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Social Media Addiction and Its Impact on Teenage Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

This research paper has examined the impact of social media on teenage mental health, how it affects their physical, mental and emotional well-being. Social media being a routine part of their day has led to addiction, depression, anxiety, fear of missing out, body image issues, etc. Cyberbullying is marked to be one of the major concerns, as teenagers are easy targets and often hesitate to seek help. Additionally, the paper discusses the negative impact of social media on daily life, sleep patterns, academics, attention span, body image issues and overall health due to excessive screen time and blue light exposure. Moreover, social media can also be used positively if used mindfully. The paper discusses coping mechanisms, mindful usage and how digital detox plays a crucial role in teenagers' daily life.

Keywords: Teenage Mental Health, Impact of Social Media, Cyber Bullying, Body Image Issues, Screen Time, Blue Light Exposure, Digital Detox, Mindful Usage of Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is now an essential part of every teenager's life, leading to an unhealthy addiction which can affect their mental wellbeing. "Engagement patterns contribute to emotional distress leading to negative emotional outcomes" (Ali et al. 163). Teenagers usually struggle to control the use of social media leading to anxiety, disrupted sleep patterns, fear of missing out, decreased academic focus etc. social media addiction creates a barrier between the real world and the internet world, leading to having unrealistic approach towards beauty standards, social relationships, personal relationships, need for digital validation for example comments, likes, shares, followers etc. Most of the content being unrealistic, develops unrealistic expectations. AI driven social media algorithms are designed solely to capture the user's attention— like personalizing content and enhancing users' engagement by continuously tailoring feed (De et al. 1). The impact of this is the most prone to teenagers. Social media can often be the cause of privacy and security breaches leading to cyber bullying which can cause trauma. Teenagers are comparatively more vulnerable to share their personal details on social media leading to higher rates of cybercrime. Social media has various harmful effects the most common being the negative or hostile audience such as, online predators and hackers. Teenagers are the most convenient target for these types of audience as they are in their early stage of cognitive development. They face peer pressure leading to interacting with the harmful aspects of social media. Unlike traditional bullying digital bullying is relentless and often anonymous hence, it leaves teenagers with no safe space. It's often difficult to pinpoint harmful predators on a digital platform. Intense peer pressure creates a need to maintain a perfect digital footprint for example, making certain types of content, following the trends nonetheless merely for approval. Digital conformity suppresses a person's individuality and reinforces harmful stereotypes. The increased peer pressure can also mold the way an individual would normally think otherwise leading to questioning self-worth and identity. Social media being a vast platform also gives exposure to certain toxic content which can affect teenagers mentally such as, normalizing toxic behaviour like bullying, trolling, making unethical comments on certain people which is ethically and morally wrong this type of behaviour may seem fun and normal to the person executing, but it leaves a profound impact on the mind of the person experiencing the same. Trolling nowadays is a very normal thing on social media despite its harmful effects, leaving teenagers the most vulnerable to it.

ANXIETY, OCD, & DEPRESSION

Anxiety is a mental health condition characterised by excessive fear, worry or unease that is often difficult to control. It may be triggered by specific situations. OCD means obsessive compulsive disorder in which a person has obsessive thoughts which leads to compulsion that is a continuous behaviour performed to ease the obsessive thoughts. Depression is a persistent feeling of sadness which leads to no interest in daily chores, basic routine, etc. Due to its tailored feed, teenagers tend to spend more time on social media than in real life which leads to anxiety often resulting in fear of missing out (FOMO), developing unrealistic expectations about their appearance, facing bullies and trolling, seeing reels on Instagram often makes teenagers doubt their self-worth leading to being anxious about the way they look, how they appear on social media and what their true self really is. Social media being addictive due to its tailored feed makes teenagers lose interest in various aspects of life for example – daily chores, studies, basic hygiene like brushing, bathing, washing clothes etc., these are the early signs of depression that should not be ignored. Though the effect can be curtailed by reducing the time spent on social media, being more productive in real life and spending more time with nature than being active on social media forever. The toxic content which appears on social media, leads to obsessive thoughts which can be stressful for teenagers as they are in their early stage of cognitive development at that specific time.

Reducing the use of social media is very important to prevent teenagers being the victims of social media addiction. Many of them show signs of anxiety when their social media access is taken away for example uncontrollable thoughts, feeling on edge and unable to relax or heartbeat racing even without any physical activity involved. Anxiety can often disrupt a way a person thinks, which can be a reason for emotional distress and loss of connection from the real world as the teenagers will start to use social media as a comfort thing not knowing it's affecting their mental health in the worst way possible, because for them it's providing them with comfort and validation, "it is essential to understand the adverse impact of social media on teens and their brains that are under development" (De et al. 2). Teenagers disconnect from nature in order to make a perfect digital footprint for validation, using apps like Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook etc. the negative impact of social media, outshines its several positive ones. While social media is a great platform to connect with people globally, its over use can cause several mental health issues in teenagers which may be consistent throughout their life and leave an impact. The brain's cognitive functions embrace information processing, attention, working memory, structured search, internal modeling, and flexibility in thinking and actions. According to the Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) model, internet use affects attention, mood, emotional regulation, and inhibitory control involved in decision-making (De et al. 3)

ATTENTION SPAN & SLEEP PATTERNS

The addictive patterns of social media often lead the audience to use their cellphones simultaneously reducing their attention span. Teenagers are easily distracted by notifications, messages etc. leaving teenagers the most vulnerable, as they get easily distracted. This can often make them lose interest in real life, reducing their attention span. Constantly being in front of a screen is not only harmful but it can cause loss of eyesight at a very young age. Social media not only alters your mind, it also changes the way of how you perceive things in real life, applying what you see on social media in reality is not always a good idea. Excess use of social media can often lead to disrupted sleep patterns, for example being in front of the screen for a long period of time which can cause headache, trigger migraine. "Levenson et al. (2016) noted that due to the social stimulating nature of social media sites and exposure of the users to blue seeing LED electronic screens, the circadian rhythm may be disrupted" (Hanif and Haroon 2150). "The compulsion to always stay connected and updated results in excessive screen time, especially before going to sleep can further lead to late sleeping and late awakening" (Hanif and Haroon 2149). The blue light that emits from the screens often suppresses your melatonin production, leading to tricking the brain that it's daytime and keeps our mind on a constant alert mode. A moderate screen time should be 1-2 hours but due to social media nowadays we have excess screentime which results in problems in sleeping, paying attention etc. Teenagers tend to focus more on their digital footprint than actual lives, for example a mere notification distracting them from studies, instead of spending quality time with family and friends in real life they believe more in calls, chats etc. this not only disconnects them from their loved ones but also created a fake digital life which is not always as good as it seems.

BODY IMAGE & SELF ESTEEM

Body image is a person's perception of how they appear. Social media and its unrealistic beauty content makes teenagers question how they appear in the mirror. Social media not only sets unattainable beauty standards but it also puts people down on the basis of their appearance. Due to this many teenagers go through body image issues which lead to serious mental health issues like eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia and binge eating. Self-esteem is what you think of yourself, what you think you're capable of, what you perceive your self-worth to be. As on social media everything appears to be perfect, every makeup tutorial, every lifestyle video, makes us think that we should have the same things in life as the influencers although we may be in very different stages in our life. This can make us question our self-worth. Hence, constant scrolling on Social media can result in poor self-esteem. "Self-esteem can be conceptualized as both a mostly stable trait that develops over time and a fluid state that is responsive to daily events and contexts" (Vogel et al. 207). Poor self-esteem not only causes negative thoughts; it also changes your approach towards life. No one is perfect but due to the toxic influence of social media everyone is chasing to be what they are not. "In particular we suggest that trait self-esteem may be affected by long-term exposure to social media in everyday life" (Vogel et al. 207), it also leads to anxiety and depression which may cause a lifetime of damage in your mind and create a negative aspect of how you perceive yourself. Poor body image due to overconsumption of certain kinds of lifestyle, beauty content can also lead to lowered self-esteem. Journaling, self-love, knowing your worth, not comparing yourself to others can help you overcome poor self-esteem and body image issues. Connecting to people in real life can also help, it gives them closure that the edited version or the perfection they present in their content on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, tik tok, etc does not necessarily need to mirror who they are offline, they need to be aware that the person on the other side of the screen is a whole different person and what is portrayed may not be real.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF CYBER BULLYING

Cyber bullying is nowadays a common thing we see on social media — many users have normalized it not knowing its lifelong effect on the one experiencing it. It can be in various forms like body shaming, casteism, racism and sexism. These practices are almost present on social media on a daily basis which alters how a teenager thinks, they are the most vulnerable to it because of less exposure and early stages of their development. It can lead to various psychological impacts like anxiety, overthinking, body image issues, etc. reducing the usage of the methods they can conduct cyber bullying through like messages, stories etc. can help too, educating them about how cyber bullying or any kind of bullying is a punishable offence. "Cyber bullying victimization is a significant stressor in the lives of children and adolescents, because their aggressive acts can be perceived as negative peer feedback and social rejection, reinforcing the victim's negative self-evaluation and potentially causing mental health problems" (Lee et al. 2). Depression is one of the common consequences of cyber bullying, leading teenagers to show depressive symptoms like isolating, overthinking etc. negative texts and stories sometime make teenagers feel those are right and imply them in their lives even though it's not necessary, leading them to overthink and change things which really are natural and can't be changes like race and caste. "Overall, the results from existing research suggest that there may be differences in the experiences of cyberbullying among children and adolescents in Asian and western culture" (Lee et al. 3).

SOCIAL COMPARISON THEORY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media not only promotes unattainable beauty standards but it also intensifies comparison which makes teenagers question their worth, its algorithm driven personalized content makes it worse as it shows the same type of content over and over again because of which they overthink and compare themselves to people not knowing their content can be edited or artificial intelligence.

“Social comparison occurs when comparing oneself with superior others who have positive characteristics, whereas downward social comparison occurs when comparing oneself with inferior others who have negative characteristics” (Vogel et al. 206)

Comparison is not only on the bases of looks and lifestyle it's also on the basis of social media validation like followers, likes and views. This type of social media validation has become so common nowadays that people tend to do anything to get likes and followers. It has a negative impact on teenagers as they are easily influenced. Influencers and actors usually use filters and editing tools such as snapchat filters, Instagram filters etc to make their photos and videos unrealistic which influences teenagers to look the same way, which leads them to overthinking, being anxious about how they look and it also lowers their self-esteem.

“Social comparison causes people to feel inadequate, have poorer self-evaluation, and experience negative effects. On the other hand, although downward comparison can at times make people feel negative because it reveals how things could be worse, it more often leads to improvement” (Vogel et al. 206-207). “Research has shown that people tend to believe that other social media users have a better life than they do. It stands to reason that, all else equal, people who use Facebook most frequently should have the most exposure to such upward social comparisons” (Vogel et al. 208). Teenagers are more prone to it as they are in their early period of identity formation choosing who they want to be, this type of content affects their mental health and can cause identity crises as they are sensitive towards peer approval and emotionally reactive.

ACADEMIC IMPAIRMENTS

Due to the high usage of social media, it can affect your attention span, it not only messes with your mental health but also your academic performance. It alters the way your mind works leading to academic impairment. Academics is very important to sustain a better future due to the excess screentime nowadays, teenagers tend to spend less time building their academic identity instead form a social media presence which is of no use in the actual world. “Excessive social media use significantly increases learning burnouts. Learning burnout negatively impacts academic performance and mediates the effect of all three types of social media use” (Ma et al. 01). Increased screen time not only causes burnouts but it also affects your eyesight, which is a very important aspect to look at. Social media is a huge distraction I believe, because of the notification, pressure of creating a good social image, having good number of likes, followers and comments. All these become an important part of their life due to peer pressure due to which they don't focus much on their academics which leads to academic impairment. While social media can provide a temporary escape from academic pressure through entertaining content such as humorous videos and memes, excessive hedonic use can lead to dependency on such content. The enjoyment derived from social media can create negative emotions when students must return to academic tasks, and distraction from entertaining content can further impair their ability to focus, contributing to learning burnout (Ma et al.03). It is very important to have a proper routine for everything including your social media use, if social media is used for a good cause and with less screen time it can prevent academic impairment. “While academic discourse has extensively debated related constructs—such as problematic use, addictive use, compulsive use, social media addiction, and social frontiers in media fatigue—excessive use is distinct in denoting a less severe but still burdensome pattern of engagement, imposing psychological strain without reaching pathological harm” (Ma et al. 02-03). Moreover, the constant pressure of being perfect and having a good social footprint also reduces teenager's motivation to study. Half of their emotional energy is exhausted on social validation rather than academic goals. This ongoing competition between academic improvement and social media presence becomes very stressful eventually leading to academic impairment.

LONG TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A teenager nowadays spends more time scrolling on Instagram than interacting in real life, studying or sleeping. It increases the importance of digital platforms in a teenager's life which results in increasing concerns of long term psychological and developmental conditions. Due to this they also have difficulty in having real conversations and even social withdrawal because they have made social media the centre of their life which leads to social anxiety. Due to this they face long term psychological consequences like depression, anxiety, body image issues, low self-esteem etc., also long-term developmental consequences being weak eyesight, disrupted sleep pattern, change in default routine etc.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

The psychological consequences being anxiety, depression, insomnia, social withdrawal and social anxiety, all this alters a teenager's life very evidently. Social media gives them fake validation through likes and comments, due to which they don't take the real-life rewards seriously. “In adolescents and young adults, impairments in cognitive functions, such as self-monitoring, memory retention, organizational skills, and time management, are commonly seen in cases of internet and smartphone addiction” (De et al. 3).

Social media creates a hypothetical world for them where everything is perfect— every human, their appearance and their lifestyle. Which influences children to also have all of that keeping them in delusion, delusion is a word very normalised by teenagers nowadays but it's a serious issue that should be raised. Delusion is when a person creates a life that is not real, it's all hypothetical where everything is perfect making them disconnected from the real world, therefore when the reality hits it's hard for them to understand that the real world is a lot different than the one they have created online.

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

There are many long-term developmental consequences too for example difficulty focusing, less attention span and eyesight. Being in front of the screen for a long time can affect your eyesight in many ways. Not only their eye power may increase, they also might suffer from anxiety and depression which can be a hurdle in their development. “Moreover, users are also more likely to engage in unfavorably viewed smartphone-related behaviours, such as phubbing (i.e., snubbing another individual in a social setting by paying attention to one's phone instead of interacting with the person who is actually with them), and develop nomophobia (fear of being without/not being able to use one's smartphone) or a digital fear of missing out (i.e., “fomo”; anxiety or fear of missing out on experiences their contemporaries are engaging in).” (Paige and woodruff 2) this may sound temporary but it leaves scars that can be carried by teenagers for the rest of their lives.

DIGITAL DETOX, MINDFUL USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND COPING MECHANISM USED BY TEENAGERS

Amongst all the smartphone apps social media apps such as tik tok, instagram and facebook are the most time-consuming smartphone applications, having the most screen time mostly youngsters who have grown connected to the social world (Paige and woodruff 2).

Digital detox in the current situation of the country is quite an essential part, due to the increased negative usage of social media amongst teenagers. Social media having its positive side also has a negative side which usually overshadows the positive one, due to which mindful usage of social media is very important for teenagers. They spend half of their time being on social media detaching them from the real world, due to which they have difficulty connecting with people in person. "Particularly, given that smartphones have become an all but necessary component of everyday life, detoxing from social media instead of complete device abstinence or restriction may better balance the potential of obtaining improvement in health-related outcomes while still enabling users to continue, mostly uninterrupted, with daily life" (Paige and woodruff 3). Due to this excess and continuous use, teenagers often disconnect from nature and forget there is a world outside of their smartphones. Mindful usage helps them in a very reliable way; it helps them calculate their usage without taking the full access way which in some cases may lead to anxiety and restlessness even small breaks might help in those cases. Taking access all of a sudden may lead to negative or sometimes aggressive responses, due to which teenagers often lead to bad coping mechanisms. Instead, we can educate them on negative and positive coping mechanisms which will help them use social media mindfully and have a digital detox without any restlessness or anxiety. Slowly taking breaks, setting timers, and having more outdoor activities can also help. For instance, Instagram has a feature of setting timers through that they can lessen their usage of Instagram, which is also one of the most used social media apps amongst teenagers nowadays. Parents should create a safe environment for their children so they don't feel like they can't share their thoughts and feelings with them. It also helps them create safe space for themselves online without hesitation and being addicted, as they are often bullied into having social media, perfect digital footprint, having understanding parents can help them through this by providing them the needed and safe advice for the same instead of getting into the influence of someone.

CONCLUSION

This research paper has examined how the majority of teenagers who make social media a basic part of their routine end up with an addiction to it. This can result in mental health issues as well as physical health issues which can have long term consequences in some cases if not addressed early on. They also develop poor self-image due to the perfect lifestyles portrayed on social media by the influencers, it alters their thought process in a maladaptive manner, to think they are not 'good enough' which often results in eating disorders, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and body image issues. It is very important for them to understand that life on social media does not always reflect reality, you never know how the person is in real life. Setting unattainable beauty standards for teenagers is a lot easier because they are in their early stage of cognitive development. It is important to teach them about self-love at an early age so they don't fall for the social media lifestyle that may not be real in most of the cases. Cyber bullying is also one of the main concerns, teenagers are a soft target for such online predators. For them it's normal but for the people who are experiencing it is not, it often leads to self-hatred, anxiety, self-esteem issues and depression. Teenagers often hide this stuff from parents in a fear that they might be the one who will be in trouble, not knowing it can affect them and reaching out to an adult is the safest option. It is important for the parents to create a safe environment for their children, so they are not hesitant to share their problems or any kind of bullying that has taken place. Social media not only impacts your way of thinking but also sleep patterns, academics and attention span. Constant notifications and urges to scroll through social media often affect your attention span which often results in academic impairment, it also leads to decline in melatonin production due to the blue light emitted from the gadgets used. It's important to not be in front of the screen for so long and read a book or meditate before going to bed instead of being in front of the screen. We can also use social media for a better cause, for example studying, there are a lot of tutors online who help you understand concepts in a captivating manner. It is very important to not compare yourself to the people online, the ones to appear to be perfect which could be edited in the majority of cases. Social media detox is very important for teenagers nowadays as taking a break can help in several ways. It's not a complete denial of access which can often lead to restlessness or anxiety, but helps them to develop a schedule without curtailing the access completely. It's important to reduce the usage so teenagers can also connect to the real world and understand the beauty of originality and nature along with connecting to people in real life and having better social skills, which due to social media were declining. This paper concludes reducing screentime and having a supportive environment at home can help teenagers develop a healthier relationship with social media.

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