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Public Health News



Social Media Use and Mental Health Indicators Among US Adolescents

Is social media a cause of concern for teens?

A recent study found a relationship between prolonged social media use and poor mental health.

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Introduction

According to the Digital 2023, Global Overview Report, there are 4.76 billion social media users, equivalent to more than 92% of Internet users worldwide. The use of social media among students increases every year. Currently 53% of students have a smartphone by the age of 11 (Richter, et al., 2022). Social media supports peers to be connected. It offers access to friendships and other relationships. However, students are in a critical stage of their life and this raises some concern among parents and educational leaders. Social media can feel harmless and become addictive to children, because it is designed to keep you hooked. However, it is important to study its effects on cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Thin-Ideal Internalization among adolescent girls

While social media plays an important role in helping adolescents stay connected with each other and family members, it has raised a lot of concern among adolescent girls. Common social media platforms include Snapchat, Instagram and Tiktok, allowing users to share messages, photos, videos, and comments. Almost every platform of social media allows users to get “likes” on their post from other users and friends. these features allow users to gain a sense of belonging.

Thin-ideal internalization is regarded as a negative body image representing the gap between reality and the ideal (Zeng et al., 2023). Adolescent girls present stronger preferences for a thin ideal, which causes dissatisfaction with their bodies(Zeng et al., 2023). Research has revealed that higher thin-ideal internalization is associated with more frequent usage of social media among adolescent girls(Zeng et al., 2023). As noted, adolescents can obtain positive feedback and social approval from social media. The results of the research conducted in this study demonstrate that thin-ideal internalization is very strongly linked to problematic social media use or PMSU(Zeng et al., 2023).

Problematic social media use (PSMU) is defined as “problematic behavior with excessive and compulsive use of social media, accompanied by a preference for online social interaction, a motivation for mood regulation, and negative effects to life”. Studies show that PSMU is associated with numerous negative emotions like anxiety, depression, body image disturbance, substance abuse, and even increased eating and sleeping disorders(Zeng et al., 2023).



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Since social media is growing quicker than one can expect, it is now labeled as the “Social Media Revolution,” and within this revolution were great links between the time spent using and overall mental health. During 2021, a study revealed that young adults among the ages of 18-24 reported 75% used instagram and snapchat while 50% used TikTok (Azagba, S., Ebling, T., & Korkmaz, A., 2024). This correlates to an analysis performed during 2021 among children and adolescents. It was shown that 25.2% had been clinically diagnosed with depression symptoms where as 20.5% had been experiencing anxiety symptoms. Furthermore, there was

also a significant rise in depressive episodes of those between the ages of 12 to 20 (Azagba, S., Ebling, T., & Korkmaz, A., 2024). In addition to the statistics, it has also been determined that high social media usage along with depression symptoms has been associated with ongoing online harassment, poor sleep, low self esteem, and poor body image. All in all, an abnormal amount of social media usage has slowly increased young adults risk for mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Social Media Threats and Health Among Adolescents

Although ties between poor mental health and social media has become apparent, new research offers specific ways in which media interactions can threaten the mental and physical well-being of teenagers today. This includes cyberbullying, sexual harassment, physical appearance pressures, racism, misinformation and more. With this information, the hope is for parents and guardians of adolescents to remember that these are transformative years in which they develop their own self-perception, are influenced by peers, and are more vulnerable to engage in risky behaviors. By protecting and supporting young adolescents as they begin to interact more on media platforms, parents and other loved ones can help them build emotional intelligence and a healthier relationship with media. Moreover, actions to reduce exposure to threats on social media should be taken by lawmakers and service providers in order to protect teens– especially those at higher risk.

References

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