

Innovative Research Program on Suicide Countermeasures in FY2020: Report on Commissioned Research Results

Field 3: Developing new policy areas

Topic number : 3-1

Research topic:

Research on Suicide Countermeasures Using Social Media

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Summary:

This study aims to understand the actual conditions of social media (SM) use among college students and workers, and to clarify the effects of SM on mental health, its mechanisms, and individual differences.

This year, we conducted a literature review, group interviews, and three web-based questionnaire surveys.

A literature review of recent studies on SM use and mental health in Japanese and English was conducted, and the related factors were summarized. The Royal Society of Public Health (2017) reported that SM is more addictive than tobacco and alcohol and has unfavorable effects such as anxiety and depression, poor sleep, body image concerns, cyber-bullying, and FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out). On the other hand, SM also has positive effects such as access to expert health information, emotional support, community building, self-expression, self-identity, and real-world relationships. According to a systematic review by Seabrook et al. (2016), positive interactions, social support, and social connectedness on SNSs (considered as one category of SM) were consistently related to lower levels of depression and anxiety, whereas negative interaction and social comparisons on SNSs were related to higher levels of depression and anxiety. SNS use was related to a lower level of loneliness and a higher level of self-esteem and life satisfaction.

We conducted a group interview with 13 university students and 8 workers prior to the web-based questionnaire surveys. In addition to the positive and negative effects of SM, participants use SM as a coping strategy to deal with stressful situations. They also have set up "My Rules" to avoid unfavorable effects of SM use on their physical and mental health.

After approval from the SFC Research Ethics Committee at Keio University (Reception No.309), we conducted an exploratory web-based pre-survey of SM use (1582 respondents [782 males, 800 females], 1200 workers [600 males, 600 females] and 382 university students [182 males, 200 females]) from January 6-13, 2021. The results showed that (1) the time, duration, and type of SM use differed between students and workers, (2) first-year college students in particular spent a lot of time for SM use on holidays, (3) they used different types of applications for different purposes, (4) some of the positive experiences as well as the negative experiences associated with SM were positively correlated with the suicidal ideation, and (5) the duration of SM use had a non-linear relationship with suicidal ideation, with a negative relationship when the duration was shorter than 2.5 hours and a positive relationship when the duration was longer than 2.5 hours.

To clarify the detailed mechanism in the relationship of SM use with mental health and suicidal ideation, we conducted the web-based main survey 1 (1600 workers [800 males, 800 females], February 5-9, 2021) and web-based main survey 2 (1600 university students [800 male, 800 female], February 5-12, 2021). We are now conducting detailed analyses.

In addition, this project organized lectures by experts to learn the current situation around SM management and the front line of suicide prevention. The person in charge of TikTok, Mr. Yasuyuki Shimizu, representative director of the Japan Suicide Countermeasures Promotion Center, and Ms. Saori Okada, representative of the Youth Mental Support Association gave lectures, which provided us with a lot of practical suggestions on suicide prevention measures using SM.