

## Social Media Impact on Adolescent Mental Health

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Social media, in all of its glory, has been proven to be a crutch as well as an inhibitor for high schoolers and college students alike. If those said adolescents who are believed to suffer from or have been diagnosed with a social media addiction should consider the proposal of deleting social media applications for one week out of every month, then the mental health of adolescents who appear to have this addiction will improve in due time.

Using any form of social networking raises *FOMO* (the anxiety that there might be an amusing or fascinating occurrence somewhere at the moment, sometimes aroused by messages seen on those platforms) and feelings of inferiority, disappointment, and loneliness. These thoughts, in fact, affect the mood adversely and intensify the effects of depression, anxiety, and stress. In a study conducted by Berryman, Ferguson, and Negy (2017), 467 young adults were surveyed "...on their time spent using social media, importance of it in their lives and tendency to engage in vaguebooking (posting unclear but alarming sounding posts to get attention)." In those findings it was stated that, "Our results are generally consistent with previous work which suggests that how individuals use media platforms is more critical than time spent online in regards to mental health" (Berryman et al., 2017, p. 312). The time essentially wasted on building up this "better image" of yourself counteracts the much-needed time to actually put forth the efforts of taking care of your overall well-being.

All signs point to the fact that adolescents spend a much larger amount of time on SM compared to what is considered "healthy." A 2011 study by the American Academy of Pediatrics

(AAP) claimed that “Facebook Depression” could grow among young people who have been using social media for too long (Berryman et al., 2017). Going completely “cold turkey” on social media doesn’t necessarily guarantee a better lifestyle either—in a mental health sense. A suggestion of deleting and/or disabling all SM applications for at least one week out of every month would be a perfect starting point in a better management of one’s SM addiction. Just as someone with a nicotine addiction starts with patches, pills, and such, a safe beginning would be to limit yourself with a week of focusing on other things you may have ignored before, which could include prior responsibilities that were put off by procrastination and distraction of platforms or even hobbies not related to looking down at your cell.

Experts often recommend that the optimal time you should devote to social media is thirty minutes or less a day. Limiting use to thirty minutes a day can contribute to improved health outcomes, according to a *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* report published in 2018. In that same journal, a study was conducted: “After a week of baseline monitoring, 143 undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania were randomly assigned to either limit Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat use to 10 minutes, per platform, per day, or to use social media as usual for three weeks” (Hunt, et al., 2018, p. 751). Results proved to be nothing but support of the idea that limitation of SM screen time improves overall mental health: “The limited use group showed significant reductions in loneliness and depression over three weeks compared to the control group. Both groups showed significant decreases in anxiety and fear of missing out over baseline, suggesting a benefit of increased self-monitoring” (Hunt, et al., 2018, p. 751).

In a survey conducted on Google Forms by myself, one of the questions I had asked was, “Would you consider yourself addicted to social media?” (Social Media Addiction in Students Survey 2020). Out of the 81 college students and high school students alike, 51% said yes, 16% said no, and 33% said maybe. Taking that information and applying to the almost 50% of students who claimed they had a diagnosed mental disorder, the commonalities are present. In comparison to another study consisting of frequency of mental illnesses on college campuses done by Cambridge University Press (CUP), researchers found that, “One-fifth (20.3%) of college students had 12-month DSM-IV/CIDI disorders...” (Auerbach, 2016, p. 2970). The amount of DSM-diagnosed individuals should not be taken lightly because even then, if someone hasn’t been diagnosed, it doesn’t mean they’re neurotypical. Our “mental wellbeing” determines how we perceive, act, and behave. It also helps decide how we cope with everyday stressors, interact with others, and make decisions. At any level of life, especially our teens and adolescent years, mental health will always be significant. Moreover, many other similarities came up between my survey and the study conducted by Cambridge. The leading gender and mental disorder associated was females with any form of a Depression Disorder.

In the survey I conducted, I also asked the question, “Would you be interested in learning new ways to limit your screen time more efficiently?” The results were surprising; a whopping 70% of students who took the survey said that they would indeed be interested in fixing their SM habits. In many rehabilitation situations it’s been proven that a person can only recover efficiently if they *want* to get better. As pleasant as this information is, the next few steps are still important. Data also taken from my survey presents the three most used SM apps. Those top three would include, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram. TikTok – being the most popular – is,

according to its website, “a short-form, video-sharing app that allows users to create and share 15-second videos, on any topic.” Many, including myself, have considered TikTok as a replacement of sorts to an older deleted application referred to as Vine. From 2013–2016 Vine was a very influential video-sharing app, and its 6-second-long videos allowed the start for many influential YouTubers and music artists alike. In almost perfect timing, this generation of teenagers and young adults have now found themselves just as enamored with TikTok as they were Vine. Many friends of mine and I have found ourselves spending hours upon hours mindlessly swiping through TikTok. The app has put forth protocols to stop such long hours of swiping by disabling the “Like” button if used too often and too quickly and has posted videos containing other automated creators/actors saying things along the lines of, “I know how easy it is to keep scrolling, but you should take a break...” or “Hey! You’ve been scrollin’ for way too long...” I believe, however, their efforts are futile. If there is a weed we can nip at the bud for better mental welfare, it would be the limitation of time spent on TikTok. If you can’t delete all your social media platforms for a week, start with your most used. Delete TikTok and if that’s still a bit challenging then apply parental controls on the settings of your phone to limit the amount of time you can spend on the app.

As communication is vital to teenagers and young adults, instead of in real life, they can become more anxious with communicating with others online. With growing amounts of time spent online, this might be “isolating.” Too much time in front of a screen let alone any social network can lead to issues in not only mental well-being, but one’s physical well-being as well. To limit your time on social media, whether it be applying parental controls on your applications or deleting them altogether one week out of every month, is a safe bet for one’s mental welfare.

Whether the proposal is shown to counselors to provide research purposes to media addicted teens and young adults, it's extremely important that we as generation begin to edify the importance of screen time limitations.

#### Works Cited

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