# Experts warn TikTok mental health tips often misinform and oversimplify complex issues



Every day, millions engage with TikTok, not merely for entertainment, but increasingly for mental health advice. This trend has raised significant concerns, as an investigation revealed that more than half of the top 100 videos under the hashtag #mentalhealthtips contain misleading or inaccurate information. The analysis, conducted by The Guardian and evaluated by a panel of mental health professionals, found 52 out of 100 videos rife with misinformation, dubious "hacks," and overly simplistic advice for complex mental health conditions. Many other videos were described as vague or unhelpful.

The spread of misinformation on platforms like TikTok highlights a particularly troubling aspect of contemporary social media culture. Among those popular videos, one suggested methods such as eating an orange in the shower to mitigate anxiety and others recommended unverified supplements, including saffron and magnesium glycinate. Some videos propagated extreme claims, such as the potential to heal trauma within an hour, while many implied that common emotional reactions could indicate serious mental health issues like borderline personality disorder or emotional abuse. This content often stems from influencers or individuals lacking professional qualifications, whose well-meaning advice swiftly circulates due to TikTok’s algorithm, which favours eye-catching, emotionally resonant material.

Mental health experts are alarmed by the distortion of psychological language in these online forums. Dr. David Okai, a consultant neuropsychiatrist at King’s College London, reviewed videos related to anxiety and depression for the investigation. He noted that critical clinical concepts are frequently misrepresented, with terms like "wellbeing," "anxiety," and "mental disorder" often used interchangeably. This conflation blurs the distinctions between everyday stress and genuine clinical diagnoses, potentially leading to serious misunderstandings about mental health.

The ongoing issue is compounded by the tendency to pathologise normal emotional experiences. Dr. Dan Poulter, a former UK health minister and NHS psychiatrist, highlighted how typical feelings of sadness or anger are mischaracterised as indicators of significant psychiatric disorders. Such misrepresentation can trivialise the experiences of individuals with genuine mental health conditions and mislead vulnerable viewers towards harmful self-diagnosis, which may deter them from seeking appropriate help.

Moreover, the simplification of trauma-related content poses additional risks. Amber Johnston, a psychologist accredited by the British Psychological Society, pointed out that while some videos may contain elements of truth, they often oversimplify the complexities of trauma and PTSD. The implication that healing can occur based on a brief clip fosters unrealistic expectations, leaving viewers feeling more isolated and ashamed when such advice fails to resonate.

In light of these alarming trends, UK lawmakers are advocating for regulation. Chi Onwurah, Labour MP and chair of the Technology Committee, has articulated the need for the Online Safety Act to empower proper oversight of algorithms that promote harmful content. She emphasised the need to close loopholes in existing legislation to enhance public health protection. Alongside her, Victoria Collins, a Liberal Democrat MP, has termed the findings of the investigation "damning," urging prompt actions to safeguard users, particularly younger audiences, from misleading mental health advice.

In response, TikTok has defended its platform as a space for sharing authentic experiences and mutual support. The company claims that 98% of harmful content is removed proactively, prior to being flagged by users. TikTok also collaborates with organisations like the World Health Organization and the NHS to assist in promoting credible mental health resources, arguing that the investigation overlooks the importance of personal storytelling in mental health journeys. They further assert that UK users searching for terms related to mental health are redirected to official NHS informational pages.

As awareness of the complexities surrounding mental health continues to grow, the need for accurate information becomes increasingly essential. The psychiatric community, represented by Professor Bernadka Dubicka of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, acknowledges the positive role social media can play in normalising discussions around mental health. Nonetheless, she insists that diagnoses and treatment should be reserved for qualified professionals, underlining the necessity for access to evidence-based information and supportive structures.

As misinformation remains rampant on social media, it is vital that users remain vigilant. Experts continue to encourage individuals to verify information and seek professional guidance, as the lines between personal experience and expert advice blur in the realm of social media.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://techstory.in/tiktoks-mental-health-advice-experts-warn-of-widespread-misinformation/), [[2]](https://time.com/6307996/mental-health-content-red-flags-social-media/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://techstory.in/tiktoks-mental-health-advice-experts-warn-of-widespread-misinformation/), [[3]](https://time.com/6211695/adhd-tiktok-women/), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-surgeon-general-calls-social-media-warning-labels-protect-adolescents-2024-06-17/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://apnews.com/article/b6d3f2218953418097834c609bdc632f), [[6]](https://www.axios.com/2023/10/10/tiktok-utah-lawsuit-mental-health-children)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://techstory.in/tiktoks-mental-health-advice-experts-warn-of-widespread-misinformation/), [[6]](https://www.axios.com/2023/10/10/tiktok-utah-lawsuit-mental-health-children)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-surgeon-general-calls-social-media-warning-labels-protect-adolescents-2024-06-17/), [[5]](https://apnews.com/article/b6d3f2218953418097834c609bdc632f), [[7]](https://time.com/6989369/us-surgeon-general-warning-label-social-media/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://techstory.in/tiktoks-mental-health-advice-experts-warn-of-widespread-misinformation/), [[2]](https://time.com/6307996/mental-health-content-red-flags-social-media/), [[3]](https://time.com/6211695/adhd-tiktok-women/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://techstory.in/tiktoks-mental-health-advice-experts-warn-of-widespread-misinformation/), [[2]](https://time.com/6307996/mental-health-content-red-flags-social-media/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://techstory.in/tiktoks-mental-health-advice-experts-warn-of-widespread-misinformation/), [[2]](https://time.com/6307996/mental-health-content-red-flags-social-media/), [[7]](https://time.com/6989369/us-surgeon-general-warning-label-social-media/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://techstory.in/tiktoks-mental-health-advice-experts-warn-of-widespread-misinformation/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://time.com/6307996/mental-health-content-red-flags-social-media/> - This article discusses the rise of mental health content on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, highlighting the importance of distinguishing between credible information and potentially harmful misinformation. Experts identify red flags such as the absence of shared credentials by influencers, heavy product promotion, overuse of jargon, encouragement of self-diagnosis, and promotion of a single therapeutic modality. The piece advises users to engage cautiously with mental health content online and to seek professional help when necessary.
3. <https://time.com/6211695/adhd-tiktok-women/> - The article explores how TikTok serves as a platform for women to discover and discuss Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), often leading to self-diagnosis. It highlights the prevalence of ADHD-related content on TikTok and the challenges women face in obtaining formal diagnoses due to differing symptoms and systemic barriers. Experts caution that while TikTok offers a supportive community, it also spreads misinformation, urging users to verify information and seek professional help.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-surgeon-general-calls-social-media-warning-labels-protect-adolescents-2024-06-17/> - U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has called for warning labels on social media apps to highlight their harmful effects on adolescents. Drawing parallels to tobacco warning labels, Murthy argues that such labels could raise awareness and influence behaviour. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are accused of negative effects on youths, including shortened attention spans, negative body images, and vulnerability to online bullying and predators. Legislation for these warning labels would require approval from Congress.
5. <https://apnews.com/article/b6d3f2218953418097834c609bdc632f> - California legislators are considering a bill that would mandate mental health warning labels on social media sites to protect children. This initiative follows U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy's call for Congress to address social media's impact on youth mental health. Statistics reveal that up to 95% of teenagers use social media, with over a third using it almost constantly. Advocates argue that these labels could mitigate harm, while industry representatives believe such measures infringe on First Amendment rights.
6. <https://www.axios.com/2023/10/10/tiktok-utah-lawsuit-mental-health-children> - Utah has filed a lawsuit against TikTok, accusing the platform of harming the mental health of children and teenagers by using powerful algorithms and manipulative design features to attract young users, in violation of state consumer protection laws. TikTok defends itself by highlighting its industry-leading safeguards, including a 60-minute time limit for users under 18 and parental controls for teen accounts. The state officials' continued investigation into TikTok and other social media companies suggests more legal challenges could be on the horizon.
7. <https://time.com/6989369/us-surgeon-general-warning-label-social-media/> - U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has called for warning labels on social media platforms to combat the crisis of mental health among young people. In an op-ed in the New York Times, Murthy suggested periodic reminders for users and parents about the risks of social media, comparable to warning labels on cigarette packages. A 2019 study showed that suicidal thoughts in young people increased by 47% as social media use grew. Murthy highlighted that adolescents spending more than three hours daily on social media double their risk of anxiety and depression.