

MA Independent Project Proposal Form

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1. Working Title

Social media usage and the implied impact on children and adolescents' body image, with a focus on ADHD as a risk factor for body dissatisfaction.

2. Project Type and Format (approx. 100 words)

This research project will be conducted using quantitative surveys, which will be sent to comprehensive schools and colleges in Wales. These surveys will include tick box questions and answers relating to their age, gender and if they are diagnosed with ADHD, exhibit traits of ADHD or do not have nor exhibit traits of ADHD, as well as multiple scales which will measure children's and adolescents' self-esteem, well-being, body dysmorphia, and their social media usage. The data from these surveys will be analysed using thematic analysis and the data collected will be compared to identify if children and adolescents with ADHD are at a higher risk of negative impacts from social media usage.

3. Rationale and Background (approx. 300 words)

Social media has become a fundamental part of everyday life, especially in children and young people, as they use these platforms for communication, self-expression, and entertainment purposes. However, there has been growing evidence that the use of social media can have a detrimental impact on children and young people's mental health. There has been links to depression, impaired sleep and poor body image (Lavis and Winter, 2020). Poor body image can develop from body dissatisfaction, which is a result that forms from a person's internalised ideas of themselves to be different to how they

appear in real life. These internalised ideas of themselves can be influenced by different sources, such as their peers, parents, and social media, and can include what the ideal body size is, for example, to be thin or muscular (de Vries, D. A., Vossen, H. G. M., & van der Kolk – van der Boom, P. (2019). Body dissatisfaction is defined by a person's perceiving their body weight or image as negative, and it is strongly associated with depression, especially with young people (Ahuvia, Jans and Schleider, 2022). Research has shown that young people who engage more with social media, especially in the form of posting selfies, are more likely to develop body dysmorphia. This is due to beauty filters which create a fake image of beauty standards, this leads to young women seeking cosmetic surgery's to alter their appearance (Khajuria et al., 2025). Furthermore, a study found that children and young people with ADHD were more likely than their peers to develop concerns over their body image, which could lead to eating disorders (Limbers et al., 2026). However, there is limited research on whether social media usage can attribute to greater body dissatisfaction and lead to body dysmorphia in children and young people with ADHD.

4. Aims and Objectives (approx. 200 words)

To explore the implied impact of social media use on body image and body dysmorphia, self-esteem, and well-being in children and adolescents, with a particular focus on ADHD as a potential risk factor for body dissatisfaction.

Objectives for this research:

To measure the amount of social media usage among children and adolescents, using a social media scale.

To assess the children's and adolescents' self-esteem, well-being, and body dysmorphia symptoms, using self-esteem, well-being and body dysmorphia scales.

To compare body image outcomes with children and adolescents diagnosed with ADHD, exhibit traits of ADHD or do not have nor exhibit traits of ADHD.

To determine whether greater social media usage is linked to children and adolescents having poor body image, self-esteem and well-being.

Research questions will include:

Does social media usage have a greater negative impact on body image among children and adolescents with ADHD compared to those without ADHD? And, Is there a relationship between the amount of social media use and levels of body dissatisfaction in

children and adolescents?

5. Literature Overview (approx. 400 words)

Research has consistently linked exposure to thin-ideal images on within magazines, television and social media to an increase in body dissatisfaction in young women. More recent studies suggest that social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, are having a negative effect on body image due to photo-based activities where users can post, like, and comment on photos (Tiggemann et al., 2018). A further study found that women who had higher body dissatisfaction focused more on appearance-related features when looking at images of what is perceived as an ideal body, suggesting that by engaging in social media further may enhance their body dissatisfaction (Couture Bue and Harrison, 2020). Additionally, a study on young people and how positive appearance comments on ideal body images on social media affects their body image and dissatisfaction. This study found that ideal body images and positive appearance comments, on social media platforms, increased body dissatisfaction (Kvardova, Machackova and Gulec, 2023). Furthermore, research suggests that the impact social media has on young people's mental health does vary and that it is context dependent. Therefore, suggesting that what children and young people do and see on social media is the root of the impacts to their mental health (Fatt and Fardouly, 2025). Therefore, children and young people develop body dissatisfaction at a young age, which will continue to affect them later in life.

Body dissatisfaction can lead to further mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout. In addition to this negative eating patterns can also emerge, including restrictive dieting, weight control practices and binge eating, especially among females (He et al., 2025). One recent study has shown that there is a rise in body dysmorphia among young people, and parents, legal guardians, physicians and teachers have been urged to aid young people in receiving the right interventions (Kaur, Kaur and Singla, 2020). Body dysmorphic disorder and muscle dysmorphia and both body dysmorphia conditions, which as characterised as a mental health disorder. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) describes body dysmorphic disorder as a person having a preoccupation with one or more flaws or defects in their appearance that. Muscle dysmorphia is described as when a person is preoccupied with the size of their muscles, whether they are too small or insufficiently lean. Both result in repetitive behaviours, such as checking mirrors or excessive grooming, and mental acts, such as comparing themselves to others (Applewhite et al., 2024). Furthermore, children and young people with ADHD are more likely to have comorbid psychiatric disorders, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, which could pose a higher risk of them becoming more preoccupied with their appearance, and therefore put them at risk of developing issues with their body image and body dysmorphia (Njardvik et al., 2025).

6. Methodology / Project Approach (approx. 400 words)

This research study will use a qualitative and cross-sectional research method to explore the relationship between social media usage and body image among children and adolescents, with a particular focus on ADHD as a potential risk factor for body dissatisfaction. Data will be collected via surveys which will be provided to comprehensive schools and colleges in Wales.

Participants will include children and adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old who attend the participating schools and colleges. Schools and colleges will be contacted and offered to provide their students with an online survey form. Participants will be voluntary, and consent will be obtained from their parents or legal guardians prior to the survey being shared, along with assent from the participants. All the survey responses will remain anonymous throughout the study to protect the participants confidentiality.

The surveys will consist of closed-ended questions as a majority, with participants being asked questions such as their age, gender and whether or not they are diagnosed with ADHD, have traits of ADHD or have no traits of ADHD and are not diagnosed. Participants will also be asked questions on their social media usage, including the amount of time and how often they use social media and across different platforms. This will be done using the social media usage scale. Participants will also complete the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, a well-being scale and a body dysmorphia symptom scale, which will be used to assess the implied impact social media has on the participants self-esteem, well-being and body image.

The data collected will be analysed using thematic analysis, with statistics from the data being used to summarise the participants overall levels of usage on social media, their body dissatisfaction, their self-esteem, and their well-being. Analysis will be used to examine relationships between social media usage and body image outcomes from the statistics, and comparisons will be made between the participants diagnosed with ADHD, who have traits of ADHD and those who are not diagnosed with ADHD or have traits.

The results will be written up into a thematic analysis style report, along with an infographic poster of the results.

7. Ethical Considerations (approx. 100 words)

As the participants for this study will be between the ages of 13 to 18 years of age, parental consent and assent from the participants will be required. All participants will be on a voluntary basis and kept anonymous and stored securely in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Participants will have an opt out option at any time if they no longer want to be a part of the study. The participating schools will also be informed of the studies aims and procedures beforehand.

The study will use questionnaires that are appropriate for the participants' age group and will ensure that all survey questions are worded sensitively, due to the nature of the topic. Participants will receive additional information at the end of the survey to relevant support services.

8. References (not included in word count)

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