

# Social Media and Suicide Risk: A Multidimensional Approach

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Dear Editor,

The parallel increase in suicide rates across the world and in Turkey has raised questions about the variables that may have contributed to this acceleration over time. Technological advances have emerged as a common origin for the developments of the past century. Significant factors related to suicide include increased use of computers and the internet, spread of social media, computer games, the film industry, and other media. Suicidal behaviour, as with many psychiatric disorders needs to be approached from a biopsychosocial perspective. Various dynamic factors such as personality traits, primary psychiatric disorders, biological predispositions, genetic characteristics, environment and interpersonal relationships contribute to this process. One psychological theory that attempts to explain suicidal behavior is Bandura's social learning theory, which is often used to study the relationship between media and suicidal behavior. The 'Werther effect', identified by Philips in the 1970s, is a psychological theory that explains the increase in suicide rates following the publication of Goethe's 'The Sorrows of Young Werther'. This suggests that suicide is a socially learnable, imitable and replicable behaviour (1). Social media is a term that emerged shortly after the internet became a part of our lives, defining various online platforms that provide mass access to internet-based sharing and communication opportunities. Social media allows individuals to directly share moments, express their thoughts and feelings, comment on various topics and interact with others' comments on certain topics. The analysis of social media as it relates to suicidal behavior should not be approached in a single dimension. It can be predicted that comments and evaluations on this topic following news reports and cases of

suicide may have a motivational influence similar to the Werther effect. Recent studies suggest that the use of social media may facilitate suicide via increasing in suicidal thoughts and behaviors, as well as increasing the prevalence of depression (1,2). A critical area to consider in relation to the risks of social media is the creation of friend/chat groups and sharing within those groups. Peer bullying, which is particularly prevalent in high school, can manifest itself through social media platforms, ultimately reaching a wider audience in a shorter period of time. The pace of sharing and diffusion can become uncontrollable after a certain point. There has been a significant increase in the risk of cyberbullying spreading. The impact of this phenomenon on exposed individuals can have serious consequences, possibly leading to suicidal thoughts. A study on cyberbullying found an increased prevalence of suicidal ideation among victims and demographic analyses showed a more pronounced effect among minority groups (3). Social comparison is a phenomenon known as the tendency of people to compare themselves with other people in order to recognize and define themselves. Social comparisons made on these platforms with extensive data and interaction have been linked to low self-esteem, body image disturbance, and increased levels of anxiety and depression (2). Another aspect of the concept of social media that we encounter in clinical practice is that people share their immediate emotions and private lives, sometimes almost compulsively. People share their experiences or emotions with an audience through photos, texts or live streams, distancing themselves from their identity by expressing their feelings through a virtual character. It is possible that this phenomenon will appear in the future as a modern defense

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mechanism. This use of social media can sometimes be described as a dissociative pattern involving excessive self-disclosure or pretending to be someone you are not (4). Well-known examples, such as suicides streamed live and the announcement of suicide over social media, suggest a potential correlation between this method and suicidal behavior. Another phenomenon observed in social media use is the formation of suicide pacts. While suicide pacts in romantic relationships have been acknowledged in the past, there are now examples of collective suicide pacts through social media (5).

In conclusion, social media has rapidly entered our lives and has become increasingly prevalent among all age groups, especially adolescents, creating an inevitable link with suicidal thoughts and behaviors. The frequency and duration of social media use are also important. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the various potential impacts, as mentioned in this letter.

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