

## Social media and suicide



Social media, through websites and mobile apps, allows users to create and share content or participate in social networks. They are widely disseminated and have intensely modified the forms of interaction between individuals<sup>(1)</sup>. Social media are one of the multiple risk or protective factors for mental health and suicidal behavior, although alone they are not able to explain these multifactorial and complex phenomena<sup>(2)</sup>.

On the internet, the issue suicide can be a “meeting point” among vulnerable individuals, as studies have found that young people with mental health problems are heavier users of social media<sup>(3)</sup> and people who post content about suicide prefer to use blogs and forums online to express themselves and tend to be younger, have more suicidal ideation and negative affect compared to people without suicide postings<sup>(4)</sup>.

The form to approach suicide in media needs to be careful to avoid the Werther or contagion effect, which is a phenomenon of apparent dissemination of influences that promote suicidal behavior<sup>(5-6)</sup>. However, in social media, pro-suicide content can be produced anonymously and is easily accessed by vulnerable people. Among these contents are suicide pacts, suicide games, manuals about methods related to suicide, as well as content that values, romanticizes, encourages, condemns, or hinders the understanding of suicidal behavior<sup>(7-8)</sup>.

The use of social media can be harmful especially when it is intense, associated with cyberbullying, excessive exposure of intimacy, unrealistic expectations, increased perception of happiness and success of others, procrastination, lack of criticism, reflection, empathic and responsible attitudes<sup>(1,4,9-12)</sup>.

The intensity and prioritization of virtual life are also associated with impairments such as feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction with body image, depressive and anxious symptoms, poor quality of sleep and the excessive media engagement justified by fear of losing what happens in them<sup>(1,4,9-12)</sup>. Considering these potential negative effects of social media, it is important to develop research and interventions related to educational and support actions for youth, parents and educators.

It is also necessary to consider the potential of the media for the promotion of mental health and suicide prevention. The incorporation of creative and attractive virtual strategies into conventional care may be accessible, facilitate youth participation, exchanges of experiences, expression and identification of emotions and needs, support and belonging catalysis, greater dissemination of information, knowledge about coping repertoires and better results in healthcare<sup>(7-8)</sup>. There are different resources for this purpose, such as: support groups, applications, serious games, sites. In addition, there are situations where anonymity may facilitate the initial search for support.

It is important to invest in research, technological innovations and creative, accessible, efficient and adapted care and educational actions for diverse publics using the social media in positive and safe way for the prevention of suicide and the promotion of mental health.


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