

Crisis intervention program leverages social media to reduce suicide risk

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An Oregon-based program that monitors social media use may have helped deter more than 150 youth suicide attempts in the five years it's operated, reports a new study published online in the journal *Psychiatric*

Services.

Staff with [Lines for Life](#), a nonprofit that operates mental health crisis support services, and researchers at Oregon Health & Science University collaborated to closely document interventions by the Safe Social Spaces program, launched in 2019 by Lines for Life.

The study's senior author said it's an example of meeting people where they are.

"Community engagement is critical," said Alan Teo, M.D., M.S., associate professor of psychiatry in the OHSU School of Medicine. "Health care systems often wait for patients to come to the clinic or hospital, but if you just wait for patients to come to you, there are a lot of people in need who will be missed."

Whatever its role in driving the [mental health crisis](#) affecting [young people](#), the new study suggests, social media can be used as a unique tool in detecting concerning messages for those paying attention.

In this case, trained staff with the Safe Social Spaces intervention program contacted more than 3,000 young people who openly shared their experience with [emotional problems](#) on social media. The program estimates that, through supportive dialogue, 163 instances of self-harm, which can include suicide attempts, have been avoided so far.

Teo acknowledged the irony of using social media to achieve a positive mental health outcome.

"Experiences on social media can be stressful, but what I love about this program is that it illustrates a way to use forums online for a good purpose," Teo said. "It's obviously not as black and white as saying social media is evil or [screen time](#) is all bad. We know that youth are spending

time there and, as with all technologies, the important thing is in how you use it."

More information: An Intervention Program for Youths Whose Social Media Posts Suggest Increased Suicide Risk, *Psychiatric Services* (2024). [DOI: 10.1176/appi.ps.20230299](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.20230299)

Provided by Oregon Health & Science University

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