

Project to explore how children use social media to promote mental wellbeing and seek health advice

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A new project led by the University of Leicester aims to explore the role social media plays in promoting mental health and wellbeing in children.

The research, which is funded by the Wellcome Trust and led by Dr Michelle O'Reilly from the University of Leicester's Department of Sociology, will examine how 12-18 year olds engage with social media and how it can promote their own mental wellbeing.

The study will shed light on [young people's](#) views of social media as impacting negatively or positively on mental wellbeing, how they use social media to seek health information and the barriers to using it as a psycho-educational tool.

While previous research has indicated that social media can both promote mental wellbeing as well as damage it, the research team suggests that the relative anonymity the internet provides has the potential to reduce the associated stigma of discussing [mental health](#) issues and can allow young people to freely explore information that could be beneficial to their wellbeing.

Dr O'Reilly explained: "It is globally recognised that mental health is an important issue and that adolescents particularly are a group in need of support.

"There is a great deal of unmet mental health need and as social media is a popular medium for communication in this age group it has great potential for mental health promotion.

"It is hoped that this project will provide us with an understanding about adolescent social media use so that in the future we might be able to develop an intervention that will promote mental wellbeing in this group."

The research will use focus groups with adolescents, teaching staff and [mental health professionals](#) to identify the benefits and challenges of promoting mental health through social media.

The study 'Social media use and adolescent mental health. A preliminary qualitative exploration of the potential use of [social media](#) for promoting mental health and wellbeing among 12–18 year olds' will be running until January 2017.

Provided by University of Leicester

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