



The Clock is TikToking: The Urgent Need to Understand Social Media and Teen Suicide Risk

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Agenda/Overview for Today



The Big Picture:
What's the Problem?



What We Know:
Social Media &
Suicide Risk



What We Need
to Know
& What We Can Do
Right Now!

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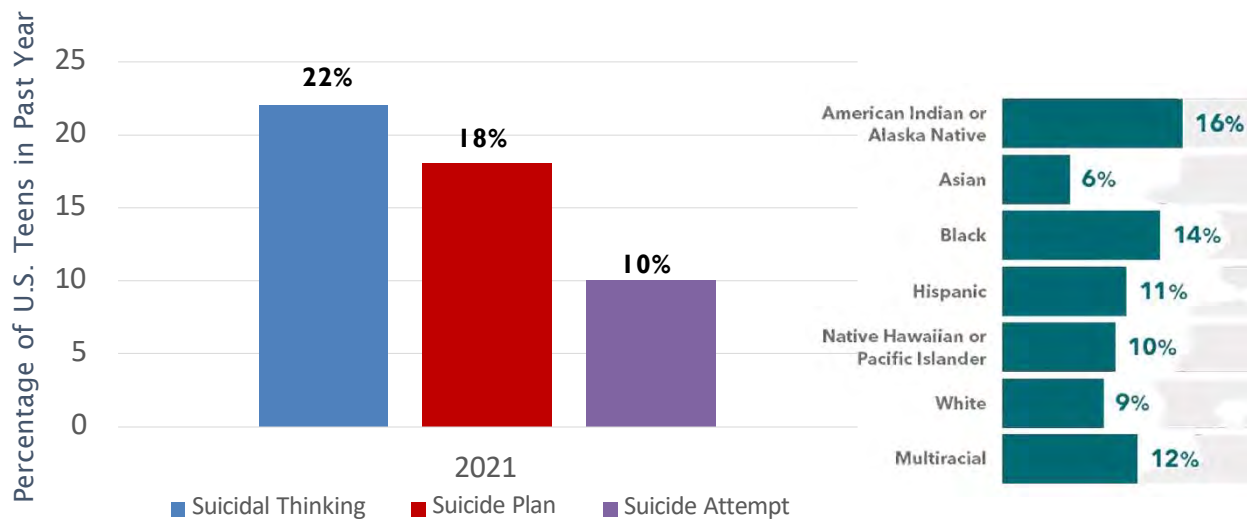
Public Health Problem

SUICIDE IS A LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH AMONG adolescents and young adults, with rates continuing to increase in recent years.



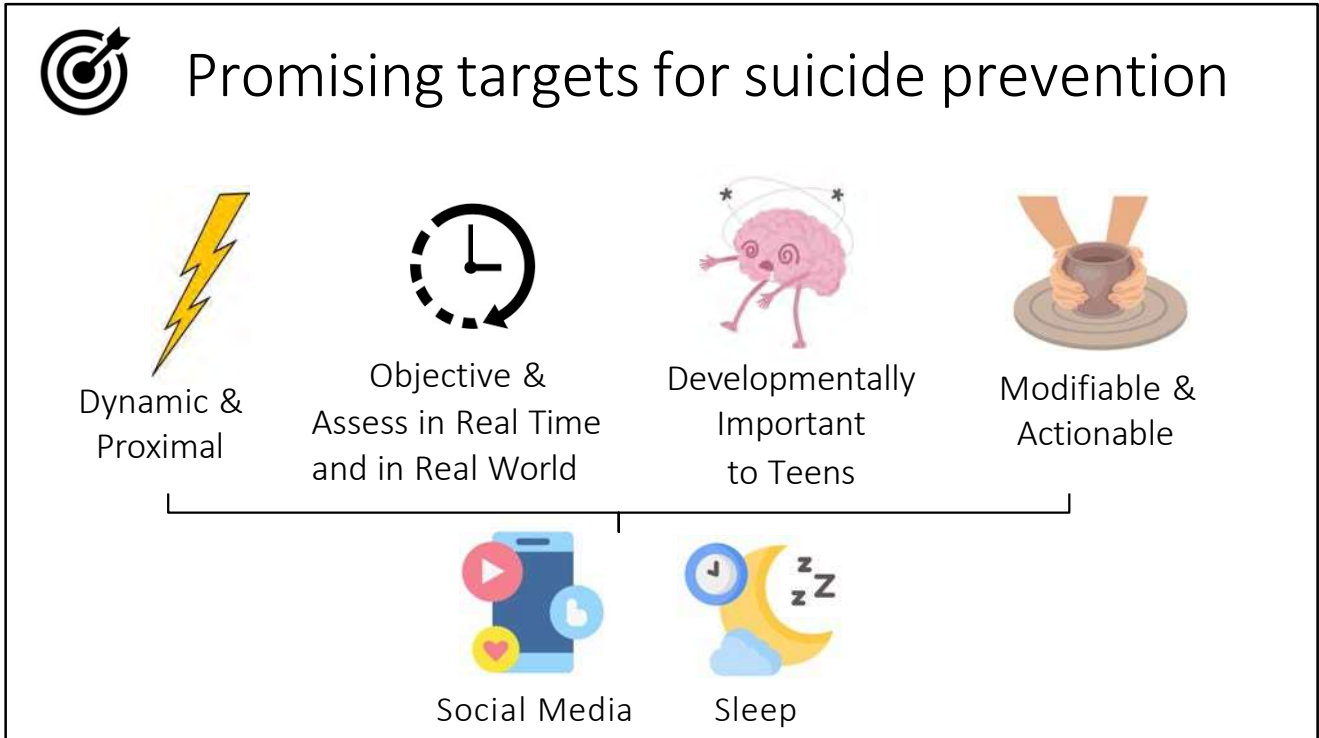
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Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors in Teens

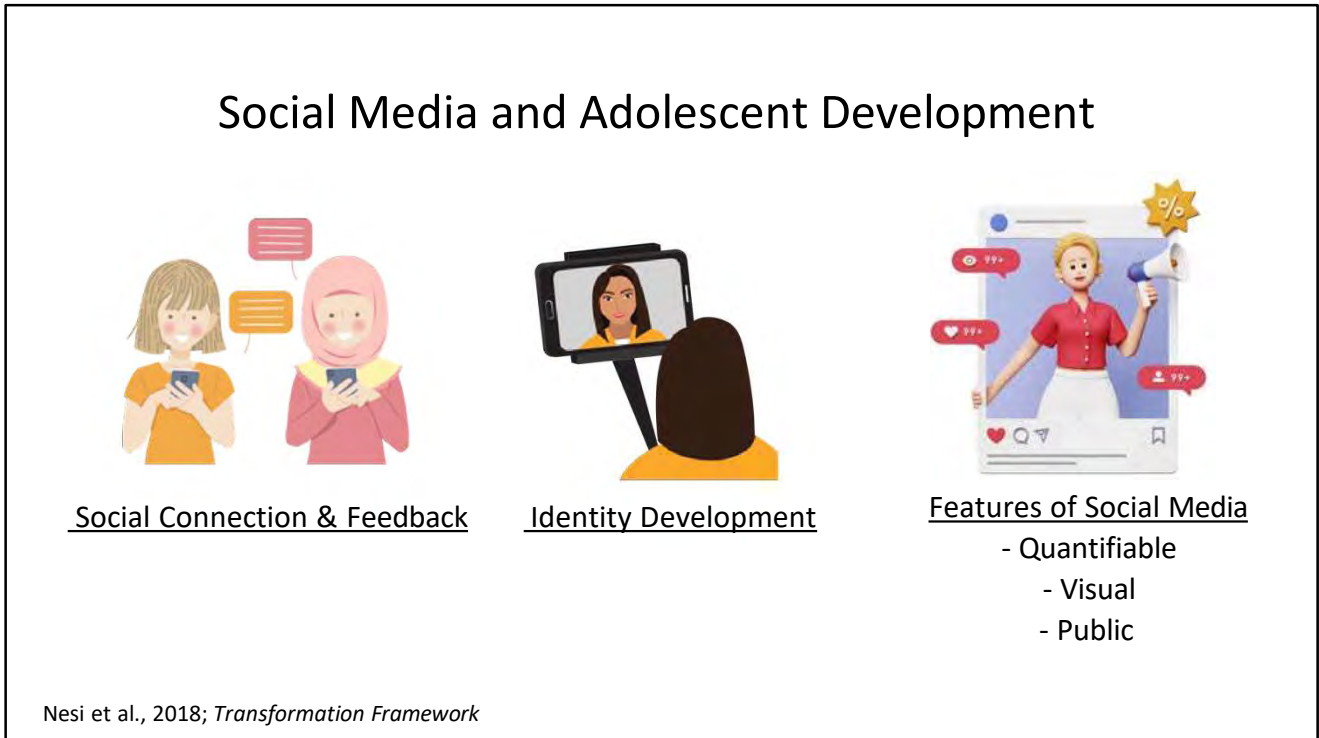


CDC, 2023

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We have it all figured out... Social Media

New Study Suggests Excessive Social Media Use Is Comparable To Drug Addiction

N.J. teen's suicide highlights dangers of social media bullying

 U.S. News & World Report

As Social Media Time Rises, So Does Teen Girls' Suicide Risk

"We found that girls who started using social media at two to three hours a day or more at age 13, and then increased [that use] over time, had the ...

Meta Accused by States of Using Features to Lure Children to Instagram and Facebook

By Cecilia Kang and Natasha Singer
 Cecilia Kang covers technology policy from Washington.
 Natasha Singer covers children's online privacy and tech regulation.
 Oct. 24, 2023

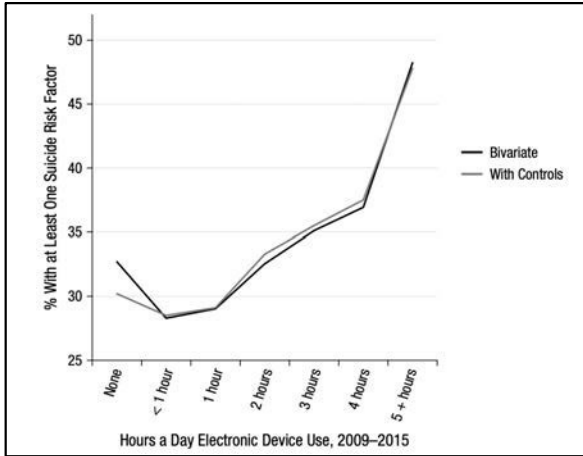
Utah bans under-18s from using social media unless parents consent

Governor signs law putting restrictions on TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and other platforms, including requiring them not to get minors addicted

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Does Social Media Use Increase the Risk for Suicide?

“Screentime use and Suicide Risk”



Twenge et al., 2018; Nesi et al., 2021



Key takeaways:

Not enough studies on social media use quantity or screentime.

Cyberbullying *and* suicide-related content is a major risk factor for suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

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Social media use and suicidal ideation among high-risk adolescents

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Social media use and prospective suicidal thoughts and behaviors among adolescents at high risk for suicide

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Abstract
Objective: To examine the relationship between social media use and suicidal thoughts and behaviors among adolescents in the first 30 days of an intensive-outpatient program (IOP) for depression and suicidality.
Method: Participants included 100 adolescents who enrolled in an IOP for depression and suicidality and completed baseline measures of social media and weekly measures of depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors at clinical visits over the next month.

N = 105 STAR adolescents
 (intensive outpatient program for depression and suicide risk)

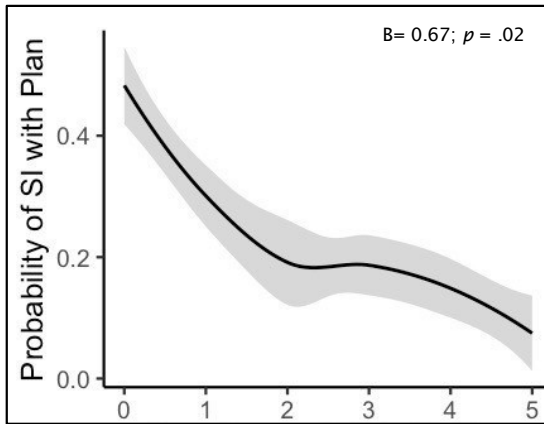
- Study measures:**
- Baseline social media use “Hours on a typical day”
 - Weekly suicidal ideation (active with/without plan)

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Social media use and suicidal ideation among high-risk (clinical) adolescents

N = 105 adolescents in STAR IOP (intensive outpatient program)



Hamilton et al., 2021, *Suicide and Life Threatening Behaviors*

Key Takeaways

- Social media is complex and nuanced.
- It has both risks and benefits.
- Experiences and content may matter more.

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Negative and Positive Social Media Experiences

In-depth interviews were conducted with adolescents (n = 30) who were hospitalized in a psychiatric unit for suicide risk.



Weinstein et al. (2021)

Negative Impacts

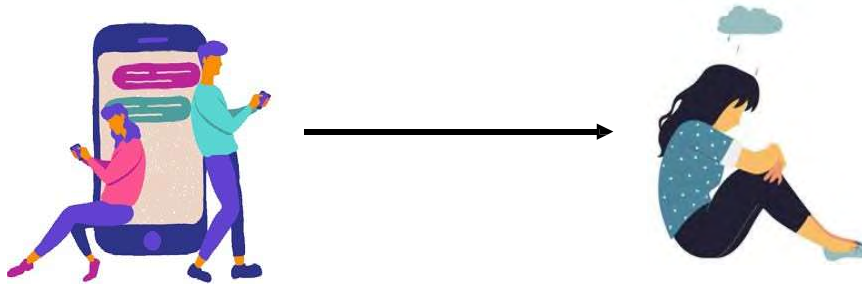
- Engagement with triggering content
- Cyberbullying, hostility, and direct exclusion
- Self - denigrating social comparison
- Burdens related to friendship expectations

Positive Impacts

- Social connection
- Positive connection
- Accessing social support
- Resources for mental health and coping
- Shared interests

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What is the relationship between social media experiences and daily suicidal thoughts?



Hamilton et al., *in press, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*

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Pathways Linking Use of Social Media to Teen Outcomes (PLUS-2 Study)

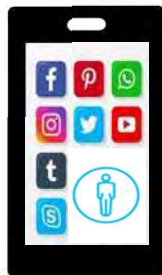


PLUS-2 Study

Duration: 8 weeks (~56 days)



Surveys- 3x/day + weekly survey

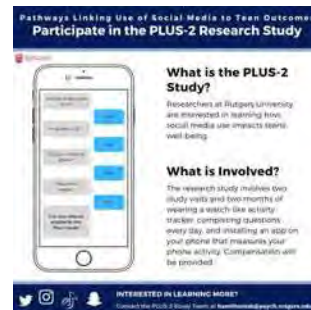


Smartphone sensing



**Actigraphy
Centreport Insight
Timers**

Target N = 115 teens (14-17 years)
50% minoritized racial/ethnic identity
*intended to be enriched for high-risk youth (with SI/SB)



K01MH121584 (Hamilton); K01 Mentor: David Brent, MD

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Our PLUS-2 Participants



Current N = 60 adolescents

Mean age = 16.04 years

49% Girls; 15% boys

62% LGBTQ+

59% Black, Latine, Asian, & Biracial

SES (MacArthur): 5.25 (SD = 1.78)

1 = lowest; 10 = highest

Suicide Risk

60% lifetime SI

25% 6-month SI

33% suicide attempt

47% active SI in EMA period

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Daily prompts (3x/day) for Social Media Experiences and Suicidal Thoughts

← Evening

Thinking about the last time you used social media, how much did you feel: **that you aren't as good (e.g., attractive/accomplished/etc.) or popular as other people?**

0 (Not at all)

1

2

Ex) Negative SM experiences

← Evening

Thinking about the last time you used social media, how much did you feel: **supported or encouraged by others?**

0 (Not at all)

1

2

Ex) Positive SM experiences

← Evening

Today, I thought about killing myself.

No

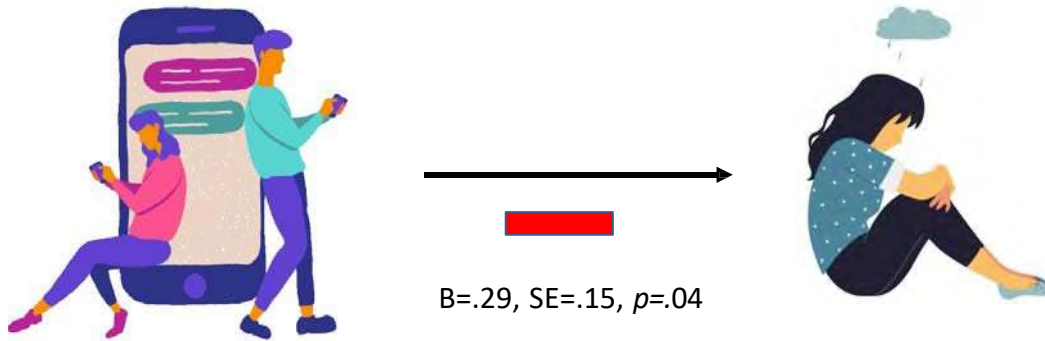
Yes, but I didn't work out th details

Yes, and I thought about th details

Suicidal Thoughts (0/1)

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Negative Social Media Experiences and Suicidal Thoughts

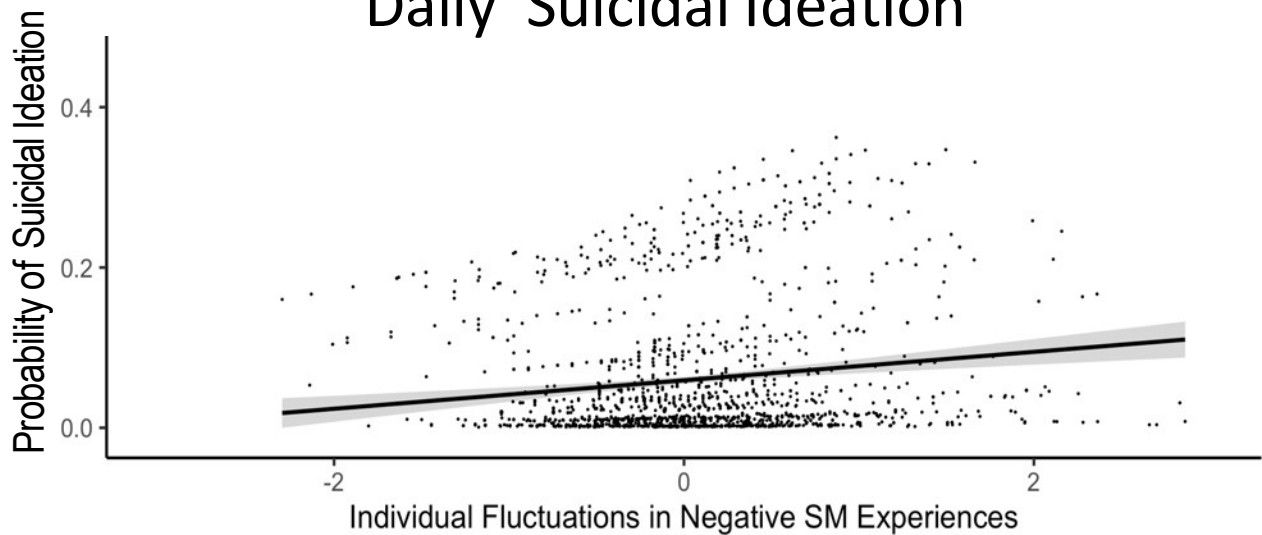


Hamilton et al., *in press, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*

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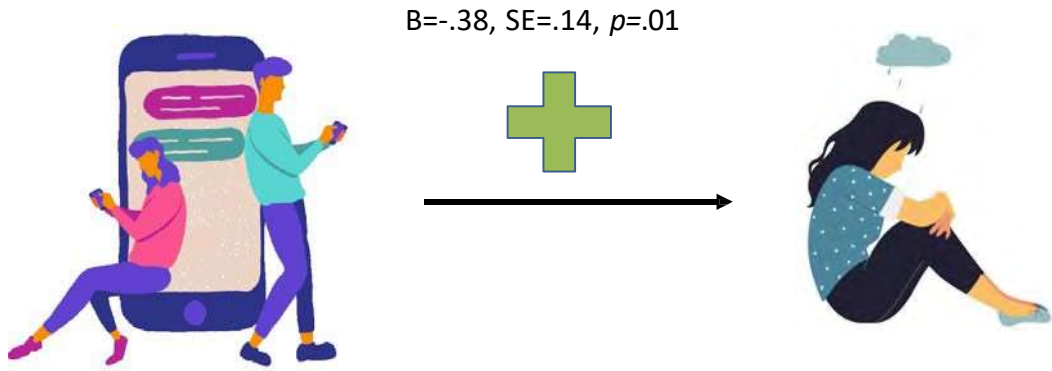
Negative Social Media Experiences and Daily Suicidal Ideation



Hamilton et al., *in press, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*

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Positive Social Media Experiences and Suicidal Thoughts

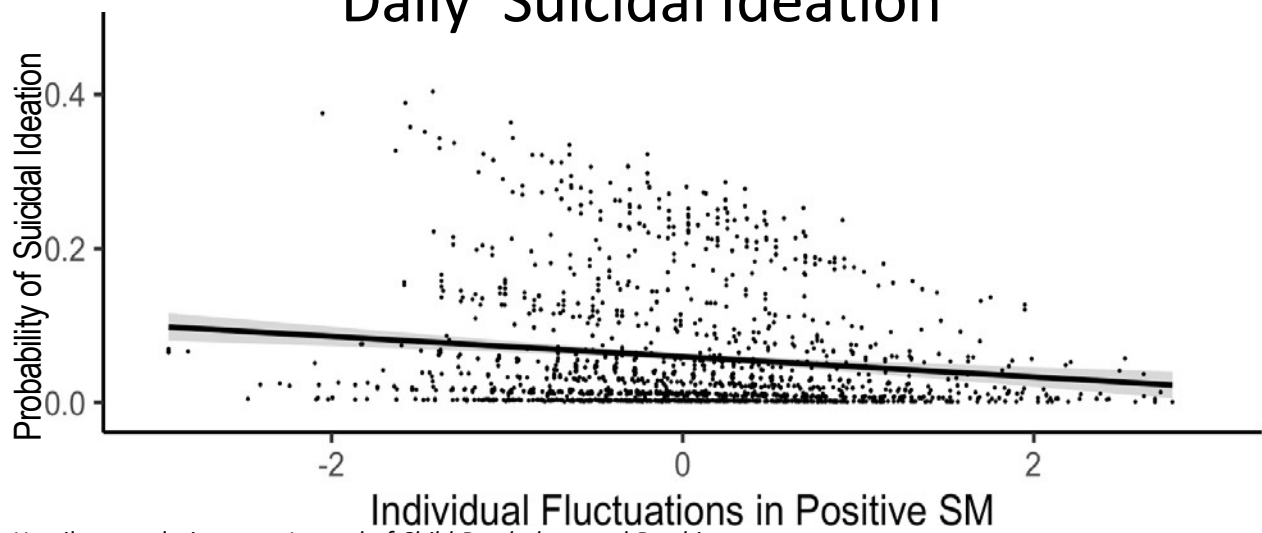


Hamilton et al., *in press, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*

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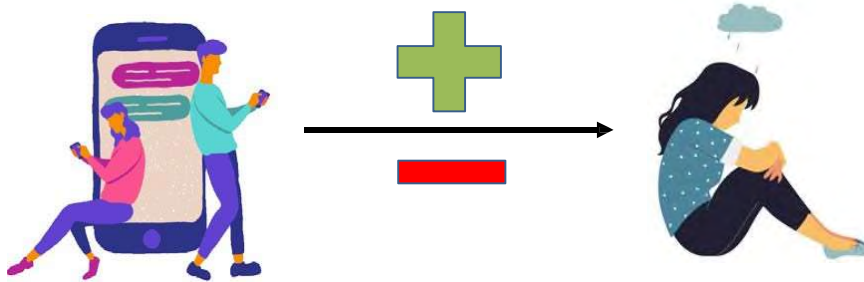
Positive Social Media Experiences and Daily Suicidal Ideation



Hamilton et al., *in press, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*

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What is the relationship between social media experiences and daily suicidal thoughts?



Key takeaway

Less focus on reducing screentime and more on reducing negative experiences (e.g., social comparison) and amplifying positive experiences (e.g., social support)

Hamilton et al., *in press, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*

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What experiences and content matter most?



Self-harm content



Cyberbullying



Violence Exposure



Mental Health Promoting

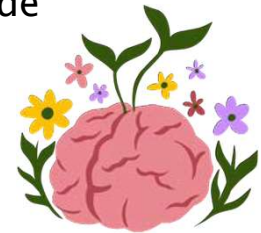
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Self-injury Activities on Social Media



Adolescents (n = 589) hospitalized in a psychiatric unit for suicide risk

- 43.3% engaged in online **self-injury activities**, which was more common among sexual and gender minority youth.
- Adolescents who talked about self-injury with friends met online were more likely to report a history of suicide attempt(s).



Nesi et al., 2022

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Self-harm Content on Social Media and Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors



N= 297 teens (14-17)

- **Exposure:**
 - 33% of teens reported exposure in the past month to images or videos that showed self-harm
 - 26% seeing posts about suicidal thoughts from people they know.
- **Engagement:** About 1 in 3 teens reported in the past month posting or messaging about their own SI (33%), engaging in self-harm (27%), or engaging with sites that promoted self-harm or suicide (31%).
- Adolescents more likely to have active SI and attempt in the past month.

Untawale et al., in prep; Preliminary data based on our Teen Social Media Experiences Study

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Self-harm exposure on social media and self-injury



SI: $B=-.80, p=.17$
NSSI Urges: $B=.81, p=.01$
NSSI: $B=2.15, p=.03$



Weekly Suicidal Ideation
NSSI urges and behaviors

Key takeaway:

Exposure to self-harm content is proximally linked to NSSI urges and behaviors.

Hamilton et al., under review; data from PLUS-2 Study

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Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence



Recommendations

1. Youth using social media should be encouraged to use functions that create opportunities for social support, online companionship, and emotional intimacy that can promote healthy socialization

Data suggest that youths' psychological development may benefit from this type of online social interaction, particularly during periods of social isolation, when experiencing stress, when seeking connection to peers with similar developmental and/or health conditions, and perhaps especially for youth who experience adversity or isolation in offline environments.^{12, 13,14,15}

<https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-use.pdf>

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Suicide Risk: Current APA Guidelines

To reduce psychological harm, adolescents' exposure to content on social media that depicts illegal or psychological maladaptive behavior, including content that instructs or encourages youth to engage in health-risk behaviors, such as self-harm (e.g., cutting, suicide), harm to others, or those that encourage eating-disordered behavior should be minimized reported, and removed.



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Talking About Suicide on Social Media

#chatsafe: A young person's guide to communicating safely online about self-harm and suicide

Edition two



1

General tips

The information in this section applies to all online content and communication, and to both creators and consumers of content.

A content creator is the author of an original online post or comment. A content consumer is someone who views or interacts with online content created by others. Interactions can include reacting, commenting, and sharing. Most people are both creators and consumers.

2

Creating self-harm and suicide content

The way that you communicate about self-harm or suicide can have positive or negative effects on both yourself and others.

3

Consuming self-harm and suicide content

If you see a post indicating someone is self-harming or is suicidal, always take it seriously even if it is posed as a joke. It is normal to feel worried and uncertain about what to do. The information in this section includes tips to help you respond safely and supportively, as well as what to do if you do not want to respond.

(See #chatsafe guidelines: orygen.org.au/chatsafe/Resources/International-guidelines/US-English)

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#chatsafe Guidelines

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Livestreams of self-harm and suicide acts

A livestream refers to a video (and other content) that is sent or transmitted over the internet in real time. Due to their unedited nature and lack of time delays, you may encounter distressing content very quickly. For example, death and injury. Engagement can unintentionally make the livestream available to more people via algorithms.

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Self-harm and suicide communities

Online communities can provide a sense of belonging, as well as being sources of support and information. However, they can become unhelpful or even harmful. Harms can include emotional distress and interference with recovery.

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Guidance for influencers

Social media influencers are content creators with large online followings who can inspire or guide other people's behaviour, for example, to buy a product or engage in a service. Because of their social power and sway over their audience, influencers can play a positive role in raising awareness, providing hope, promoting help-seeking, and reducing stigma about suicidal.

5

Self-harm and suicide games, pacts, and hoaxes

Suicide or self-harm games (also known as challenges, trends, or dares) consist of a series of progressive tasks, over a set period, which might seem harmless at first but eventually can include self-harm and can end in requiring the player to die by suicide.

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Bereavement and communicating about someone who has died by suicide

This section is to help support you to safely post.

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What experiences and content matter most?



Self-harm content



Cyberbullying



Violence Exposure



Mental Health Promoting

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