

Suicide prevention apps don't cover all guidelines: Study

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Only one in 10 apps for suicide prevention and depression management covers all six suicide prevention strategies that are commonly recommended in international clinical guidelines, a study led by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) has found.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the six strategies are tracking of mood and suicidal thoughts, development of a safety plan, recommendation of activities to deter suicidal thoughts, information and educational articles on signs of suicidality, access to support networks and emergency counselling.

The systematic assessment of 69 health apps on Apple's App Store and Google Play found that a majority of the apps provided emergency contact information and direct access to a crisis helpline.

Most apps also included at least three suicide prevention approaches, most commonly emergency contact information, direct access to a crisis helpline and suicide-related education.

However, incorrect emergency telephone numbers were found in several apps available worldwide.

Among them were two that had been downloaded more than one million times each.

The research team was led by Associate Professor Josip Car, director of NTU's Centre for Population Health Sciences.

He said: "Health apps can be a crucial addition in the way users manage their health and well-being on a global scale.

"However, for this to become a reality, health app development and release should follow a transparent, evidence-based model."

The study was published online in the journal BMC Medicine.

gansl@sph.com.sg