When college students post about depression on Facebook
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When college students post about feelings of depression on Facebook, their friends are unlikely to encourage them to seek help, a small study suggests. In fact, in this study, none of the 33 participating students said their friends told them they should reach out to a mental health professional to discuss their problems.

Instead, most friends simply sent supportive or motivating messages. But that may not be good enough for people who are truly depressed—as some of the people in this study probably were, said Scottye Cash, lead author of the study and professor of social work at The Ohio State University.

"It makes me concerned that none of the Facebook friends of students in this study were proactive in helping their friend get help," Cash said.

"We need to figure out why."
symptoms indicated that they were depressed."

Students reported that the most common responses from their friends to their posts about depression (about 35 percent of responses) were simply supportive gestures. "All my close friends were there to encourage me and letting me know that everything will be okay," one student wrote.

The next most common response (19 percent of posts) was to ask what was wrong, which participants didn't always take positively. "It is hard to tell who cares or who's (just) curious this way, though," one participant wrote.

The other three most common responses (all occurring 11 percent of the time) were contacting the depressed friend outside of Facebook, sending a private message within the app, or simply "liking" the post.

Although participants reported that none of their friends suggested they get help, Cash said she is sympathetic to the plight of these friends.

"For the friends reading these posts, they often have to read between the lines since few people came right out and said they were depressed," Cash said.

"Many people used quotes and song lyrics to talk about how they're feeling, so their friends really had to decode what they were saying."

Cash said the findings point to the need for more mental health literacy among college students and others so they know how to recognize the signs of depression and how to respond.

"Both Facebook and colleges and universities could do more to give these students information about resources, mental health support and how to recognize the signs of depression and anxiety," she said.

"We need to increase mental health literacy and decrease mental health stigma."
