



INSIGHTS TO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USE, DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS, AND DELIBERATE SELF-HARM IN DEPRESSED ADOLESCENTS

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INTRODUCTION

- Adolescents with internalising mental health conditions spend more time on SM, engaged in greater social comparison, and experience greater impact of feedback on mood. (Fassi et al., 2025)
- Quantitative studies link problematic SM use with depression, self-harm and suicidal ideation; (Xiao et al., 2025; Blanchard et al., 2023)
- Emerging qualitative research highlights that youths in Singapore experience negative effects of SM but its effects appear to be mitigated with high levels of media literacy and harm-reduction strategies. (Samari et al., 2022)
- There remains a lack of clinically grounded qualitative research in depressed adolescents in Singapore.

OBJECTIVES

- ✓ How depressed adolescents use SM in their daily lives
- ✓ The perceived impact of SM use on mood and self-harm
- ✓ How depressive states shape SM engagement



METHODS

Participants: 19 Singaporean youths aged 16–19 years (3 males, 16 females) on clinical follow-up for depression

Study Design: semi-structured interviews

Analysis: Inductive, data-driven thematic analysis

Measures: Psychiatric diagnoses, Beck Depression Inventory–II (BDI-II), Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS).

94.7% Primary Diagnosis: MDD
68.4% Self-harm in past year
BDI-II median: 35 (range 9 - 52)
100% Instagram & YouTube users
78.4% very often/often think about or plan SM use
47.4% use SM to cope with difficulties

RESULTS

Usage patterns –

fluctuating engagement influenced by mood

Most decreased SM use when depressed.

“Umm when I’m in a low mood I think I generally just stay away from everything.” (S012)

Others increased scrolling or posting as a form of distraction or emotional release.

“For me when I get stressed or depressed I use social media more so that I can distract myself from my sadness” (S05)



Psychological impact

Upward social comparison and distressing content worsened mood.

“[I think] Instagram has a more negative impact on my depression [than positive]...because I end up feeling bad and I ended up comparing my situation with other people’s so then...I feel bad, sad” (S007)

Humour, inspirational content and supportive interactions were beneficial.

“When my friends sent me something funny or I find something very funny to send to [my friends], that will affect me positively and my mood” (S007)

Social dynamics and identity

Public accounts were curated to meet perceived norms.

“It’s like people don’t realise I’m depressed? Because...the way I talk [on my main account] is very cheerful I guess.” (S019)

Private accounts enabled authentic expression.
“In the first place in that private account I was very particular about who saw...so whenever I post anything about my mood I didn’t really feel like...anyone would judge me.” (S003)



Coping Strategies

Feed curation, limiting exposure & temporary deactivation were used to manage overwhelming emotions.

“It just feels...bad to see everyone having fun. Because usually social media you just post all the fun stuff right. Then I see people in school enjoying themselves...it just feels...bad to see everyone having fun. I also want that. So like after a while I just, I don’t want to look at it anymore because I know that I can’t be there now.. So I will like distance myself from that and [delete].” (S015)



CONCLUSION

Findings indicate depressed adolescents use SM variably, and may have strategies to mitigate harms. Given its ubiquity, clinicians should assess SM’s nuanced role in their adolescent patients.

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