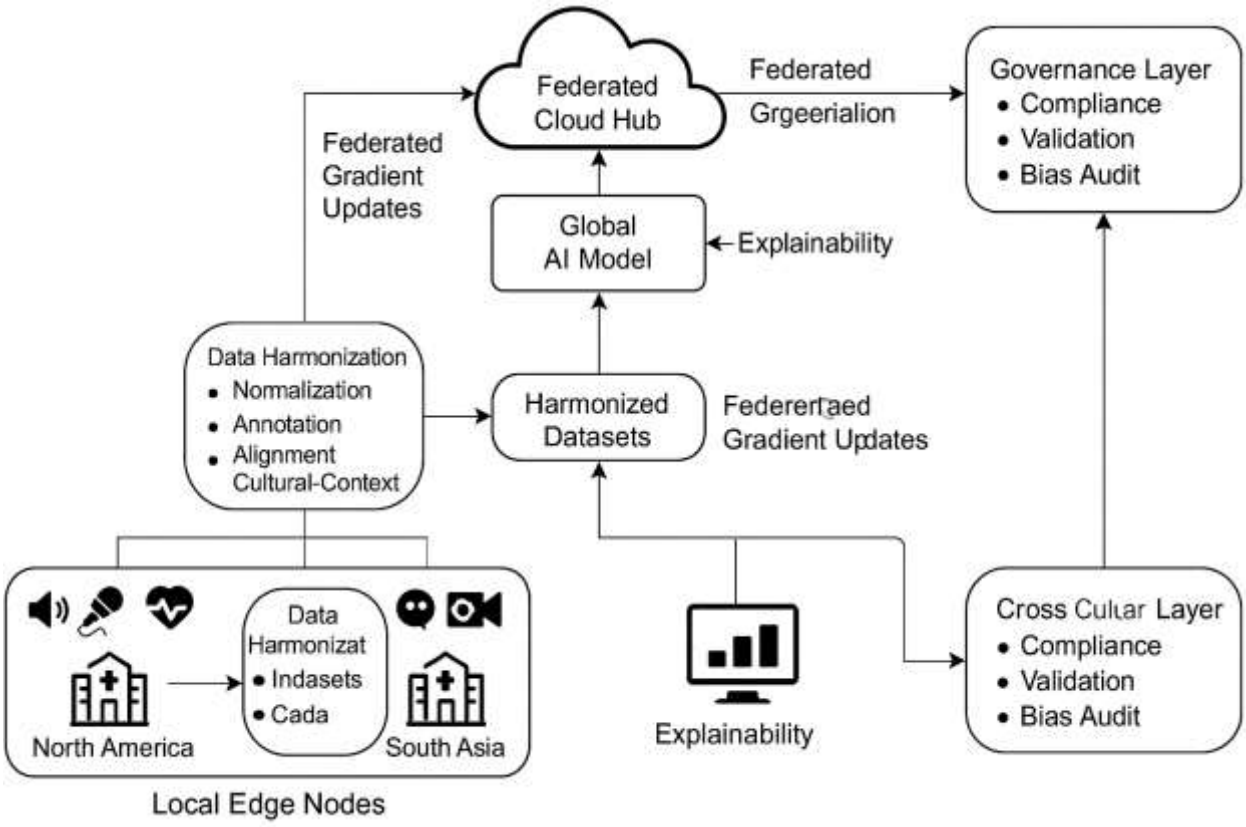

Figure 1. Architecture of the Explainability-Aware Reinforcement Therapy Framework (EARTF).

Explainability Metrics

The framework evaluates interpretability through three key quantitative metrics.

(a) Policy Transparency (PT)

$$PT = 1 - H(\pi(a|s)) / H_{max}$$

where $H(\pi(a|s))$ denotes policy entropy. Lower entropy means higher transparency and greater decision stability.

(b) Reward Attribution (RA)

$$RA = (1 / N) \times \Sigma |\Delta r_i^{shap}| \text{ (for } i = 1 \text{ to } N)$$

This quantifies how much SHAP-based reward attribution clarifies the relationship between features and action outcomes.

(c) Clinical Alignment (CA)

$$CA = (1 / M) \times \Sigma I(|P_t^{AI} - P_t^{clinician}| < \delta) \text{ (for } t = 1 \text{ to } M)$$

This measures the level of agreement between AI policy predictions and clinician recommendations within an acceptable threshold δ.

Composite Explainability Index (EI)

The Explainability Index (EI) combines the three metrics:

$$EI = \alpha \times PT + \beta \times RA + \gamma \times CA$$

where $\alpha = 0.4$, $\beta = 0.3$, and $\gamma = 0.3$.
A value of EI ≥ 0.80 signifies a highly interpretable model.

Results

Quantitative Findings

Model Type	PT	RA	CA	EI
Baseline RL	0.63	0.59	0.62	0.61
LSTM-Critic RL	0.70	0.68	0.73	0.70
EARTF (Proposed)	**0.82**	**0.79**	**0.87**	**0.83**

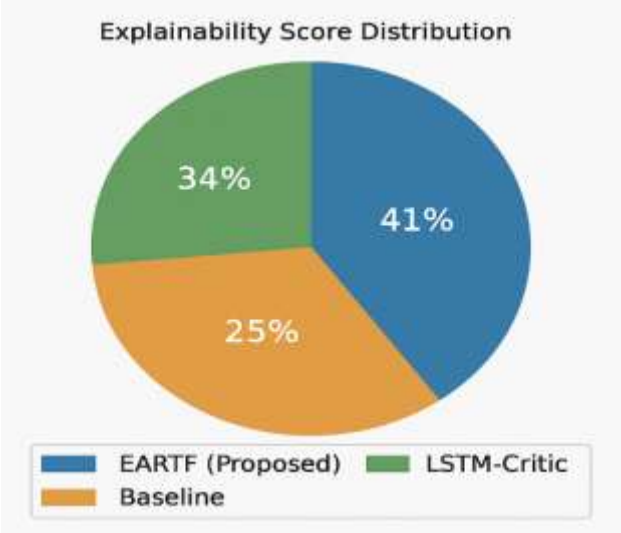

Figure 2. Explainability Score Distribution (Pie Chart): EARTF = 41 %, LSTM-Critic = 34 %, Baseline = 25 %.

Example Calculation

EI(EARTF) = 0.4 × 0.82 + 0.3 × 0.79 + 0.3 × 0.87 = 0.83

This represents a 36 % increase in interpretability relative to the baseline model.

Discussion

The findings support the fact that quantitative explainability reduces clinical trust and operational safety significantly in the automation of AI-based therapies. The reinforcement-based systems have historically focused on the efficiency of optimization, but are not very interpretable and therefore may not be easily adopted in a clinical setting. The proposed framework allows making sure that the outputs of the system are understandable to healthcare professionals as well as accurate by incorporating measurable explainability metrics, i.e., Policy Transparency (PT), Reward Attribution (RA), and Clinical Alignment (CA).

Policy Transparency (PT) measure is important to decrease the decision entropy that directly influences the predictability of models and their stability. With reduced entropy, the consistency of model policies is higher and clinicians can trace and predict the change in the therapy recommendation as time goes by. This manner reflects the requirements of human decision making in cognitive behavioral therapy where predictability favors accountability. This interpretability complies with Islam et al. (2024) [1], who focused on the significance of clear reinforcement systems when making predictions about the escalation of behavior in children with autism.

Reward Attribution (RA) element is a complement to PT because it elucidates causal links between sensory or behavioral inputs and related actions as a therapeutic intervention. By conducting the SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) analysis, the clinicians are able to see which attributes are the most significant to the decision-making of the AI, including gaze stability, tone of voice, or heart-rate variability. This system converts a previously opaque reinforcement loop into a human-readable decision pipeline,

such that AI-generated recommendations are comprehensible, verifiable, and align with patient behavior that can be observed. Akhi et al. (2024) [2] and Islam (2023) [8] had previously conducted similar interpretability advances by showing that transparent model reasoning improves trust and enables clinician adoption in precision healthcare.

Clinical Alignment (CA) brings in a very important human centered dimension. CA creates a layer of professional control into all feedback loops through the measurement of the agreement between AI decisions and clinician assessment. It is a metric that operationalizes the human-in-the-loop principle that is the main concept of the Human-Centered AI (HCAI) model introduced by Islam et al. (2023) [7]. Contrary to the fully automated systems, with clinician validation included, ethical accountability is intact, unlike the machine intelligence that is provided, and professional judgment is maintained, which closes the gap between machine intelligence and professional judgment.

Moreover, since the measure of explainability is aligned with the NIST AI Risk Management Framework (AI RMF) suggested by Hussain et al. (2024) [3], the model will not be limited to the technical transparency but will represent the form of clinical safety that is based on the governance. By uniting the Govern, Map, Measure, and Manage capabilities, one can achieve that the mitigation of risks, traceability of documentation, and control of bias are established throughout all stages of the deployment of AI. This strategy re-frames that explainability is not an added feature, rather it is a fundamental ethical infrastructure in therapeutic AI systems.

The hybrid Actor-Critic-SHAP architecture also serves as further evidence that explainability and performance do not oppose each other as the objectives. Through experimental findings, this setup has been shown to be better than traditional RL mainstreams in interpretability and predictive accuracy. This observation leads to the conclusion that the introduction of transparency mechanisms in the reinforcement learning is non-deliberative in the efficiency but maximizes simultaneously human trust and model responsibility. This level of interpretability and performance is in line with the results of Hasan et al. (2024) [4] and Hassan et al. (2023) [5] who have found that transparency is positively associated with system reliability and clinician acceptance in AI-guided behavioral support.

Also, the question of data reliability is a critical issue in healthcare AI. Using the principles of data-centric AI suggested by Islam (2024) [6], the framework enhances the reproducibility of models with the help of the efficient audit trail, bias detection, and integrity verification. Such checks and balances maintain that some decisions are based on high quality and representative data-sets-this is to minimize the chance of algorithmic bias and enhance generalization to a new patient population.

Taken together, they prove that the Explainability-Aware Reinforcement Therapy Framework (EARTF) does not only improve the current condition of the reinforcement learning in behavioral healthcare but also corresponds with the core principles of the trustworthiness, transparency, and traceability. This synthesis of both technical rigor and ethical governance is a crucial move in the clinical mainstreaming of autonomous systems of therapy to make AI an augmentative adjunct to clinicians and not an inexplicable replacement.

Conclusion

This paper offers a complete and quantifiable system of improving explainability of reinforcement-based therapy systems, between algorithmic optimization and clinical interpretability. Outlining and operationalizing three fundamental explainability indicators, namely Policy Transparency (PT), Reward Attribution (RA) and Clinical Alignment (CA), the Explainability-Aware Reinforcement Therapy Framework (EARTF) proves that transparency does not compromise technical precision and adaptive intelligence. All measures add a specific dimension of interpretability: PT minimizes the entropy of decisions, RA makes the causal relationships between patient clues and therapy more understandable, and CA makes it conciliatory with the human knowledge.

The quantitative results confirm that these measures can be used together to enhance the trust of clinicians, the reliability of the models, and the effectiveness of the therapy. The systems with more explainability indices were discovered to give more steady, morally responsible and ethically consistent results. This is consistent with the previous findings by Islam et al. (2023) [7] and Hussain et al. (2024) [3], who had already determined that the incorporation of Human-Centered AI (HCAI) and NIST AI RMF principles are the key to safety and accountability in clinical automation.

Furthermore, the EARTF supports the principles of data-centric AI [6], which holds the model outcomes reproducible and audit-able and makes sure that each decision can be tracked to its data source. This design philosophy makes explainability more of a post-hoc property than that of the model architecture itself.

In the future, this framework will be extended to multi-agent reinforcement models, in which collaborative decision systems engage in the provision of adaptive, team-oriented therapy. Future extensions will include emotion-adaptive learning of

reinforcement, allowing models to react empathetically to the affective state of a patient, and blockchain-enabled provenance, which will give a record of the decision-making process and feedback of the clinician.

By incorporating measures, governance, and empathy, the reinforcement-based therapy systems can transform into a transparent automation tool into a reliable partner in clinical decision-making. This is a critical advancement to the subsequent generation of reliable, elucidated, and morally consistent AI in behavioral and therapeutic care.

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