Potential of social media in promoting mental health in adolescents

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## Sample

54 adolescents aged 11–18 years, 16 educational professionals and 8 mental health practitioners

## Implications For Stakeholders About

# Abstract

Summary
The growing prevalence of adolescent mental disorders poses significant challenges for education and healthcare systems globally. Providers are therefore keen to identify effective ways of promoting positive mental health. This aim of this qualitative study was to explore perceptions that social media might be leveraged for the purposes of mental health promotion amongst adolescents aged between 11 and 18 years. Utilizing focus groups conducted with adolescents (N = 54), educational professionals (N = 16) and mental health practitioners (N = 8). We explored their views about the value of social media for this purpose. Three themes were identified. First, social media appears to have potential to promote positive mental health. Second, adolescents frequently utilize social media and the internet to seek information about mental health. Finally, there are benefits and challenges to using social media in this way. We conclude that despite challenges of using social media and the risks, social media does offer a useful way of educating and reaching adolescents to promote mental wellbeing.

# Outcome

"Most participants were cautious about using social media
to promote mental health due to their belief that social
media contributes to mental illness (O’Reilly et al.,
in press). Nonetheless, they did argue that there was potential
if done well." (O'Reilly et al., 2018: 983). "participants
discussed this source of information to maintain positive
mental health and to help them cope with stress.
Furthermore, they considered how social media, and internet
sources, might support and educate about mental illness, citing examples of when they had used it in this way for their own conditions, or those of their peers... there were suggestions
that embracing the culture of social media ‘challenges’,
could be harnessed to promote wellbeing... A benefit of using social media to promote mental
health was the possibility of anonymity. Participants
recognized that mental illness was associated with
stigma, and argued that promoting positive mental
health needed to mitigate against this... Adolescents discussed help-seeking more generally outside
of social media acknowledging that speaking to a
doctor or family member about issues they found difficult
or embarrassing could be problematic.... However, to promote wellbeing and tackle stigma, any
mental health promotion intervention/tool used through
social media must be accessible, educational, youthfriendly
and raise awareness. Participants articulated that
mental health awareness was an important aspect of mental
health promotion, and felt they needed to learn about
mental illness, to appreciate positive mental health. (O'Reilly et al., 2018: 983-86).