

# 2022 Best Research Poster Award

## Therapeutic Guidelines For Young Adult Social Media Use

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### INTRODUCTION

Most serious mental illnesses develop and peak in young adulthood, and the period is one of many transitions, identity development, and influenced by personality (Cunningham and Duffy 2019; Grant and Potenza 2009)

Research needs to inform how friends, family, services, and social workers can ensure targeted, meaningful support for social and emotional wellbeing of young adults (Cunningham and Duffy 2019)

Social media (SM) continue to demonstrate help-seeking potential, particularly for people experiences stigmatized health issues. Importantly, significant concern remains about potential risks for some vulnerable populations accessing SM (Alao et al., 2006; Ma et al., 2016)

Social Work has been cautious to engaging with SM in clinical practice, and lacks adequate evidence-based clinical guidelines

The eSafety Commissioner provides guidance around internet safety in the evolving online context, e.g. online scams, identity theft, cyberbullying and family violence

#chatsafe guidelines specifically assist young people to safely talk about suicide and self harm online

However, what is missing are tools to support young adults to engage in SM in a safer and therapeutic way, to ensure they mitigate the potential risks, whilst leveraging the potential therapeutic opportunities that SM provide

### OBJECTIVES

What would be included in guidelines for young adults using SM, to leverage the supportive and therapeutic opportunities, while minimising the potential risks?

### METHOD

The Delphi model, involves recruiting a panel of experts, specifically chosen for their knowledge and expertise in the content and subject matter for which a consensus is being sought (Baker, Lovell & Harris 2006), and has been adopted in health research

Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSW) and MSW students (18-34yo) were invited to participate via Australian Association of Social Work website, and direct email invitation, and made up panel of experts

Three survey rounds sought consensus on items to be included in therapeutic guidelines for young adult social media use.

The inclusion threshold was 70% agreement at the conclusion of the three rounds

The first round was informed by results from our global online survey of 208 young adult SM users (Dodemaide et al., 2021; 2022)

### RESULTS

The sample declined over three rounds.

Round One n=38; Round Two n=23, Round Three n=13

29 items met inclusion, creating the following guidelines presented here

### REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of these unceded lands, the Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation.  We pay our respects to the Elders both past, present, and emerging.

### THERAPEUTIC SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

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#### Guiding Principles

How you use social media is more important than how much you use  
More active, therapy-oriented social media use is ok at greater levels  
Passive, mindless scrolling social media use is better at smaller levels  
Too much social media use can lead to addiction  
Therapeutic benefits need to translate to the real world

#### Social Media

valuable for accessing resources  
link to apps eg. mood and sleep and for monitoring behaviour change  
useful for hearing from others with stigmatised lived experience

#### Social Workers require competency

to support resilience with social media  
to manage and control privacy settings and limitations

#### Social Workers require access

to a curated list of reputable, respected social media, eg. online support groups, apps, websites, TED Talks, blogs

#### Social media must enable young adults to

consider the source of their feelings and emotions  
find useful help-seeking information  
learn about things important to them  
access content moderated by professionals, to maintain quality of help-seeking information  
develop a peer group or support network

#### Caution

Avoid self-diagnoses when accessing resources, and consult a reputable professional for personalised advice  
Avoid negatively comparing self to others within social media  
Important to know how to block / report / navigate privacy and security settings within each social media platform  
Young adults in a mental health crisis should not use, Photo sharing sites, eg. Instagram

#### Social media must enable young adults to

know there are others with similar experiences  
choose to use their real name or alias  
modify whether they engage the platform, actively or passively  
understand the privacy settings

### DISCUSSION

Therapeutic SM use is less about *what type*, or *how much* SM a person consumes. Instead, it is the *way*, or *how* a person consumes SM. Active vs passive SM use is explored in recent research, however critiqued as too simplistic.

Regarding young adults not using photo sharing sites in a crisis, importantly short videos are increasingly a feature of photo-sharing sites such as Instagram. While the item remains in the guidelines, future research may seek to better understand what it is particularly about 'media-sharing' platforms that is important to safeguard those in a crisis from.

The guidelines enable Social Workers to leverage the therapeutic opportunities that SM provides.

Social Work specific items indicate we need the skills and competence to deliver SM-based interventions (Joiner, 2018), and to provide evidence-informed advice and interventions to support young adults to engage in SM in a safer and therapeutic way.

Limitations include selection bias, clinical expertise of AMHSWs reliant on self reports by clinicians, Australian clinicians only.

These guidelines are provisional only, and not yet been tested in a clinical trial

### CONCLUSION



These guidelines are the culmination of existing research, lived experience of consumers, and practice wisdom of AMHSW



They have potential application for consumers, for clinicians, researchers, organisations and health systems



Future research should evaluate the clinical application of these guidelines across a variety of practice settings