



IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

In the 21st century, family structures have undergone remarkable transformation, reflecting broader social, social media has become an important part of adolescents' everyday lives, offering opportunities for communication, emotional expression, social support, and access to information, while also presenting potential risks to psychological well-being. This article examines the impact of social media use on adolescent mental health, focusing on social media screen time, cyberbullying, and body-image dissatisfaction. Existing evidence discussed in the article indicates that associations between social media use and mental health are not uniform: some research reports links with depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem, loneliness, sleep-related difficulties, and other forms of psychological distress, whereas other longitudinal evidence suggests that time spent on social media alone may not consistently predict poorer mental health. Cyberbullying emerges as an important risk factor, with reported associations with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, emotional distress, and suicidal thoughts. The article also highlights concerns surrounding appearance-related social comparison and body dissatisfaction, particularly among adolescent girls. At the same time, social media can support interpersonal relationships and social connectedness when used appropriately. The article concludes by emphasizing the role of parents in establishing healthy media boundaries, encouraging offline interaction and physical activity, monitoring content, modelling balanced media use, and maintaining open communication with adolescents.

Keywords: social media; adolescent mental health; cyberbullying; screen time; body image; self-esteem; parents

Introduction

Social media is a vital tool in the life of an adolescent. However, with its numerous advantages come some serious risks. Adolescents' lives can be negatively impacted by social media, especially if they do not use it properly. Various studies and evidence show us that using social media too much can have a negative impact on one's mental health and increase the risk of developing conditions like anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The use of social media has been linked to an increase in feelings of loneliness and social isolation, which can result in mental health issues. Teenagers may also develop unrealistic expectations from social media, which may result in low self-esteem and inadequacy. Teenagers may experience cyberbullying on social media, which could have a negative impact on their mental health. It is important to note that not all social media use is dangerous. When used appropriately, social media can improve mental health. Social media, for instance, can support interpersonal relationships, let people express their emotions, and allow for the expression of social support.

Social Media Screen Time and Mental Health

One factor considered while investigating the impact of social media on adolescents' mental health is the time, they spend on it. Adolescents' time spent on social media can vary depending on a variety of factors such as age, gender, location, and personal preferences. Evidence shows that adolescents in general spend around 2 to 4 hours every day on social media. Time spent on social media is not associated with an increased rate of mental health issues among adolescents (Coyne et al., 2022). It is important to note that this study was looking at the long-term impact of social media screen time on adolescents. On the other hand, studies from the Millennium Cohort Study found that spending more time on social media is linked to higher risks of depression and self-harm in women as well as lower levels of self-esteem. (Barthorpe et al., 2020). However,

we have witnessed that the findings of most studies are no different from that of Barthroe's research as most of it looked at the short-term impact.

Several studies have stated the relationship between social media screen time and its impact on adolescents' mental health. Most of the previous findings stated negative associations such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, poorer well-being, etc. Studies also demonstrated gender differences in screen time and mental health where females were more compelling than males. However, it is important to keep in mind that sometimes poor mental health in females is also attributed to biological and environmental issues. Though many negative associations were not found between screen time and self-harm, it is possible that social media screen time can either decrease or increase the risk of self-harm.

Cyberbullying and Mental Health

Cyberbullying is another factor that adds to the negative impact of social media on adolescents' mental health. Cyberbullying is the type of bullying that occurs specifically on social media platforms, messaging apps, and other online sites. There are numerous forms of cyberbullying – posting hate comments, spreading online rumors, imitating someone else on the internet, etc. all of these are done to ruin the individual's reputation. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying leaves no scope for someone to escape as it follows one around anywhere, they go online, and the worst part is the bully is anonymous which makes the victim feel more vulnerable and helpless.

Evidence shows that cyberbullying can lead to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts among adolescents. Roughly, 15% of students and 7% of students were respectively involved in cyberbullying in their lifetime and the past 1-month. These students were suffering from low levels of self-esteem and moderate levels of depression and anxiety (Baruah et al., 2017). Evidence shows that the prevalence rate of cyberbullying is 6.5% to 34.5% and it is also associated with severe depressive symptoms, substance use, ideation, and suicide attempt (Bottino et al., 2015). Several psychosocial risk factors and mental health problems have been linked to cyberbullying among victims, offenders, and those who are both victims and offenders. Emotional stress, social anxiety, substance use, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts are all linked to cyberbullying.

Talking about the emotional response to cyberbullying, varied in terms of quality and intensity. Most of the adolescents experienced negative emotions such as anger, upset, worry, stress, fear, and "depressive feelings" and others did not care much. However, for some victims, developmentally strong traits like self-esteem and self-efficacy may help to limit emotional harm, as well as adaptive resilience and a positive assessment of a stressful situation. According to studies, the likelihood of attempting suicide is up to twice as high among victims and aggressors as among those not involved in cyberbullying. However, suicide is not caused solely by having experienced cyberbullying. We can see that several negative outcomes are prevalent among adolescents due to cyberbullying.

Body Dissatisfaction and Mental Health

Negative feelings, thoughts, and attitudes about one's physical appearance, particularly one's weight, shape, and size, are referred to as having a poor body image. This dissatisfaction may result from several things, including societal pressure to meet predetermined beauty standards, media portrayals of idealized body types, or personal accounts of bullying or taunting over one's appearance. Unhealthy behaviors like disordered eating or excessive exercise can result from having a poor body image, including negative emotions like shame, anxiety, and depression. It can affect people of all ages, genders, and body types, and it can have serious consequences for their mental and emotional well-being.

The purpose of the study is to determine the percentage of females who are unhappy with their bodies, the relationship between different factors and body image dissatisfaction, and the weight-control strategies used by teenage college girls. 77.6% of the females reported having a negative perception of their bodies. It was discovered that depression, a higher BMI, and social and cultural pressure to be thin were all strongly linked to poor body image. The most popular weight-control strategies were skipping meals and eating small meals. The primary motivations behind weight control activities were to enhance attractiveness and body shape (Ganesan et al., 2018).

Due to their usage of social media, teenage girls appear to be more vulnerable to mental health issues than teenage boys. It is thought that the availability of sexualized images online increases the body dissatisfaction of adolescent girls. Sexual objectification might reinforce for adolescent girls the idea that their value is based on how they look. This study examined if the sexualized images that are regularly found on social media may have either beneficial or negative effects on the mental health of adolescent girls. Teenagers reported making comparisons between their appearances while browsing photos on social media, and body

image was noted as a big concern. Comparing appearances were supposed to exacerbate teenage girls' concerns about beauty. Adolescent girls attempt to change how they look and get validation from social media. (Papageorgiou et al., 2020).

Most of the studies show the same kind of results in terms of body image dissatisfaction but the surprising part of it is that all these studies are mostly done on adolescent girls and not boys. In our society beauty is an attribute associated only with girls and not boys as a result of which all beauty-related issues are only associated with girls and even if boys do have them, they are not allowed to speak of it. This makes them more susceptible to mental health issues since all these studies are done on girls, we tend to think that girls have comparably more mental health issues than boys due to social media, but we forget that none of us are taking into account the perception of the boys too.

Key Findings

Social media is very necessary for the lives of your adolescents having both positive and negative effects on them and their mental health.

Social media screen time has been one of the factors considered for mental health issues in adolescents. There have been researchers stating that there is no association between screen time and mental health issues at the same time certain researchers stated an association between them. Evidence showed that the increase in social media screen time leads to psychological distress like lack of sleep, depression, anxiety, self-harm, etc. It also results in feelings of loneliness and a lack of connection with others.

Cyberbullying is another prominent factor for the negative impact on the mental health of adolescents. It does lead to psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, the feeling of helplessness, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal. The victims go through constant fear and embarrassment, and shame resulting in feelings of hopelessness and despair.

Body image dissatisfaction is right now one of the most prevalent reasons for negative social media impact on adolescents' mental health. This has mostly affected young girls since they wanted to achieve the perfect beauty standards regarding social media. It leads to eating disorders like anorexia nervosa, bulimia and depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy.

Recommendations for Parents

Parents need to manage their Family Media Plan including both individualized and content time. Also, discourage media multitasking especially during doing their homework, and at the same time learn about parental control and settings.

Prioritizing face-to-face interactions, and physical activity over screen use and being part of those activities can be meaningful in controlling adolescents' social media use.

Adolescents model their parent's behavior so it is important to set the right examples for them. Encouraging screen-free time during family dinners or socializing, engaging with their children in their alternative hobbies, and discouraging social media use 1 hour before bedtime.

Parents should have a comfortable and friendly relationship with their adolescents for them to come and share the issues they are facing on social media.

Parents need to give more positive feedback about their adolescent's physical appearance to make them feel positive about their bodies.

Prioritizing the content that is being watched on social media can help to reduce a lot of issues and protect adolescents to face any trouble.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media can have a big impact on adolescents' mental health, both good and bad. While technology may offer chances for social interaction and access to beneficial resources, it may also exacerbate anxiety, sadness, and loneliness. Parents may support their children in forming a healthy connection with social media and upholding good mental health by keeping an eye on their usage of it, establishing reasonable boundaries, and having candid dialogues about it. While social media isn't always harmful, it can hurt mental health if it isn't used responsibly. Parents may assist and encourage their kids to thrive both offline and online by taking the correct approach. Finally, supporting free communication and fosters a balance between online and offline activities. Young people successfully handle social media obstacles and support good mental health outcomes.

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