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SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON YOUNG ADULTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF MENTAL HEALTH CLINICIANS

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PERSPECTIVES OF MENTAL HEALTH CLINICIANS

———————————

A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

———————————

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

in

School of Social Work

———————————

by

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June 2019

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ABSTRACT

Social Workers make up a significant portion of mental health clinicians providing services to clients or young adults, and in today's day and age, the popularity of social media use is increasing within the young adult population. Young adults spend hours on end on many different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and/or Snapchat. Therefore, this study asks, what are clinician's perspectives about social media influencing young adults with mental health concerns? This study utilized a qualitative, content analysis approach in interviewing clinicians to draw from their experience with clients who have used and interacted with social media.

This study utilized a qualitative, content analysis approach in interviewing clinicians to draw from their experience with clients who have used and interacted with social media. The findings of this study suggest that social work clinicians interviewed have found that social media has an overall negative influence on young adults, but that they have not considered the depths of its effect. The findings of this study assist in raising awareness on the ever-present and changing internet culture; and this study provides clinicians perspectives on therapeutic modalities that can best be used in practice when interacting with clients.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

Social media is a rapidly growing form of socialization as evident by the multiple outlets that are readily available to those with internet access. Such outlets include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Snapchat, to name a few. In the present-day world, there is a growth of individuals ranging from various ages who use social media outlets to connect with others. Many studies have shown that young adults are active users on social media platforms due to the efficiency and appeal in communicating with others in a broader sense (Whaite, Shensa, Sidani, Colditz, & Primack 2017; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010).

At this time, one in five adults in the U.S experience some form of mental health condition, and 56% of the population have not been treated due to a mixture of reasons including lack of access and/or the stigma that may accompany seeking services (Mental Health America, 2018). This issue will complicate social work practice at the micro level because the mental health concerns if gone untreated create room for greater impairments to individuals. Additionally, mental health providers may not know how to reach out and offer the services if individuals are not aware or interested in receiving them.

Furthermore, mental health seeking individuals may substitute social media for professional advice or validation which can result to vulnerable individual's needs to go unheard of or ridiculed (Ted, 2017). Consequently, there

are also many privacy concerns when taking to unsuited social media outlets for mental health assistance. Such concerns include limits to confidentiality, private and privileged information, as well as a lack for mandated reporting. Moreover, those who find their way on social media may also want to rely on themselves to address their personal issues, rather than seek professional help (Eisenberg & Hunt 2010; Gulliver, Christensen, & Griffiths, 2010). With this new emergence of social media, users are substituting these outlets as an alternative for counseling, which creates a setting where possible maladaptive behaviors could be encouraged through their use (Shensa et. al, 2017).

Clinician's perspectives on social media use (SMU) is something that should be assessed due to their vast knowledge of mental health and their qualifications to provide mental health services. Additionally, these mental health providers would be able to give insight on the possibility of social media as a catalyst causing harm or if it can be used to raise awareness. Despite the negative, connecting through social media platforms, could benefit the individual by creating a safe space for connection towards proper care (Moreno et al., 2011). Thus, mental health providers must seek new and innovative ways to screen individuals to address this growing concern relating to mental health perceptions on social media. Moreover, SMU can lead individuals towards negative outcomes if used without proper education or input from credible individuals such as mental health professionals. With the continuous rise of SMU,

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health providers would need to adapt to the new forms of communication in order to better connect with current young adult clients.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to assess the awareness of SMU from mental health providers. Additionally, significant implications this study can possibly have for social work on the micro level, would be how health services are delivered and where they can be improved. Due to an exponential increase of young adults using social media greatly in their day to day lives, it has been made evident that SMU is an important part of their identity and the social supports they have made through these outlets.

As mental health services progress in the way they are delivered it is necessary for the clinicians providing these services to evolve along with it. While, past studies found for this research topic tend to focus more on the client's perspective, they exclude the clinicians view on the connection of social media and mental health. The study will conduct interview on social work clinicians, how and if they screen for SMU and their views on young adult's interactions on social media.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The idea to conduct this study arose from the observation of technology in society growing quickly as presented in social media's ability to move us towards

a digital culture. In raising awareness in how social media can affect mental health concerns, it can lead to better development of client care and engagement.

This study will fall under the assessment phase of the generalist model and the assessment phase would be where clinicians would acquire an understanding of the potential concerns of client's interactions on social media. Overall, the assessment phase will be used to gain insight on how SMU, through the clinicians' perspectives, can influence client's views of their mental health and social interactions. It will also allow insight into the clinicians practice and if it has shifted to accommodate the factor of SMU in services.

The findings in the study may contribute a greater understanding of the influence social media has on individuals seeking assistance and on social media, and the level of awareness that mental health providers have of this issue. To reiterate, the potential findings of this study will assist mental health providers in informing their practice through bringing awareness to the changes social media has brought to coping with mental health issues. Furthermore, to solidify the research focus, the question the study will address is: What are clinicians' perspectives about social media influencing young adults with mental health concerns?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter consists of an examination of relevant research in regard to mental health clinician's perspective and awareness on the issue on young adults' social media use. The subsections in this chapter will include mental health concerns among young adults, technology in the mental health field, and mental health and social media use. The final subsection will examine the Interactionist Perspective and the Self-awareness Theory, which are relevant to this research topic.

Mental Health Concerns in Young Adults

In the United States every four to five young adults meet the criteria for a mental health disorder diagnosis (Merikangas et. al, 2010). Some of these young adults may be utilizing the internet and social media. To illustrate, as much as 81% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 use the internet for SMU as a form of access to socialize (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010). Of those young adults who use the internet social media, 78% are on Snapchat, 98% use YouTube, 71% use Instagram, and 45% use Twitter, often multiple times a day (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

Moreover, in a TED talk presented by Sarah Liberti (2017), the presenter discusses the apathetic manner in which young adults post comments on

suicidality and mental health online. Such postings being shared online were passively suggesting these individuals wanted to end their lives or even blatantly stating in the open ideas of self-harm. These comments showed serious mental health concerns within the online population. Nevertheless, due to these negative thoughts being shared on social media, these results were not being taken as serious because users lacked the knowledge on recognize warning signs or simply being uncomfortable with the topic of suicide. Luxton, June and Fairall (2012) suggested that social media can influence mental health behavior due to the large amount of interactions individuals can have with others online despite being in different parts around the world. The article disclosed that there has been found an emergence of pro-suicide websites on social media. As a result, these types of websites present a risk to vulnerable populations including young adults with mental health concerns. Additionally, the authors discuss cyberbullying presence in social media and how it manages to initiate suicide ideation in young adults alongside possibly increasing thoughts and feelings of worthlessness and isolation.

Mental Health Services

Within the general population, there are certain risk factors among young adults such as the prevalence of mental health issues. When distinguishing mental health differences in young adults, males are more at risk for suicide, while females are more likely to show symptoms for depression and anxiety (Hunt and Eisenberg, 2010). Moreover, behavioral disorders are serious health

concerns during young adulthood, since the use for mental health services by this population are low. Notably, about one-third of young adults with mental health concerns or disorders utilize mental health services to alleviate their symptoms (Vanheusden et. al, 2008).

Goodwin, Savage and Horgan (2016) found that US young adults viewed reaching out for professional support as a character flaw or sign of weakness. In other words, the study found that young adults appeared to be under the impression that seeking out mental health services would result in rejection from peers, even if they were to be validated for their efforts. Furthermore, the fear of rejection from peers appears to be was a greater motivator to avoid services. Other aspects besides the fear of rejection which can influence young adults to not seek professional guided services, is the negative stigma that accompanies mental health, self-perception, and media's influence. The media has contributed to stigmatizing or glorifying mental health and portraying it in a negative light (Goodwin, Savage, & Horgan, 2016). As media influences many parts of culture in society, it sets expectations of what is accepted, which may result in a fear of rejection and negative self-perception.

Technology and Mental Health

While cellphones and other platforms have been used in the medical setting, the use of technology for mental health purposes has not reached the same level of implementation. However, technology for mental health services is slowly rising (Luxton et. al, 2011). Technology use in mental health can provide

clients or young adults with direct access to a therapist which can create a stronger therapeutic relationship. When the client is provided direct access through the ease of technology enhancements, it can expand a greater outreach for the services offered. Technology in the behavioral health setting has been seen as an important tool as it is influential and impactful in the lives of many young adults today (Fuber et. al, 2011).

<u>Studies on Mental Health and Social Media Use</u>

As briefly aforementioned the TED talk presented by Sarah Liberti (Ted, 2017) titled "Casually Suicidal", the speaker discusses how mental health issues like depression and suicide are being addressed on social media as a form of a joke by users. This practice has been normalized within the 21st century has been normalized through most of the social media community. Sarah goes on to highlight how individual's online, use humor to mask the pain of being suicidal when in reality they are trying to reach out for help, but fear being perceived as fragile. The presenter stresses that individuals on social media are not comfortable in openly discussing suicide and are not being equipped with the tools to speak on such sensitive mental health concerns. Furthermore, mental health concerns on social media are usually not taken seriously because of the uncomfortable nature and the platform used to share this delicate subject matter.

SMU characteristics are similar in how it influences mental health in different parts of the world as explained by studies focusing on the U.S population (Levenson et. al., 2016; Primack et. al 2017; Whaite et al., 2018) and

Turkey (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017). Researchers have identified that individuals who have a higher SMU tend to experience increased levels of social isolation through utilization of these platforms. Moreover, social media users may also have negative reactions on these sites such as online arguments or being unfriended aiding in lowering their self-esteem. Kuss and Griffiths (2017) further support this claim by stating one of the motivations for individuals in investing so much time on social media, is to promote identity formation, in which they strive to build a desirable online self as well as paired with other factors associated, such as personality (e.g. extroverted and introverted) and geographic location which proved as a useful indicator in predicting social isolation in SMU (Whaite et al., 2018). Whaite et al. (2018) postulates additional research is needed to understand r the relationship between SMU and social isolation. With further research, the mental health field can progress towards designing appropriate interventions around screening individuals with mental health concerns. The research results emphasize individuals who indulge in SMU can have long lasting impacts regarding personal mental health. However, the authors argue through raising awareness from a clinician perspective, educating clients on mental health risks, and teaching social skills on SMU can reduce negative outcomes. As a result, many of these studies require time to explore current mental health clinicians' perspectives regarding SMU and mental health.

Supporting Sarah Liberti discussion regarding mental health and SMU, other research suggest that individuals tend to cope with personal issues through

social media platforms (Kircaburun, Alhabash, Tosuntaş, & Griffiths, 2018; Kuss and Griffiths, 2017; Primack et. al, 2017; Whaite et al., 2018). A common trend within these research studies is how impactful SMU can be on individual's mental health state. Based on these studies (Primack et. al, 2017; Whaite et al., 2018), it appears that individuals SMU is a primary source in dealing with their mental health. This attempt to alleviate mental health symptoms contributes to low social support, negative personality traits, and increases access to others from various geographic location on social media. These studies expand on how prevalent SMU is with dealing with mental health needs, unfortunately not much has been done to raise awareness. As a result, only a few recent studies have taken the approach to understand how implementation of social media may be used as a screening tool increasing contact with proper health resources. Primack et. al (2017) supports the research stating that there is a relationship between mental health concerns and SMU that professionals do not understand yet. SMU has a social benefit which is the reason individuals continue to utilize these outlets to connect with others around world. All these studies also agree that not all social media outlets influence mental health negatively such as platforms like a snapchat and Instagram users present more positive symptoms such as decrease loneliness and increase happiness due to being an image-based platform compared to Facebook which is time consuming and less intimate (Kircaburun, Alhabash, Tosuntaş, & Griffiths, 2018).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Two theories that will be utilized to guide this study are the Interactionist Perspective and the Self-awareness Theory.

The Interactionist Perspective, as discussed by Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2016), focuses on an individual's social interaction. This theoretical framework suggests that society shapes individual's reality, therefore shaping society through their interactions. This perspective provides insight into how individuals learn from their environment. The interactionist perspective includes symbolic interactionism, a type of nonverbal communication. This symbolic interactionalism suggests that objects or symbols, such as those that can be found on SM, have understood shared meanings among society (California Alabama, 2017). This theory will guide the research to explore how young adults are influenced by society and SM while viewing how that influences their mental health needs and help seeking behaviors.

The self-awareness theory was proposed by Duval and Wicklund (1972). This theory states that individuals analyze their self and/or environment in order to undergo self-evaluation. During this process, individuals challenge their perception of self by considering personal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that contributes to self-dissatisfaction or change behaviors. Duval and Wicklund (1972) considered that individuals focus attention on what life expectations they strive to achieve and reactions that follow when they are successful or fail to achieve the expectations. Self-awareness is a necessity to identify the

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differences of personal values and actions. This theory will provide a strong framework to guide the study to look/inspect a clinician's professional self-values and actions towards SMU. These clinician's will have to self-evaluate their own professional obligations in how therapy is provided and what context SMU plays in the mental health service sector.

Summary

Overall, many studies postulate that there is a connection in SMU and mental health wellbeing. In addition, the literature highlights SMU should be further analyzed and implemented as a tool to raise awareness of prevalence of mental health among young adults. As a result, these studies have created a dialogue to discuss the increase nature of technology in influencing mental health. Consequently, these studies focus only on user of social media and disregards mental health clinicians' level of understanding.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study presents the perspectives of mental health professionals on how young adults utilize social media, as well as identifying if professionals view social media as a factor for mental health treatment. This chapter outlines how the study was conducted. Topics that will be discussed include study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

This study focuses on exploring mental health clinician's current insight in assessing for SMU in young adults during treatment, and the potential use to increase awareness on this issue for clinicians to explore better methods to deliver services. This is an exploratory research project because of the limited amount of information and research available on the topic from the perspective of social work mental health clinicians. The perspectives provided from social workers may give insight on the topic which has not been addressed in previous studies.

A strength in using an exploratory and qualitative approach with individuals who practice in the mental health field is that professionals will be able to reflect and provide information on their own experiences in working with

young adults, rather than being limited to few answers a survey. This research topic will expand on the social worker's perspective which not been the most sought out in previous studies. Therefore, the social workers perspective will provide new ideas in exploring the strengths and barriers to overcome when working with young adults in the digital age.

A limitation of this study is that participants might embellish their answers. Since participants will be interviewed in person they may be more likely to provide desirable answers to the researchers in order to appear in a more appealing manner. Those being interviewed might withhold from giving honest answers or share certain information due to a possibility of being viewed as incompetent.

Sampling

This study used snowball sampling to recruit social workers who practice in the mental health field. These social workers are currently or have in the past provided mental health services to young adults. Contributing social workers in the study will participate solely on their own free will with no connection to their employers, therefore agency approval will not be necessary for this study. There are a total of seven clinical social workers participating in this study.

Data Collection and Instruments

The qualitative data for this study was collected by using in-person audio recorded interviews. Each participant was provided with a description on the study and its intentions. Demographic information on each participant was collected. The information collected is as follows, age of participant, level of education, if the participant is an intern in the field of social work or an employee, and number of years in the mental health field.

The researchers interviewed each participant on a series of questions related to the topic. Questions were delivered through an interview guide developed by the researchers. A few of the topics that were discussed in the interviews are as follows: the clinician's level of understanding of social media, their awareness of the culture of young adults on social media, and if they screen or educate young adults receiving services about social media? Furthermore, to ensure the reliability of the developed interview questions, researchers have curated and reviewed the questions, as well as had them reviewed by peers to ensure there are no inconsistencies. During the interviews observations of participants non-verbal communication was evaluated and taken into consideration for the study. As interviews progressed researchers asked to follow up questions related to the topic to gain further understanding.

Procedures

Data was collected through a series of interviews conducted by the two researchers of this study. Participation of subjects have been solicited through a mixture of purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling. Through professional connections, both researchers were able to reach out and obtain permission from mental health clinician's whom they interacted within professional settings. Emails were the main form of communication to recruit and inform clinicians of the nature of the study. Interviews were held in locations convenient for the subjects participating. Participants had a say on where these interviews will be held through collaborating with researchers on what is the most comfortable space for interviews to be held. In addition, both researchers worked collaboratively to obtain information from interactions through joint interviews and audio recording dialogue exchanges as well as researchers transcribing clinician's input. Finally, interviews were completed within a three-month period to obtain the data in an efficient manner.

Protection of Human Subjects

To ensure little to no risk, a consent form was provided to participants in order to explain the process of the interview, nature of study, tools utilized, and how confidentiality will be maintained. Due to the sensitive nature of the interviews and the audio recording of the process, participants were not obligated to provide identifiable information such as name or work position during

recordings. General information such as age, sex, years in the field, and professional status was collected, but kept confidential. The researchers have kept track of this information through a mixture of initials and pseudonyms to maintain anonymity for the participants. In addition, information on recording device(s) are protected by researchers to properly maintain relevant files from the study in an organized and controlled environment securely stored on password encrypted computers files.

Data Analysis

Statements were solicited in one on one interviews and were gathered in thematic analysis. Interview recordings were transcribed in written format to reflect common themes identified through the interview process. Participants were assigned pseudonyms as previously mentioned to help keep track of which participants were interviewed. Two researchers will be present during interviews to solidify, transcribe, assist in asking follow-up questions, and compare notes relating to non-verbal communication as well as time participants spent in responding to questions.

Participants were divided into domains that reflect years and types of professional settings spent in the mental health profession. Information gathered through interviews were categorized by themes identified by researchers. Overarching categories included perceptions of social media and mental health while encompassing sub-categories including no impact, mild impact, and serve

impact. Researches read and reread transcriptions and exchanged views to assure that themes and sub-themes are represented correctly in each category. Individual statements were then input in a blank document with respected categories and questions/follow-up questions asked in the interviews in a T-chart. In addition, information gathered was input on an excel document under the corresponding pseudo-name of the participants. Finally, frequencies and proportions were run for all information gathered relating to the perception of social media and rankings associated by participants.

Summary

The study examines how current clinician's in the mental health setting view social media's influence on young adults. Through these one on one open-ended interviews, clinicians had an opportunity to express their views on the emergence of social media and how it can co-occur, cause, or not have any influence on mental health. The qualitative methods mentioned will give optimal freedom for interviews and participants to analyze and delve into the topic of the potential influence social media has in mental health services.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Presentation of the Findings

Primary form of Communication

In discussing the impact of social media within the young adult population, clinicians interviewed individually came to the same conclusions which is, that this population uses social media as a primary form of communication. Clinician's shared the same notion between the research available that SMU is embedded deep within the culture and that young adults have adopted this as a norm to communicate with others. As stated by a participant: "I think it keeps people in touch with each other; I think it keeps families together," (Participant #5, February 2019).

Be it an expedient form of communication, SMU has helped this generation connect frequently with others in a convenient manner. These clinicians express that SMU among young adults is common and have adjusted to this platform as the main channel to connect with others.

"So, if we want to say that they do spend quite a lot of time in social media, and that's how they're communicating and they're relating, [...] that allows them to sometimes express themselves even more extensively, because they're not seeing [people] eye to eye as we are now. So sometimes that allows them to be more expressive and to open up more," (Participant #3, January 2019).

Furthermore, it appears that social media, based on the participating clinician's perspective, provides young adults and their peers access on keeping up to date with each other's lives. Rather than having a face to face interaction on what that particular individual has been doing, Furthermore, social media users can log on and see quick highlights of other's lives. As reaffirmed by another participant, "[Social media can] most definitely connect to young adults [and help them…] to instantaneously find answers or see what's see what's happening across the world," (Participant #2, January 2019). Users have quick access to the information others post creating a sense of connection in being part of that individual's life even when they may not be physically present.

> "[...] I think it's a big part of our lives. It's the way that young adults and even adults relate to each other, they communicate their everyday experiences through social media, they make friends through social media, they put their political views on social media, they share in a lot of information about their daily in everyday life," (Participant #4, January 2019).

Positive Influences

There have been numerous arguments that social media has had a positive and negative impact in the development of young adults. These articles referenced in the project have argued that social media is a good medium in having others connect with one another quickly as well as having noticeable impact in their mental health. Despite these arguments, it is clear that social media has a big presence in our culture. A participant shares that "I think it's a

big part of our lives" another participant even goes to label social media as a "power to influence millions of people," (personal communication, January 2019). Considering the force of social media, clinician's interviewed are split between if social media has positive or negative influences

In discussing positive effects, it is recognizable that social media has allowed many around the world to socialize and share pieces of their lives. Participants have agreed that it has allowed individuals to have quick access to information. This access helps individuals connect to common themes to relate with on another when struggling with interpersonal issues. This creates a sort of a union and a "great support" amongst young adults experience similar situations.

"There's even places [...] that you can follow on social media [called] 'To write love on her arms.' [It] is a huge movement that I like to [...] refer some of my clients to when they're feeling depressed or dealing with anxiety because this movement kind of deals with self-harm, depression and anxiety. And people who have experienced the same issues and are [...] trying to stick together and [say] 'we can overcome this,' and they post those positive things," (Participant #5, February 2019).

Clinicians have agreed that social media can be utilized as an education tool to raise "awareness". In focusing on positives aspects of any topic, it could build a safety net in sharing common experiences when utilized for good.

"I think, a positive could be on social media, you could find a group of a support kind of system, online where someone with mental illness who maybe doesn't have a big social support could find a positive social support online, right, again, if they were guided correctly, or if it was a purposeful meetup group with people with certain disabilities or certain illnesses, and that could be really positive for someone who feels isolated, they could use that as their social support," (Participant #7, February 2019).

Negative Influences

In relationship to negative influences, there seems to be themes of seeking approval from others online by only posting positive information. Through this, clinicians have argued that it creates a negative outcome on both sides. For example, these individuals who crave the "likes" and seek "approval from their peers online versus in person, the online persona is much more important than their real self." Additionally, this has significantly impacted how individuals interact with one another online. Participating clinicians agree that social media is over used with this population and that is a misrepresentation on how individuals portray themselves.

"[...]one of the issues that I have with social media is that everyone puts their highlight reel in social media. You know, 'I [am]having such an awesome day and look at what awesome thing my kid did.' They don't post the tantrum that their kid had[...], the perfect attendance award that kind of thing. And so, the problem is, [...]you get stuck into believing that everyone

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else's life is perfect, and wonder [if] your life is not perfect and wonderful. And so, I don't know if that affects self-esteem or if that affects certainly the self-perception; [...] because, I must be screwing up in life because look at how great everyone else is and everyone has it all together," (Participant #6, February 2019).

With this notion of misrepresentation, is difficult to escape because young adults consistently surround themselves with social media. Like an addiction, it is overused which detrimental effects in areas of setting proper boundaries and learning social skills.

"Young adults use social media frequently. I actually have had parents come in because of concerns of the social media used by young adults. I've even had young adults where they've had difficulties just putting down their phone and logging out of different social media accounts. So, I know it's a big part of young adults' lives," (Participant #3, January 2019).

In addition, behaviors online seem to impact mental health of individuals. Due to the anonymity of posting information online, users are able to be more vulnerable. This consequence can possibly lead to further concerns in mental health needs.

"When you get a rejection online, it's magnified, right? It's just so much worse, it would be awkward in person. [...] I think the rejection can also be harsh. But more often than not, you're getting approval from social media," (Participant #1, January 2019).

Of those interviewed most presented concerns of how social media can spread misinformation, or how young adults can obtain information that is not beneficial to them. As one participant stated: "I've actually seen people, decide yes, they have a mental illness by reading Web MD," (Participant #6, February 2019). Some participants do suggest that social media can cause more harm than it does good with vulnerable populations. As stated by a participant, "When you talk about social media, it is always negative when it comes to mental health concerns," (Participant #7, February 2019).

Through this reliance on acceptance on social media, users will be dependent on some form of approval from other users. When not able to receive that approval, it takes a toll on their self-perception. Due to a disconnect and not face to face assurance, users are not able to see their reactions of the actions online have on others well-being.

"There's a disconnection so they can say whatever they want on social media, if you're in front of me, I'm going to be more filtered, your human being, I'm going to see your reaction, you know, whether you're getting angry, or you're tearing up, and that's going to kind of curb what I'm going to do, where what I'm seeing, when they're just not texting and posting things, they're just more free to be mean and hurtful and evil. There's just kind of a lack of filter because the other person that the other person isn't right in front of them to see the harm and hurt that's happening," (Participant #1, January 2019).

This is especially prominent to those who already have a predisposition to mental health symptoms such as depression and anxiety. An action that may appear as a joke to one user towards another can be exacerbated or triggering to that individual who has struggled or is struggling with mental health. As stated by a participant: "If you already have risk factors, say for like depression or anxiety, then comparing yourself could exacerbate the symptoms of depression or anxiety," (Participant #2, January 2019). Unfortunately, users continue to put themselves in this position for the sake of being accepted in any shape or form.

"Why don't you be careful of who follows you on social media and it's like a competition because everybody wants a million followers and so they're willing to endure this type of like trauma and being bullied on a daily basis just to have numerous followers. It's kind of ironic to me," (Participant #7, February 2019).

Almost unanimously these clinicians shared through professional and personal experience that it depends how social media is implemented that varies in outcomes to the wellbeing of users. Some even provide solutions and recommendations that it should be limited, or individuals should be educated about the dangers. In addition, clinicians argued "we need to be better about teaching having rules, having limits" when introducing children in at a young age. Every lasting influence of SMU, habits formed at a young age can follow children to adulthood creating a sense of false connection with a lack of socialization hindering interpersonal relationships.

Summary

This study gave the opportunity for participants to provide their views on how social media presents itself in the lives of young adults. Participants provided many common themes to discuss and the extents to which those themes appeared in the lives of young adults. While many participants voiced an overall negative view of social media, they also offered ideas and opportunities on how social media may benefit and educate others positively.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This discussion portion of the paper will identify the anticipated and unanticipated results, limitations of the study, and the recommendations for social work practice. Researchers explored the common themes that have been identified through interviews of participants. The themes are: Primary forms of communication, positive influences and negative influences of young adult's personal well-being. With these themes, the researchers will assess the implication it may have toward social work practice and interactions with clients living with mental health concerns.

Discussion

Anticipated Results

In regard to the responses from the interviews, the results of SMU were leaning towards more on the negative side from clinician's perspectives. The studies mentioned throughout this article support both sides be it excessive use, misrepresentation of information, main method to connect with one another etc. However, clinicians seem to focus more on the negative aspect on how SMU impacts young adult's well-being. Unanimously, clinicians are in agreement that social media is a prominent part of the current culture. In addition, some respondents see the importance of social media as a tool in aiding individuals

who may be experiencing mental health issues while others see it only as a dismissive product that only hinders progress. Fortunately, these participants are all like-minded stating that social media evaluation should be included in assessments for mental health professionals in order to gain a concrete understand of the individual's environment. Lastly, gaining various perspectives from the participants who all share plenty of years working in different areas of mental health and social work, they all provided important input on how to assess and what therapeutic modalities should practitioners consider when exploring SMU. These recommendations will be explored in the later section.

Unanticipated Results

A few of the unanticipated results that came from interviewing participants were clinicians did not consider the impact social media has on young adults. While participants understood that social media has gained momentum and they have a general overview of how it might have influence in society, they expressed not taking time to consider its potential severity. Additionally, few participants were able to name specific resources that can be used to benefit those in crisis. Researchers were provided with specific details and examples of positive aspects of social media.

Another unanticipated result through interviews with participants was that upon reflection through the questions asked, they suggested that education on social media should start even younger and the focus should not just be on young adults but also elementary age children. Participants through the interview

took the time to consider that young adults are not the only ones who would be affected, as social media is a part of every age group. From the very young using YouTube to the very old everyone using Facebook many have access to social media.

<u>Limitations</u>

As important as this emerging topic of SMU and young adults is to mental health professionals, it does come with its set of limitations that should be addressed to gather supplementary information to support these results. First off, the sample size was far too small only encompassing the perspectives of seven social workers. Furthermore, the timeframe to collect data and formulate the research was only done within a nine-month period due to the program structure of California State University, San Bernardino. Three months was used to develop the topic, three months were used to gather date, and the final three months was used to complete and articulate the research.

Next limitation is that only a few colleagues from researchers' personal contacts were used to review the questionnaire for feedback. It was desired to gather professional perspectives to solidify the reliability of the questions asked. Fortunately, these questions asked to participants allowed for flexibility to ask follow-up questions.

The third limitation to this study were a lack of diverse demographics amongst of participants. Due to the small sample size, perspectives may not accurately be represented within ethnic differences (two Hispanics, one African

American, and four Caucasian) and age differences (range: 37-65) may create a disconnection between clients and practitioners' perspectives on SMU. However, some participants do know of people who utilize social media, they themselves are not be fully endowed in the culture only having an outside perspective. Next limitation is in regards of how participants were recruited. There may be a possibility of sample biased because participants were gathered through convenient and snowball sampling techniques. In addition, one should consider when approaching this topic of SMU is expanding its definition to included online gaming. The online gaming community seems to be another avenue where not only children and adolescents, but young adults engage in. It very popular within this population and the animosity towards one another appears almost instant when individual's under perform in a video game. This area of online gaming should be furthered explore to see if their interactions have an impact on this population's wellbeing. Lastly, as highlighted by many of the respondents, SMU behaviors should be researched as young as school age children to see how concerns in social development may be impacted into adulthood. With these limitations in mind, potential studies can reinforce the information presented in this article.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

In regard to recommendations, the field of social work can benefit in including the influences of social media on users. With the inclusion of ethical

use of technology is the National Association of Social Work since 2017 (NASW, 2017), the field is already considering how current trends impacts services. However, to expand on this notion the Council of Social Work Education should include SMU behaviors in the curriculum of each school of social work to better understand the current generations patterns of interactions. As the participant's responses implies, some had different perspectives of how social media plays into people's lives. However unanimously, all clinicians who participated agreed this was a main form of communication meaning there is some form of awareness of the nature of social media.

Furthermore, with SMU being taught in the classroom settings, professors and students can apply theory and models such as Person in Environment (P.I.E), Ecological Systems, Strengths-Based, Social Constructionist and so on to analyze the interactions in individual's digital environment. In addition, clinician's provided great insight during the interviews that practitioners should assess for SMU behaviors during initial assessments. These assessments such as the biopsychosocial are meant to capture the information of any client holistically. With this in mind, SMU is another part in the person's life that may hinder and/or provide support towards stability.

Through the last questions outlined in the interview questionnaire suggested by participants that the following be added to intakes for the purpose of screening and assessing possible risks of social media to an individual's

mental health. According to participants the following questions should be considered:

1. What sites are used; for how often and how long?

2. What information do they surround themselves with? Do they seek advice?

3. How comfortable are they sharing information online vs. in person?

4. Their perceptions of how social media impacts them, if any?

5. How often does this happen on social media versus how often does this happen in real life? So where are you at right now?

6. On a scale of one to 10, how has your stressor decreased?

7. Mental function, is it well or unwell?

8. Do they see social media as a problem for them or have others identified a problem with their social media usage?

In addition to these questions participating clinicians suggested certain therapeutic modalities can be used to inform and use in practice. Therapeutic modalities presented were Psychoeducation; this modality may be used to educate how to navigate through social media, raising awareness of negative influences but also how to get connected to positive support. Another modality suggested was Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT can be used to explore thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. As it applies to social media use, clinicians can use this modality to assess what sites are used, why they are used, and how they feel when on social media. As stated by a participant, CBT can be used to

"reframe reality," if social media is imposing unrealistic expectations onto that individual. Furthermore, a participant suggested taking into consideration the Ecological perspective because it consists of examining internal and external stressors as well as their connection or relationship to mental health. Moreover, as proposed by another participant using a Strengths Based Perspective and Empowerment Theory as therapeutic modalities can encourage positive forms of using the social media outlets available to young adults and all individuals in general.

This is needed information to improve on delivery of services. In fact, whenever possible, social media can be used as a form of intervention within mental health services. As one of the participants mentioned, they would bring a client in to see how they perceived their interactions on sites like Facebook and YouTube. Through this, the clinician was able to work on setting boundaries with the client in identifying what were authentic and false social supports.

Through these interviews, this study helped the researchers realize how influential social media is not just in the lives of young adults, but society as a whole. It would be beneficial to educate up and coming social work students and others in the helping profession on the impact social media on clients. Clinicians going into the field need to be adapt to the changes that are occurring culturally. NASW has taken the proper steps to raise awareness of technology use amongst professions, however this should be expanded to include the use of social media with others due through general observations proving that it has the

power over vulnerable populations. These insights from participants and recommendations provided by the researchers, it is hoped to expand the knowledge of social workers and other fields in the helping professional to continue to raise awareness and encourage further research on perspectives from both clients and professionals to solidify the results from this study.

Summary

This project has explored the clinician's perspectives about social media and the influence it may have on young adults with mental health concerns. What was ultimately gathered is that clinicians have minimally considered social media's impact on young adults. Although through further interactions with the participants it was discovered that social media's influence should be assessed at a much younger age. Furthermore, it was concluded by these researchers that education on the influence social media has should be added to the curriculum of social work students obtaining their degrees.

Researchers recommend further exploration on this topic as it pertain to social work practice in order to connect practice to the culture of society as it advances into the digital era. In addition, this study seeks to raise awareness of the influence social media has and seeking creative methods to mitigate the concerns that may arise. As more research is conducted on the topic, hopefully practitioners gain the expertise in this emerging topic to address possible gaps within services provided to clients and better serve its populations.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

WE DEFINE THE *future*

Academic Affairs
School of Social Work

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407
909.537.5501 | fax: 909.537.7029
https://csbs.csusb.edu/social-work

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine social media use among young adults. The study is being conducted by Natalie A. Valdepena and Ulises I. Lozano graduate students, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Armando Barragán, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine the perspectives of mental health clinicians of young adults with mental health concerns and social media use.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked a few questions on the current status of social media use amongst young adults, the influence it has on mental health, and weather or not they screen for social media use in assessments.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will remain confidential and data will be transcribed from audio recordings.

DURATION: It will take approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete the interview questionnaire.

RISKS: Although not anticipated, there may be some discomfort in answering some of the questions. You are not required to answer and can skip the question or end your participation.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Barragán at (909) 537-3501.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2019.
****
I agree to be audio recorded: _____ YES _____ NO

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

_____   _____
Place an X mark here   Date

California State University, San Bernardino
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee
APPROVED __1/22/2019__ VOID AFTER __1/22/2020__
IRB# SW 1923   CHAIR _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questionnaire

<u>Demographics</u>

Age:

Ethnicity:

Years of mental health experience:

<u>Questions</u>

1. What is your experience in working with young adults?

2. Describe your understanding of the present nature of social media in our
    culture?

3. What is your knowledge of young adults and social media use?

4. Is there a connection between young adults and social media? Explain
    why or why not?

5. Do you see any influence of social media on young adults with mental
    health concerns? Explain why or why not?

6. Do you think social media use has a negative or positive influence toward
    individuals with mental health concerns? Explain why?

7. Do you believe that various therapeutic modalities can help in educating
    individuals on the influence of social media use? If so, which ones would
    you suggest? (e.g. Psychoeducation, Cognitive Behavior Therapy)

8. Answering these questions thus far, do you think it would be appropriate
    for clinicians to screen individuals for social media use during initial

assessment? What kind of questions would you ask if you were to

assess? How would you measure its risks?

Created by Natalie Aliana Valdepeña & Ulises Ivan Lozano.

APPENDIX C

RECRUIMENT EMAIL SAMPLE

Email Recruitment Sample

Hello [Desired Participant],

I hope this email finds you well. As you may be aware, I am in my final year of my master's program, which means I will be conducting research as part of my program's graduation requirements.

I am currently in the process of obtaining consent from mental health professional social workers to participate in my research study for my final year. I wanted to see if you were interested in being a potential participant. When the time comes for collecting data, may I reach out to you for participation in this project? Further, information about the research topic will be provided as the process unfolds. I would greatly appreciate your participation as I believe it will help build a solid perspective on my topic. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Natalie A. Valdepeña/Ulises Lozano

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILTIES

Investigators Natalie and Ulises completed the project through a collaborative effort. Investigators collaborated in project's overall strategic direction including formatting and providing feedback to one another. Ulises had the responsibility of setting up scheduled times dedicated to completing the project. Natalie was responsible of record keeping and organizing information related to the study. Overall, investigators consulted and held each accountable during the process of project completion.