



SOCIETY OF
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MEDICINE

Posting about Stressful Situations on Social Media May Be Bad for Mental Health

Study findings have implications for prioritizing in-person relationships when dealing with stressful life events

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 6, 2018 – Social media may not be the best place to talk about stressful situations, according to new research from the University of Pittsburgh.

The findings will be presented Wednesday, March 6, at the Society of Behavioral Medicine's 40th Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions.

Researchers surveyed 2,392 adults ages 18 to 30 about their mental health and social media use, specifically asking how often they talk about stressful life experiences in-person and on social media. People who often or always talk about stressful situations in-person had a 43 percent *decrease* in odds of depression, whereas people who often or always share about it on social media had a nearly four-fold *increase* in odds of depression.

"We were surprised with how dramatic the results were," said lead author Ariel Shensa, M.A., Statistician and Research Scientist at the University of Pittsburgh Center for Research on Media, Technology, and Health (MTH). "While it is well known that talking in-person can be beneficial, it was surprising that communicating on social media didn't seem to bring any of that benefit, and that in fact it was associated with risk."

It could be that people overshare on social media, thereby embarrassing themselves or presenting opportunities for negative or no feedback, resulting in depressive symptoms. Or, people who are depressed may share more frequently on social media.

For people who use both settings to share about stressful situations, posting more frequently online was still associated with three times the odds of depression compared to more frequently doing so in person.

"These results suggest that we should be prioritizing in-person sharing over social media sharing, particularly about stressful situations," said Shensa.

Shensa, an SBM member, will present the findings Wednesday, March 6, during a poster session at the SBM Annual Meeting, being held in Washington, D.C., at the Washington Hilton. Additional authors on this research are Jaime E. Sidani, Ph.D., M.P.H., C.H.E.S., César G. Escobar-Viera, M.D., Ph.D., Beth L. Hoffman, B.Sc., and Brian A. Primack, M.D., Ph.D., all of MTH at the University of Pittsburgh.

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The University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences include the schools of Medicine, Nursing, Dental Medicine, Pharmacy, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences and the Graduate School of Public Health. The schools serve as the academic partner to the UPMC (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center). Together, their combined mission is to train tomorrow's health care specialists and biomedical scientists, engage in groundbreaking research that will advance understanding of the causes and treatments of disease and participate in the delivery of outstanding patient care. Since 1998, Pitt and its affiliated university faculty have ranked among the top 10 educational institutions in grant support from the National Institutes of Health. For additional information about the Schools of the Health Sciences, please visit www.health.pitt.edu.

Conference Program

<https://www.sbm.org/UserFiles/file/am19-pro-v11.pdf>

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