# Exploring the Impact of Social Media on the Mental Wellbeing of Young People with Lived Experience of the Care System

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Introduction

• Care experienced young people (CEYP) are highly susceptible to developing mental health issues [1]

• Social media use is increasing dramatically each year among young people, even more so since the COVID-19 pandemic [2]

• Social media research has produced mixed results [3] and has generally only considered the general population due to CEYP being a hard-to-reach population

• Therefore, the impact of social media on vulnerable young people, such as CEYP, is important to explore.
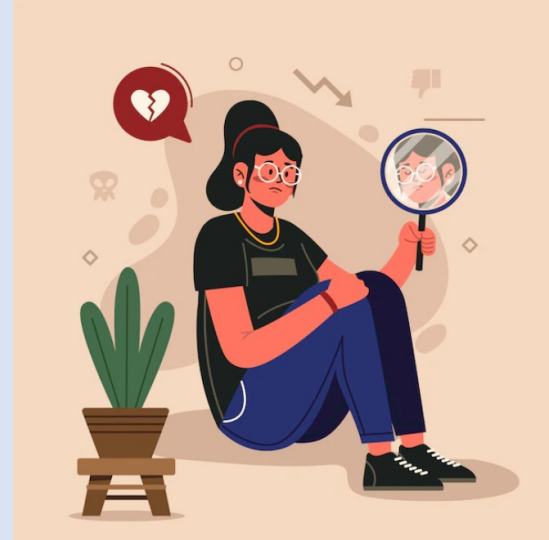
Research Question

How does **regular social media use** impact the **mental wellbeing** of young people and how does this vary between young people who have and have not **experienced the care system**?

Method
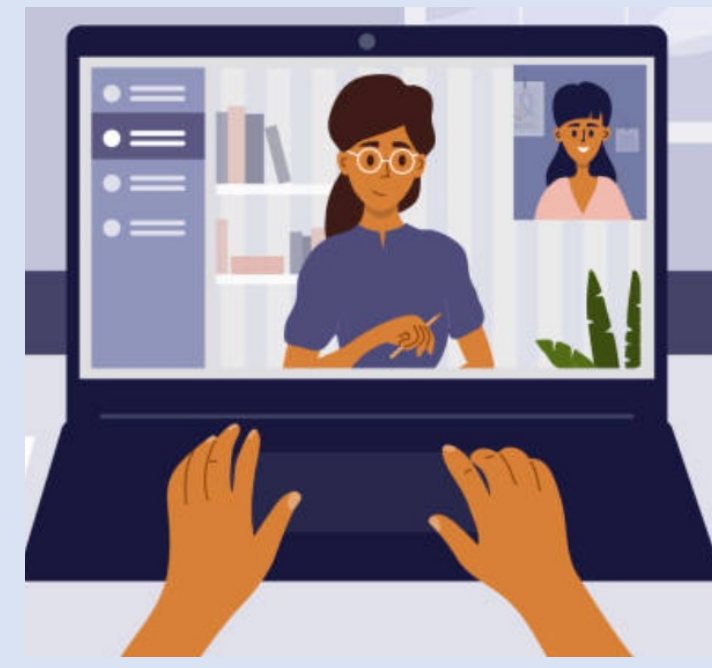
Semi-structured one-on-one interviews, co-designed with Nottingham City council

11 Care experienced young people

11 Young people from the general population

Themes

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to find the following themes:

Key finding: Community and belongingness on social media was very important to CEYP

Key finding: Only CEYP mentioned issues around identity and cyberbullying

Positive impact: entertainment, motivation, and escapism

Harmful impact: negative comparison, addictiveness, and low self-esteem

Age and emotional maturity are important

Protection from harm: self-regulation, social media design, better policies, and improved education

COVID-19 impact: significantly increased social media use and exacerbation of positive and negative effects

Care experience: high resilience, heightened emotions, strict monitoring, and the need for more education

Key finding: CEYP focused on education from social care, whereas the general population focused on education from school

Take Aways

1. Despite many similarities, the findings show **differing needs** between care and non-care experienced young people, which has **implications for social media design, policies, and education**
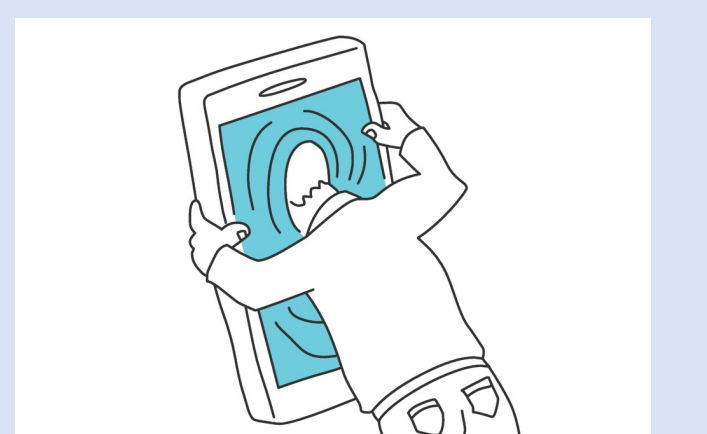
2. Findings can be used by councils to **inform social media policy** and **how to monitor** CEYP's social media use

3. Social media companies need to address the concerns over **addictive design** and the ease of seeing **harmful content**

4. **More education** is needed to prepare young people for the potential emotional impact social media can have

References:
[1] Richardson, J. & Lelliott, P. (2003) Mental health of looked after children. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 9*(4), 249-256.
[2] Lee, Y., Jeon, Y.J., Kang, S. *et al.* (2022) Social media use and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in young adults: a meta-analysis of 14 cross-sectional studies. *BMC Public Health, 22,* 995.
[3] Best, P., Manktelow, R. & Taylor, B. (2014). Online communication, social media and adolescent wellbeing: A systematic narrative review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 41,* 27-36.