



A Study of the Prevalence of Depression among Children and Adolescents

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13930810>

ABSTRACT

This study addresses the increasing prevalence of depression among children and adolescents worldwide, with a focus on the role of social media as a contributing factor. The research problem revolves around the detrimental effects of social media on mental health, particularly in relation to depression, with factors such as social comparison, cyberbullying, fear of missing out etc. identified as potential causes. The aim of the study is to explore the relationship between social media and depression, considering both the negative impacts and the potential for social media to aid in alleviating depression. The research design includes a qualitative analysis of the factors causing depression in relation to social media use, with a graphical analysis of depression rates and social media usage trends. The implications of this study highlight the importance of promoting mindful social media usage, and being vigilant for signs of depression, especially in vulnerable populations.

Keywords: depression, mental health, social media, adolescents, children, social comparison, cyberbullying, fear of missing out, addiction, negative content exposure, unrealistic beauty standards, mindful social media usage.

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, a significant proportion of children and adolescents worldwide, ranging from 10% to 20%, grapple with mental health issues. Around half of all mental disorders emerge before the age of 14, and three-quarters of these disorders manifest by the age of 18. Generalized anxiety and depression were the most common mental health conditions in this age group.

Depression is a type of mental illness characterized by periods of sadness, reduced interest, lack of pleasure, persistent fatigue, and other symptoms. The Royal Society for Public Health and Young Health Movement reported that over the past 25 years, the prevalence of anxiety and depression in young people have risen by 70%. These mental health issues can have detrimental effects on adolescent development, including reduced educational achievement, higher drop-out rates from school, strained social relationships, and an increase in chances for drug use, mental sicknesses, and suicide.

Relationship between social media and depression

To gain a deeper understanding of the growing prevalence of depression in modern society, various studies have identified social media as a significant contributing factor. With an estimated 5.04 billion individuals globally utilizing social media, it is noteworthy that 266 million new users have joined social media within the past year. According to some researches, social media engagement has a positive correlation with increased depression rates.

Factors causing depression:-

Social media may play a role in exacerbating the feelings of depression through various mechanisms. Here are some of the possible causes of depression:-

1. Social Comparison:

Social media platforms typically exhibit the most favorable aspects of individuals' lives, showcasing their accomplishments, memorable experiences, and positive events. However, this constant exposure to highlights may lead to the creation of unrealistic standards for comparison. This may make people feel that they are not happy or not achieving much in their lives as compared to others thus leading to low self-esteem and even depression if one resorts into feeling bad about themselves.

2. Cyberbullying:

Cyberbullying is a term used when somebody continues to hurt or cause distress through social media purposely and repeatedly. Cyberbullying can take various forms, including hurtful comments, threatening messages, or the spreading of false information. The consequences of this can be severe, leading to feelings of embarrassment and shame that may cause victims to conceal their experiences from friends and family in real life. These feelings can result in mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts. The lack of awareness and support for cyberbullying can exacerbate the situation by preventing victims from seeking help, leading to instability in their mental well-being.

3. Fear of missing out (FOMO):

The concept of “fear of missing out” (FOMO) is defined as the feeling of anxiety that arises when one perceives others as participating in enjoyable activities from which they are excluded. This tendency is particularly prevalent in young adults and teenagers. In addition to causing emotional distress, FOMO has also been linked to a range of negative health outcomes. On days when FOMO is particularly acute, individuals are more likely experience sadness, fatigue, and stress, as well as difficulty in sleeping. Furthermore, FOMO can cause social isolation, anxiety as well as a need for constant connectivity.

4. Addiction and Time Consumption:

Social media platforms are often designed with an emphasis on engagement, which can potentially lead to addictive behavior. Overusing these could mean spending too much time on the internet thereby ignoring important day-to-day tasks and responsibilities. This behavior can have a significant impact on an individual's well-being. Neglecting real-life obligations can result in feelings of stress, guilt, and a sense of unfulfillment. Additionally, this can contribute to feelings of isolation and depression over time.

5. Negative Content Exposure:

Social media serves as a source of news and information, but it also exposes users to negative events, tragedies, and distressing content. For instance, the exposure to suicide- and self-harm-related content can have detrimental consequences. This type of content can normalize and romanticize self-destructive behaviors, leading to an increased risk of self-harm and suicide. In addition, people may experience high levels of anxiety, grief or feeling powerless, particularly when they are overwhelmed by large volumes of negative information without sufficient pauses.

6. Unrealistic Beauty Standards:

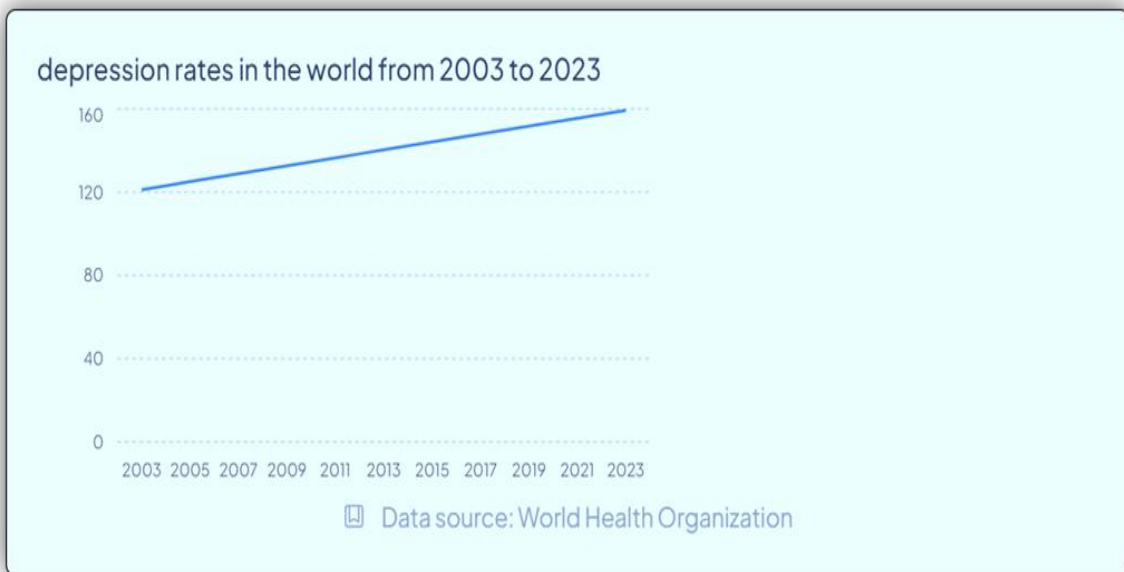
Social media frequently displays curated and polished images that may not accurately represent reality. These images can perpetuate unattainable beauty standards, which may affect users' self-perception. Exposure to these standards may result in negative consequences such as body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and poor body image. Furthermore, this constant exposure may contribute to the development of depressive thoughts and feelings

Graphical analysis of depression rates and social media usage

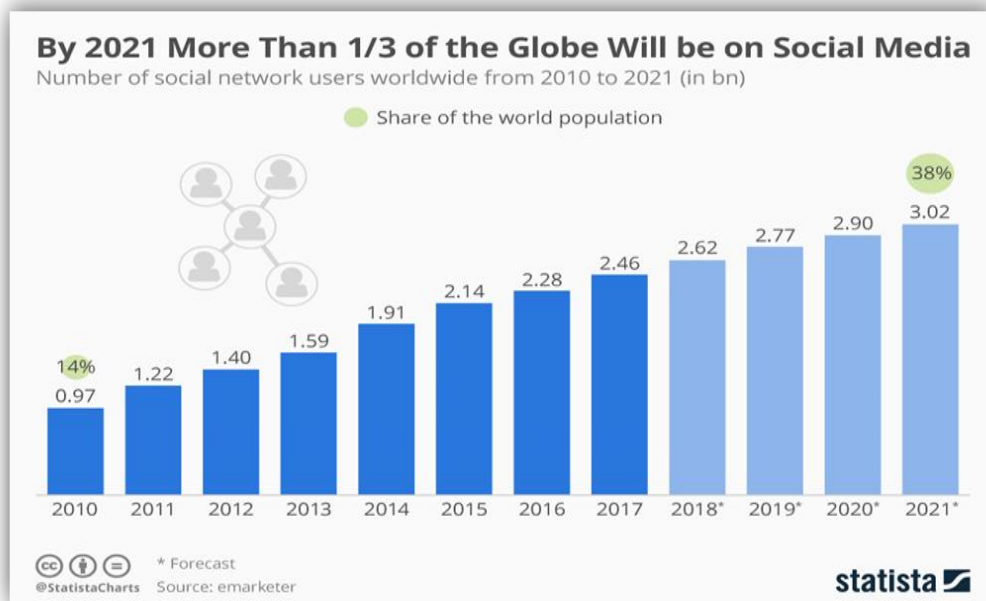
Social media has become a popular tool for connecting people around the world since its introduction with the emergence of platforms like XING and Myspace in the early 2000s. Currently there are more than an estimated 5.04 billion people connected via different social networks, by 2021 the number had risen to over 3 billion, resembling over one third of the global population.

The following charts show-:

1. the depression rates from 2003 to 2023
2. the number of social media users worldwide from 2010 to 2021.



Graph No. 1 (Source- Data source world Health Organization)



Graph No.21 (Source- Statista)

Results-

Based on the charts provided, it is evident that there exists a positive correlation between social media usage and depression rates. In the year 2021, there were approximately 3.02 billion social media users, and the depression rate was at its peak. The underlying cause of this correlation is that social media can have adverse effects on mental health for some individuals, leading to depression, anxiety, loneliness, and other such issues. Furthermore, it can be noted that each year, the usage of social media is increasing, and so are the depression rates.

Disadvantages of social media

- **Summary of Adverse Effects of social media**

Social media, while a powerful tool for communication and connection, poses several significant risks to mental well-being and personal security.

- **Mental Health Impacts-**

Overuse of social media can lead to anxiety, despair, and feelings of isolation, as users often compare themselves to curated images of others, which can diminish self-esteem and foster inadequacy. Additionally, the fear of missing out (FOMO) can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and dissatisfaction with one's life.

- **Dependency and Time Management**

Social media platforms are designed to maximize user engagement, which can result in compulsive usage. This addiction not only squanders valuable time but also disrupts daily routines and reduces productivity, leading to a lack of focus on real-world responsibilities.

- **Cyberbullying and Harassment**

The anonymity of social media can facilitate harmful behaviors such as cyberbullying and hate speech, particularly among younger users. This can lead to emotional distress and, in severe cases, long-lasting psychological trauma.

- **Privacy and Data Security Concerns**

Social media networks collect extensive personal data, often without explicit consent, making users vulnerable to identity theft, scams, and unwarranted surveillance.

- **Misinformation Spread**

The rapid sharing of information on social media can lead to the virality of fake news and misleading content, which can create public confusion and influence social and political views negatively.

- **Sleep Disruption**

Exposure to blue light from screens and late-night scrolling can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to poor sleep quality and associated health issues, including increased stress and decreased cognitive performance.

- **Reduced Face-to-Face Interactions**

Heavy reliance on virtual communication can hinder opportunities for in-person social interactions, weakening personal relationships and social skills, especially among youth.

- **Body Image Issues**

The prevalence of retouched images and idealized body types can negatively affect users' self-image, particularly adolescents, potentially leading to harmful eating behaviors and body dissatisfaction.

Advantages of social media

Social media, often criticized for its potential negative impacts on mental health, can paradoxically serve as a tool for alleviating depression through the following ways:-

1. In recent years, social media has emerged as a prevalent communication tool for sharing, searching, and exchanging information. Patients have increasingly turned to social media for health-related information and communication. Some healthcare social media platforms, such as online depression communities, are being utilized by individuals with depression symptoms to obtain health information and provide social support to one another in their fight against depression.
2. social media offers a way for individuals to connect with others who share common interests or goals, thereby facilitating the formation of new friendships and communities. this in turn can allow individuals to express their feelings thereby serving as a therapeutic measure to alleviate stress and emotional distress.
3. Social media platforms frequently offer valuable insights related to mental health. They are employed at multiple levels to increase awareness and battle the stigma associated with mental health issues.

Solutions to Social Media Problems

When overused, social media can negatively impact one's physical and mental health. When one is preoccupied with social media, one can become less attentive to doing things like going to bed on time or paying attention in class. So, to avoid all this, one should keep the following ways in mind to avoid depression:-

- Focus on achieving balance: Ensure that you are actively engaging in social interactions offline and dedicating time to activities that contribute to your sense of self and confidence.
- Avoid distractions: App developers are becoming increasingly aggressive with notifications in an attempt to keep users engaged with their phones at all times. Avoid falling into this trap.
- Be vigilant for girls at greater risk of depression: Keep a watchful eye on girls who are experiencing a particularly challenging period or are under unusual stress. The negative effects of social media can be more pronounced when self-confidence is low.
- Promote mindful social media usage: Encourage teenagers to be truthful with themselves about how their time spent on social media affects them and to disengage from interactions that increase stress or sadness.
- Model self-restraint and balance in your own media consumption: Set an example by disengaging from media to spend quality time with your family, for example, while having dinner.
- Establish a phone-free period before sleep by instituting a rule that prohibits smartphones in the bedroom after a specific time and throughout the night. Instead of using your phone as an alarm clock, opt for a traditional alarm clock to wake up.
- To improve one's mental well-being, it is advisable to surround oneself with social media accounts that promote positive self-image and avoid those that perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards or harmful self-talk.

Conclusion: -

In conclusion, the influence of social media is profoundly determined by individual engagement choices. Although it serves as a potent instrument for establishing connections, disseminating knowledge, and promoting creativity, its impact can significantly differ based on the user's intents and behaviors. For some, social media offers avenues for education, career advancement, and significant interactions, enhancing their lives. For some individuals, excessive usage or detrimental interactions may lead to anxiety, diminished productivity, and social isolation.

Ultimately, social media is fundamentally neutral; its impact is contingent upon the user's engagement. Prudent utilization, including establishing boundaries, fostering a constructive online atmosphere, and exercising discretion in content intake, can enhance its advantages while mitigating any detriments. Conversely, impulsive use of social media or participation in toxic online behavior might yield harmful consequences. Consequently, the foundation of a good relationship with social media is in self-awareness, intention, and equilibrium.

The efficacy of any tool is contingent upon its utilization. By making deliberate decisions and cultivating a constructive digital presence, individuals may guarantee that social media enriches their lives instead of diminishing it.

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