

Social Media Addiction, Anxiety, and Childhood Emotional Abuse in Young Adults:



A Scoping Literature Review

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Introduction

- Problematic social media use (PSMU) has become extremely prevalent in recent years, estimated 17% of the population suffer from social media addiction¹
- From 1990 to 2021 there was a 52% increase in anxiety disorders, potentially resulting from the ubiquitousness of social media²
- Research is needed into mechanisms explaining links between PSMU and anxiety
- Childhood emotional abuse (CEA) is common and linked to insecure anxious attachment styles during adulthood, which is linked with PSMU through maladaptive coping, which then exacerbates anxiety^{3,4}
- This scoping review assesses the need for future research examining CEA as a moderator of the association between PSMU and anxiety in young adults

Research Questions

1. How have PSMU, Anxiety, and CEA in young adults been conceptualized and associated with one another in existing research?
2. Does existing research support the need for future studies including childhood emotional abuse in association with problematic social media use and anxiety in young adults?

Methods

- Scoping reviews systematically compile existing literature that addresses the research questions about concepts, theories, findings, and gaps in the literature⁵
- Stage 1: Formulate research questions and objectives
- Stage 2: Identify relevant studies: PsycINFO, PubMed, CINAHL, AI search tools (e.g. Elicit, LitMaps, Connected papers), References
- Stage 3: Select a subset of studies based on inclusion and exclusion criteria relevant to the research questions (e.g. includes \geq two of the variables; adults ages 18-24)
- Stage 4: Extract and chart data: general study information, methodology, measures, findings, limitations and future directions (3 in duplicate)
- Stage 5: Organize, synthesize key findings in a tables, and narratively describe findings relevant to research questions
- Stage 6: Consult and network with experts in the field to review findings and suggest additional considerations for future studies

PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram

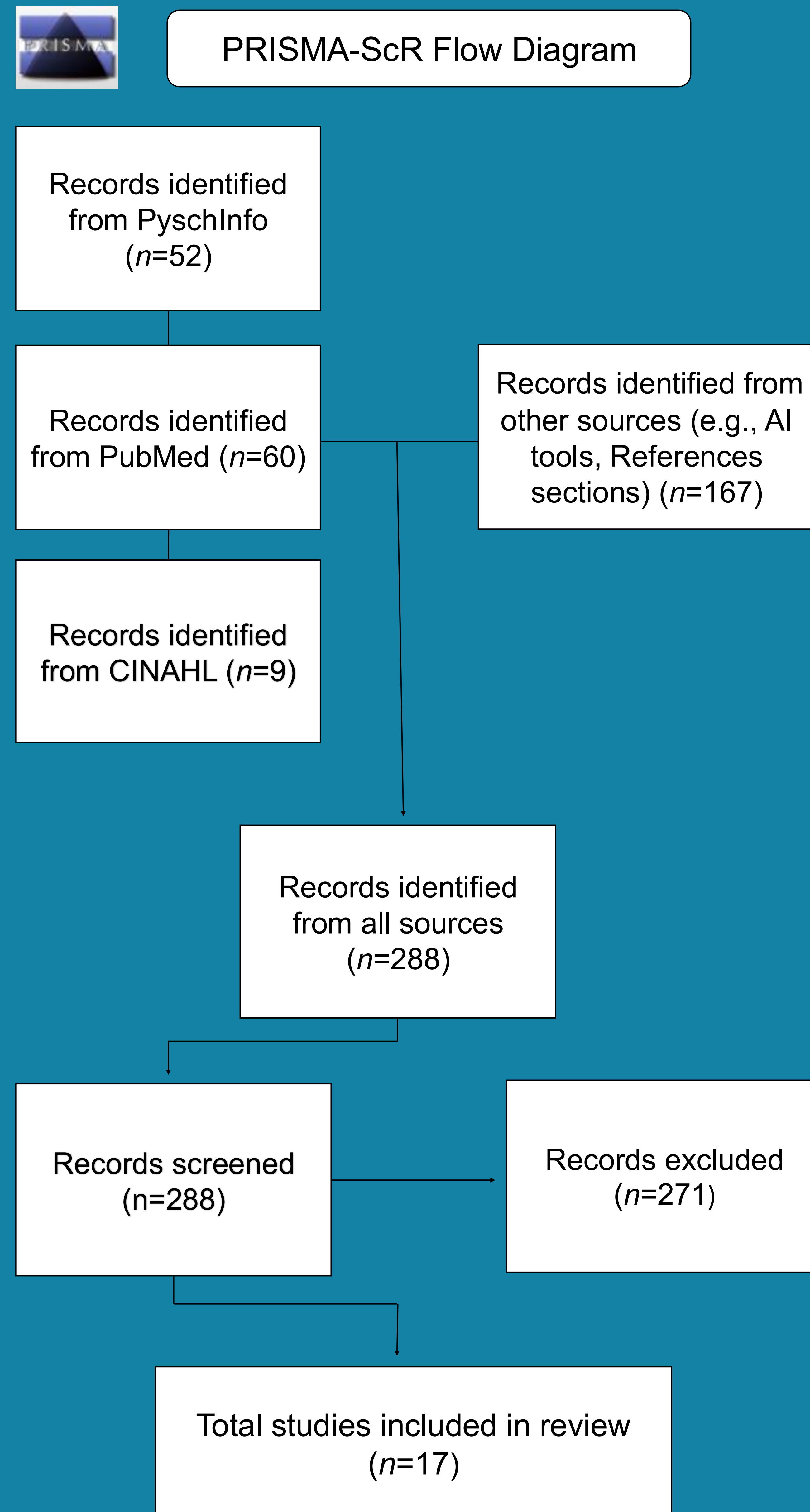


Figure 1. PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram illustrating the selection process for studies included in the scoping review on childhood emotional abuse, social media use, and anxiety in young adults⁶

Results

- Out of 288 papers, 17 met inclusion criteria; Relevant themes were:

 1. Articles examining PSMU and anxiety identified a bidirectional relationship and included multiple different variables such as addictive behaviors, negative online feedback, communication overload, and emotional investment in social media
 2. Links between CEA and PSMU were understood through anxious attachment, depression, stress, cluster B traits, and low self esteem
 3. CEA was found to be linked to anxiety in young adults through high external locus of control, low activational and inhibitory control, insecure attachment, stress, emotion dysregulation, amygdala structure and function, and interpersonal insecurity

Discussion

- This scoping review synthesizes past research finding a bivariate association between PSMU and anxiety in young adults
- CEA has theoretically consistent associations with both PSMU and anxiety
- No past research has looked at the role of CEA in the association between PSMU and anxiety in young adults
- Future studies should examine CEA as a moderator of the association between PSMU and anxiety to inform clinical interventions for vulnerable young adults with histories of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

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