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Mental health effects of social media usage on teenagers!

Introduction

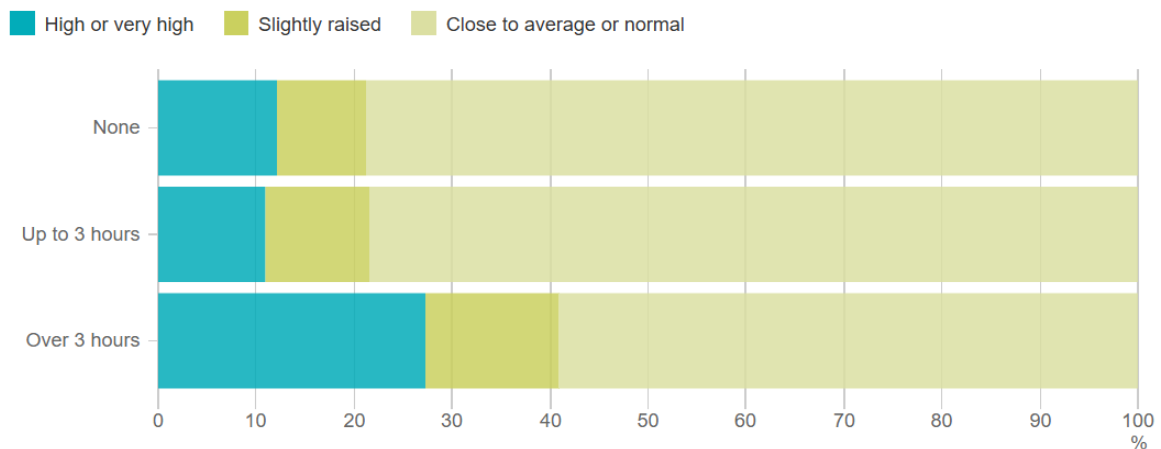
Social media plays a significant role in modern-day life, especially for teenagers growing up in an era of fast communication, smartphones, and digital devices. There are many benefits to social media, from staying in touch with family and friends to business opportunities and content creation. However, concerns have emerged about its potential impact on teenagers' mental health, possibly contributing to issues such as anxiety and depression. Therefore, this research aims to explore how social media is linked to adolescent mental health and to gain a better understanding of this relationship.

Several factors contribute to mental health issues among teenagers. According to Li (2024), cyberbullying can have a detrimental effect on adolescents, leading to low self-esteem, depression, and in some cases, self-harm or suicide. Disrupted sleep due to excessive screen time has also been reported as a concern (Pirdehghan et al., 2021). McCrae (2019) suggests that anxiety and stress may also be linked to social media use, affecting overall mental well-being.

Adolescents aged 13–19 are particularly affected, as this is a developmental stage where they begin to socialise more and form relationships, yet remain highly impressionable. Those with pre-existing mental health conditions may be especially vulnerable, and the addition of social media into their daily lives may worsen symptoms. Depression and anxiety are on the rise, and this report will investigate these trends further.

According to National Statistics (2015), there has been a rise in reported mental health symptoms among adolescents. The study compared adolescents who did not use social media with those who used it for up to three hours per day. The findings showed a slight increase in mental health symptoms among the latter group, suggesting a possible link between time spent on social media and adolescent well-being.

Total difficulty score type by time spent using social media on a school day, UK, 2011 to 2012



Source: [Understanding Society, The UK Household Longitudinal Study](#)

Schonning (2020) states that social media can have both positive and negative effects on mental health. Twenge (2019) argues that digital tools and social media have a negative impact, whereas Oren (2019) found only a slight effect. On the positive side, social media can support education, help teens connect with friends and family, and boost confidence in social interactions. On the negative side, it can disrupt sleep and make socialising more difficult for some adolescents.

O'Reilly (2020) highlights that while some studies have been conducted, there is still limited evidence to confirm a direct link between social media and mental health issues in adolescents. O'Reilly also suggests that when working with young people, it is important to consider how social media affects their lives individually. Social media can have both positive and negative effects, so it is vital not to assume it is always harmful. Instead, it is more useful to explore how each young person uses social media and how it relates to their mental well-being.

When exploring the best structure for this research, both quantitative and qualitative methods can be valuable. Quantitative research, for example, can involve collecting data on the number of young people who experience sleep disturbances due to heavy social media use. Qualitative research, on the other hand, might involve group discussions where adolescents talk about staying up late because they feel pressure to respond quickly to friends or fear missing out.

National Statistics (2015) used secondary research through multiple questionnaires, analysing data from children aged 2–17. The questionnaires measured emotions, social behaviour, and hyperactivity/inattention. The findings showed that young people who used social media for more than three hours a day had a higher difficulties score (averaging 13.3 out of 40) compared to those who didn't use it (10.2) or used it less (10.5). Additionally, around 7% of young people aged 10–15 reported using social media for more than three hours daily, with girls (9%) more likely than boys (5%) to do so. This data is valuable for identifying patterns and trends in the research.

Popat (2022) conducted primary research with young people aged 13–17 and identified five key themes:

1. Self-expression and validation
2. Appearance, comparison, and body ideals
3. Pressure to stay connected
4. Social engagement and peer support
5. Exposure to bullying and harmful content

These findings are important, but the review also notes that not all effects are negative. Social media can provide support, validation, and a sense of connection. It can help young people understand others' experiences and develop coping mechanisms. This research is especially valuable because it is based on real-life stories and can inform one-to-one interviews, group discussions, and narrative analysis.

This topic would benefit from a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative research, using secondary data such as statistics and questionnaires, can help identify links between social media use and mental health. Qualitative research, through primary methods like interviews, allows for a more personal exploration. For example, asking teenagers how they feel when they don't use social media compared to how they feel after heavy use can provide rich insights and valuable feedback for the study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while there is no definitive proof that social media causes mental health issues, the evidence suggests a slight increase in symptoms among vulnerable adolescents or those with pre-existing conditions. These individuals may experience worsened symptoms with heavy social media use. However, social media can also have positive effects, such as boosting confidence, supporting social connections, and helping young people stay in touch with family and friends. Ongoing research is essential, but as this review shows, there is no clear-cut link proving that social media has a wholly negative impact on young people. Each case should be assessed individually to better understand the relationship between social media and adolescent mental health.

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