

Posts to Reddit forum 'SuicideWatch' spike in the early hours of Monday morning

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New research from the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) at King's College London has found that people on a social media suicide support forum are most likely to post to the site

during the early hours of Monday morning.

The study, which has been published in *BMC Psychiatry*, suggests that there is a clear variation in behavior throughout the week and throughout the day. The researchers hope that this means that targeted support to at risk populations can be made more readily available to those most in need.

The researchers looked at the timings at which users of the Reddit forum 'SuicideWatch' posted online. The forum is a moderated online community for individuals who are either at risk of, or know someone who is at risk of suicide.

The data, which was taken between 1st December 2008 and 31st August 2015, amounted to 90,518 posts. Over the course of a given week, posts to the forum were at their highest on Mondays between 02:00 and 05:00 in the morning. Posts trended downwards from Tuesday to Saturday. This was in stark contrast to data taken from the control group 'AskReddit,' a separate forum on the same site in which users can ask general questions of each other, which saw most content posted in the later hours of the day.

Dr. Rina Dutta, the study's Primary Investigator from King's IoPPN said "Monday has often been identified as the day of the week which has the highest risk of someone taking their own life. From the data that we've studied, we can see a clear trend over weekly cycles that closely follows the suicide timing patterns reported in some earlier studies."

The timings of the posts suggest that active users are experiencing disturbances to their sleep, and may represent a potentially modifiable risk factor for suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Dr. Dutta said, "Extensive use of social media has been associated with

disturbed sleep, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Reducing the use of social media during the night hours might be an effective means of providing targeted psychological interventions in some individuals."

The researchers believe that using this data can be used to target at risk populations with greater levels of support.

"Given that we have a clear indication as to when at risk people are posting to this [forum](#), it is challenging but certainly not implausible to envisage providing higher levels of moderation on Reddit during times of increased posting about suicidality. If developed in the right way, we might have the capacity to target otherwise unreachable populations to deliver suicide prevention messaging and interventions where and when they are needed most."

More information: Rina Dutta et al, Temporal and diurnal variation in social media posts to a suicide support forum, *BMC Psychiatry* (2021). [DOI: 10.1186/s12888-021-03268-1](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-021-03268-1)

Provided by King's College London

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