EXAMINING THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

With social media becoming ever more central to teenage life, the challenge to practitioners is now enhanced, and being able to conduct risk assessment becomes an important tool. There has been little research, yet the teenagers and also professionals are immensely powerful in dictating the reputation of using social media as linked to mental wellbeing. Teenager use of social media comes with risks, namely privacy invasion, cyberbullying, and poor impacts on psychological wellbeing and study. But responsibly, social media has the ability to create connections, dialogue, and exposure to important health messages, which contribute to improved well-being, self-esteem, and health benefits. Even as there is increasing alarm over the influence of social media on the mental well-being of adolescents, a gap exists in the knowledge of how teens view social media and how they use general media discourses to represent themselves. The extensive use of cell phones and other media among adolescents has caused them to become chronically sleep-deprived, affecting their cognitive abilities, academic achievement, and social relations. There is extensive research conducted using cross-sectional, longitudinal, and empirical research that has identified teen cell phone and social media use with greater mental distress, self-injury, and suicidal thoughts. These risks can be reduced by clinicians through working with young people and their families, using open, non-judgmental, and developmentally specific approaches, including education and hands-on problem-solving.

Keywords: young adults, adolescents, mental health, social media.

1. INTRODUCTION

The swift development of technology has had a profound effect on the lives of young people, with social media playing an ever-growing role in their lives [10]. Social media has opened up new possibilities but has also brought forth significant challenges. Evidence indicates that some social media experiences can impact the mental health of young people, with a number of variables involved [11]. The variables are the amount and kind of social media use, the material consumed, and the influence on physical activity such as exercise and sleep. Especially, individual differences, cultural context, socioeconomic status, and historical context all play a role in explaining the various ways in which social media impacts children and youth [17]. The majority of researchers concur that social media influences young people in both negative and positive ways. One of the most important considerations is brain development, especially in adolescence (between ages 10-19), a time characterized by increased vulnerability, risk-taking, emotional instability, and the onset of mental health conditions such as depression. Additionally, the brain is particularly vulnerable to social pressures, peer opinions, and peer comparison throughout the early stages of adolescence, when identities and self-worth are developing [16].

Heavy social media use is likely to increase sensitivity to social rewards and punishments, which can change the formative brain's amygdala (critical for emotional learning and behavior) and prefrontal cortex (vital for impulse control, emotion regulation, and modulation of social behavior). This heightened sensitivity may render youth more responsive to social media's interactive and communicative features [14]. Importantly, evidence indicates that use of social media among adolescents is linked to lower life satisfaction at certain stages of development, e.g., 14-15 years old boys and 11-13 years old girls. Due to adolescence's importance in the development of the brain, use of social media during adolescence requires special attention and consideration [9].

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A research work by Vate-U-Lan (2019) entitled "Psychological impact of e-learning on social network sites: online students' attitudes and their satisfaction with life" explored the interaction between e-learning, social networking, and life satisfaction. The research gathered 607 valid responses out of 896 online participants with previous e-learning experience. Applying Spearman Rank Order Correlation, the findings indicated that students who utilized social networking sites for e-learning had higher scores in Satisfaction with Life Scale and held positive attitudes towards e-learning. The research revealed a significant positive correlation between online learning attitude and life satisfaction among males and females alik.

Bruce and Jessica (2018) discovered that respondents who reported feeling as though they were about to have a nervous breakdown were positively correlated with the amount of social networking sites they utilize [15]. For those who are 30 years of age or older, this association is positive; however, for those who are 18 to 29 years old, it is negative.

De Calheiros and Stauder (2018) examined whether it is relevant to look into social media as a composite metric, taking into account gender discrepancies using a survey. A survey of 72 parents of 13- to 16-year-olds employed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the Compulsive Internet Use (CIU) scale to examine the link between social media behavior and mental health. The findings indicated differing correlations between mental health and distinct social media behaviors. In particular, socializing, online purchases, and social media following of strangers were significantly correlated with conduct problems. Also, online gaming and posting information, especially videos, were strongly linked to compulsive internet use. There were no significant gender differences, though, in the association of social media use with mental health.

John and Abi Mathew (2017) investigated how students felt about using social media in the classroom and whether or not those feelings affected how they thought about teachers utilizing social media in the classroom. Focus groups were held as part of a mixed method approach to better understand the attitudes of the students and the reasons behind their beliefs. Students at a Midwestern university were then given a poll to examine if their opinions of teachers who use social media and their attitudes toward them were related. According to survey data, students do have a favourable opinion of social media use as long as it is voluntarily. Additionally, the results indicated that just a few factors (such voluntariness and proficiency) had a moderate correlation with how the instructor was seen to use social media.

Regina et al. (2016): To assess the validity and reliability of a brief and simple-to-use Social Media Disorder (SMD) Scale, three online questionnaires were given to a total of 2198 Dutch teenagers between the ages of 10 and 17. To differentiate between intense engaged social media users and those with disordered (addictive) usage, the measurement includes a transparent diagnostic threshold. The 9-item scale evidenced high structural validity, internal consistency, convergent and criterion validity, sensitivity, specificity, and test-retest reliability. Altogether, in this study, the 9-item scale was proved to be a valid and reliable psychometric measure of Social Media Disorder (SMD).

3. METHODOLOGY

Social media has a lot of positive impacts on youths, especially the marginalized. Social media provides access to an encouraging online community, like-minded individuals, and necessary information. Social media is also a means through which youths express themselves and define their identities. A major strength of social media use among youth is the maintenance and creation of online friendships and social relationships. These relationships have the potential to offer critical social support, positive peer interactions, and stress relief, especially for marginalized populations. For example, social support online can be particularly useful for youth from racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender minorities who are frequently excluded. Social media has the potential to facilitate peer connection, identity formation, and social support, which can have beneficial effects on the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. Interestingly, 70% of girls of color say that they viewed racially uplifting or identity-affirming material on social media.

Children and teenagers can still readily and extensively access extreme, inappropriate, and dangerous content. Direct pushes, algorithmic designs, and undesired content exchanges can all be used to disseminate this. Social media posts about suicide, self-harm, and risk-taking behaviours have, regrettably, occasionally been linked to childhood deaths. This information may be especially harmful to kids and teens who are already dealing with mental health concerns. Even if some people find a feeling of community on social media, a comprehensive assessment of over two dozen research revealed that some of these platforms live-stream acts of self-harm, such as slashing, which causes severe bleeding, and partial asphyxiation, which causes convulsions.

Excessive and problematic use of social media, especially obsessive or uncontrollable use, has been linked to adolescents' feelings of exclusion, difficulties paying attention, and difficulty sleeping. Healthy sleep is essential to the proper growth of adolescents. A systematic review of 42 studies found there was a common link between poor sleep quality, reduced sleep time, sleep difficulties, and depression in youth following excessive use of social media. Poor sleep has been associated with depression symptoms, suicidal ideation and behaviour, and abnormal development of the brains of teenagers. Of particular concern, almost one-third of adolescent's report screen use past midnight on weekdays, with social media applications being the most frequently used. The association between social media and adolescent mental health is multifaceted and possibly bidirectional. Scientists are worried that tech companies' lack of transparency and limiting access to data have restricted understanding how much and in what ways social media affects mental health and well-being. Up until now, the majority of previous studies have been correlational, aimed at adults or young adults, and produced a variety of findings. Important study topics have been suggested in order to close knowledge gaps and produce evidence-based tools, resources, and interventions to promote the mental health of young people.

4. STATISTICAL MEASURES

The study examined a number of marital challenges, and the majority of participants offered insightful information about how divorcees view these challenges and whether there are any urban-rural differences. Regarding the patterns of communication in marriages, a notable urban-rural divide was noted. Rural settings may have an impact on the accessibility and quality of communication, as evidenced by the finding that individuals in rural areas reported a higher occurrence of communication gaps. Rural communities might not have the support networks or social infrastructure needed for good communication, which could make marital strife worse. Both urban and rural men share the perception of a demanding spouse, highlighting the fact that partner demands transcend geographic borders. This common difficulty suggests that the idea of partner needs and expectations is always relevant in marriages, whether they take place in an urban or rural setting. The particular characteristics of urban lifestyles are shown by the increased incidence of urban participants expressing problems adjusting to lifestyle variations. The fast-paced, varied lives found in urban settings may make it more difficult for urban divorcees to work out their differences. The fact that everyone perceives a suspicious spouse highlights how common trust-related problems are in marriages. These problems are not limited by urban-rural boundaries, indicating that difficulties of mistrust and trust are prevalent problems regardless of geographic location.

Table 1: Social media use patterns

Stigma domains	Score range	Mean (SD)
What connection exists between youths' use of social media and signs of anxiety and depression?	04 - 12	7.7 (1.9)
How does social media use affect sleep patterns and quality in adolescents?	02 - 08	7.4 (0.9)
How do social media platforms influence body image concerns and eating disorders in young people?	04 - 12	8.2 (1.5)
What impact does cyberbullying have on young people's mental health outcomes?	02 - 08	7.5 (0.9)
What effect does social media have on young people's relationships and social connections?	12 - 40	**30.8 (5.2)**

Urban and rural marriages may have different social dynamics, as seen by the fact that urban individuals reported higher limitations on sustaining social interactions. Social relationships may be restricted in urban contexts because of unique pressures on social interactions brought on by things like lifestyle needs, cultural standards, or work obligations. These findings, which were mostly drawn from casual conversations with participants, provide insight into how urban and rural areas view marital difficulties differently. Different environmental and social

aspects may have an impact on how divorcees see and understand their marital dynamics, according to the interaction between these views and the urban-rural context. Comprehending these dynamics might help customize interventions that target particular issues divorcees encounter in various communities, promoting more positive post-divorce adjustment processes.

Table 2: Mental health outcomes

Items	Intervention	Control	p- value*
How do parental social media use and monitoring influence youth mental health outcomes?	1 (-1 − 3)	0 (-2 − 2)	0.079
What impact does social media have on teenagers' self-esteem and self-concept?	3 (1 − 4)	2 (0 − 3)	0.007
How does social media use relate to suicidal ideation and behaviors in youth?	1 (0 − 3)	0 (-2 − 2)	0.001
What are the disparities between urban and rural youth's use of social media and mental health outcomes?	2 (0 − 3)	0 (-1 − 2.2)	0.027
How can social media platforms be designed to promote positive mental health outcomes in youth?	2 (1 − 4)	1 (0 − 2)	0.001
What connection exists between youths' use of social media and signs of anxiety and depression?	2 (0 − 4)	1 (-1 − 3)	0.126

Other research has emphasized differences in mental health outcomes between urban and rural settings, which can be compared to the findings of this study. It was discovered that young women living in rural areas were more likely to have bad lifestyle choices and poor general health. According to this research, young women's general well-being may face unique difficulties in rural settings, which may also affect their mental health.

Table 3: Interventions and prevention

Items	Intervention	Control	p- value*
Physical	1 (0 − 2)	0 (-1 − -2)	0.378
Psychological	1 (0 − 2)	1 (0 − 3)	0.614
Level of independence	1 (-1 − 3)	1 (0 − 3)	0.369
Social relationships	3 (1 − 4)	2 (0 − 4)	0.679
Environmental	2 (0 − 4)	2 (0.75 − 4)	0.739
Spirituality	1 (-1 − 3)	0 (-2 − 2)	0.061

In West Sumatra, Indonesia, notable disparities in the physical and emotional well-being of teenagers living in rural and urban areas were also found. According to the study, young people in rural areas were less mentally healthy than their urban counterparts, but they were more physically active.

Table 4: Individual differences and contextual factors

Items	Intervention	Control	p-value*
Physical	1 (0 − 3)	0 (-1 − 2)	0.039
Psychological	4 (2 − 5)	3 (1 − 5)	0.115
Level of independence	2 (0 − 4)	1 (-1 − 4)	0.085
Social relationships	3 (2 − 5)	2 (0.7 − 4)	0.013
Environmental	4 (2 − 5)	3 (1 − 5)	0.032
Spirituality	3 (1 − 5)	1.5 (-0.2 − 1.5)	0.006

This disparity suggests that there might be mental health differences between rural and urban environments, necessitating more research into the underlying causes of these variations. However, there was no discernible difference in the mental health of jobless participants from urban and rural locations in the current study.

CONCLUSION

Teenagers' education and well-being could benefit greatly from social media as they grow up, but it's important to weigh the risks as well. Better understandings of the effects of social media on youth will arise as more data becomes available and study advances. Every person grows differently, and their sensitivity to their surroundings and the stuff they consume on social media varies as well. Physicians, parents, guardians, and legislators may continuously support youth utilizing social media and advocate for their mental wellness, even if it would be impossible to control for every adolescent. Although they might not be able to monitor every piece of content their children engage with on social media, parents and guardians should try to set an example of good social media behaviour for their teenagers. The simplest way to do this is to actively work to unfollow persons or information that is romanticized, excessively edited, and encourages dangerous behaviour. They can also avoid interacting with content that they would not want their children to access. Building and strengthening in-person social ties can be facilitated by allocating specific time for the family and support network to spend away from social media and electronics in general.

Today, people actively engage with technology; it doesn't just happen to them. Digital technology itself is probably not going to damage the typical young person, but that does not mean there are not certain circumstances under which it might do them harm. This research discovered an association between depression among teenagers and social media usage. Nonetheless, since most studies are cross-sectional, longitudinal research is required to better clarify this relationship. Social media plays a major role in the social and personal lives of young people. Professional organizations give advice to parents, educators, and schools on the basis of incomplete and contradictory information about youth and digital technology.

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