# Mental health misinformation on TikTok threatens vulnerable users with harmful myths and oversimplifications



Mental health misinformation on social media platforms, particularly TikTok, has emerged as a significant concern in recent years. A recent analysis highlights the various ways in which mental health conditions are misrepresented, leading to potential harm for vulnerable individuals seeking help or understanding. Common themes identified in this misinformation include the pathologisation of normal emotions, the misuse of therapeutic language, the promotion of unevidenced treatments, and the prevalence of self-diagnosis.

Many videos circulating on TikTok attempt to define or explain mental health issues, but often this information trivialises serious conditions. For example, some content regarding borderline personality disorder presents everyday experiences—such as anxiety over shifting plans and mood swings—as clinical symptoms. Liam Modlin, a therapist and psychology researcher at King’s College London, notes that these symptoms are often part of wider emotional experiences and should not be hastily labelled as pathological. Similarly, when discussing depression, one video describes its manifestations in the workplace, suggesting symptoms like low concentration and irritability can directly correlate to the disorder. While there may be overlaps, these symptoms can be associated with numerous other issues, underscoring the complexity of mental health diagnoses.

The misuse of mental health terminology is another critical area of concern. Misinterpretations can lead to a trivialisation of genuine conditions. Dan Poulter, a former health minister and NHS psychiatrist, points out that portraying bipolar disorder merely as rapid mood swings fails to capture the reality of a condition defined by prolonged mood episodes. Furthermore, certain phrases—such as characterising suicidal behaviour as "almost bipolar"—can deepen stigma around mental health, as highlighted by Professor Rina Dutta, a psychiatrist at King’s College London. The risk of oversimplifying symptoms, particularly those that can appear in a variety of contexts, can lead to self-diagnosis without accurate understanding.

The spread of unevidenced treatments has also become prevalent on TikTok. Some users promote quick-fix solutions that promise to cure trauma in an hour through mere writing exercises. Amber Johnston, an accredited psychotherapist, cautions that such claims lack scientific backing and could risk causing further psychological distress. There are also assertions that crying serves as a self-soothing mechanism by releasing cortisol, a statement critiqued by Amy Durden, who emphasises the complicated nature of emotional processing. These oversimplifications ignore the nuanced realities of emotional health, reinforcing the need for more responsible discourse.

Additionally, several videos advocate for specific supplements and techniques as solutions for anxiety and depression. While certain research indicates potential benefits from compounds like magnesium or saffron, Famia Askari, a psychiatrist, highlights that these findings have not yet reached a level of consensus that would warrant their endorsement as standard interventions in clinical practice. The redundant promotion of these approaches not only misguides the public but also places a heavy burden on those grappling with mental health challenges.

The broader implications of such misinformation are concerning. As highlighted in a report by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, studies show a significant proportion of mental health advice on social media can be misleading or even damaging. The risks associated with self-diagnosis based solely on social media content are profound, emphasising the necessity for viewers to seek guidance from qualified professionals rather than relying on virally trending clips that might not accurately reflect reality.

In a landscape where information is consumed rapidly, possible solutions might lie in fostering media literacy and encouraging individuals to critically assess what they view online. Raising awareness about the potential harms of mental health misinformation is essential, not only for safeguarding individual health but also for preserving the integrity of mental health discourse in public spaces.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok), [[3]](https://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/therapy-today/2023/april-2023/the-big-issue)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok), [[4]](https://www.blog.buprojects.uk/2016-2017/hannahold/2016/12/30/misuse-mental-health-terminology-online/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/therapy-today/2023/april-2023/the-big-issue), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.blog.buprojects.uk/2016-2017/hannahold/2016/12/30/misuse-mental-health-terminology-online/), [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok), [[3]](https://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/therapy-today/2023/april-2023/the-big-issue)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok), [[3]](https://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/therapy-today/2023/april-2023/the-big-issue)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/may/31/what-is-the-most-common-mental-health-misinformation-on-tiktok> - This article from The Guardian discusses the prevalence of mental health misinformation on TikTok, highlighting four main themes: pathologising normal emotions, misusing therapeutic language, unevidenced treatments and false claims, and self-diagnosis. Experts express concern over the trivialisation of serious mental health conditions and the potential harm caused by such misinformation. The piece underscores the need for accurate mental health information and the importance of consulting qualified professionals for diagnosis and treatment.
3. <https://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/therapy-today/2023/april-2023/the-big-issue> - An article from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) highlights the challenges posed by mental health misinformation on platforms like TikTok. It cites studies showing a significant percentage of mental health advice on TikTok is misleading or potentially damaging. The piece emphasises the importance of consulting qualified professionals and the risks associated with self-diagnosis based on social media content.
4. <https://www.blog.buprojects.uk/2016-2017/hannahold/2016/12/30/misuse-mental-health-terminology-online/> - This blog post discusses the casual misuse of mental health terminology on social media platforms. It highlights how terms like 'bipolar' are often used inaccurately, leading to misunderstandings and trivialisation of serious mental health conditions. The author emphasises the importance of using mental health terms correctly to maintain their intended significance and avoid causing harm.
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