Department of Social Work

The Pull of Social Media:

Are Teens in Denial About their Mental Health?

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ABSTRACT

- This study is a secondary analysis of "Social Media, Social Life: How American Teens View their Digital Lives" a cross-sectional study by Knowledge Networks (KN).
- 1,030 participants aged 13-17 years old were surveyed through probability-based sampling in 2012.
- America's teenagers believe their use of social media has a more positive influence on their social and emotional lives than negative.
- Measures for the variables social media use, mental health/wellbeing, and perceptions of social media use were created for this study to analyze their relationship.
- Results indicate participants who identify as Black, participants who identify as female, and those who have a positive perception of social media report a positive wellbeing.
- With this research, Professionals in the health and human development field will be able to promote a teen's mental health and wellbeing by providing psychoeducation on the positive and negative effects of social media, how to manage a teen's social media use, and implement strategies to remove the mental health stigma.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study:

- Mental illness is becoming increasingly common among teenagers whose emotional wellbeing is often overlooked and attributed to "teenage angst". Unaddressed mental health problems result in suicide (the second leading cause of death among teens ages fifteen to nineteen).
- 50% of lifetime cases of mental illness are developed before the age of 17. As teens transition into adulthood, this results in a decrease in community productivity at work/school costing the U.S. \$300 billion each year.
- Social media use has been found to significantly contribute to mental health disparities among youth.
- Of all teenagers aged 12-17 years old in the U.S., 95% are online

Purpose of Research:

• This study will analyze the relationship between the frequency of a teen's social media use and the impact it has on their wellbeing.

Research Question:

• What is the relationship between social media use, perceptions about social media use, and the mental health/emotional wellbeing of teenagers?

Hypothesis:

• As social media becomes more prominent in teens' lives, they will lose social connectedness and their mental health and wellbeing will suffer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Effect on Teen Mental Health and Wellbeing Developing Brain

- A typical American teen now spends 11 hrs a day online reducing their emotional, social, and cognitive interactions.
- Humans are biologically social people that have survived by creating groups/relationships; an teen's brain is still developing and learning to create relationships with others.
- Developing strong/stable relationships serves as a protective factor against developing depression, anxiety, loneliness, and a negative self-image which contributes to poor social emotional development.

Frequency of Social Media Use

- Studies found frequency of social media use increases based on gender, age, and SES.
- Social media use has become highly popular among all teenagers aged 12-17 with 95% of teens reporting having access to their own smartphones

Mental Health and Wellbeing

• Some teenagers have reported that their use of smartphones in bed at night has led to sleep issues which has been linked to causing depressive symptoms, loss of memory, problems at school, and other serious health issues

METHODS

Research Design

- This study is a secondary analysis of the "Social Media, Social Life: How American Teens View their Digital Lives"- a cross-sectional study conducted for Common Sense Media by KN (2012).
- The purpose of the study was to investigate the use of social media among American teenagers and evaluate their perception of the role social media has had on their social and emotional lives.

Data Collection Procedures

• KN collected their data through surveying 1,030 American teens. The survey was administered via email online. Those without access to the internet were provided with dial-up internet and notebook computers to participate

Sample & Sampling Method

- The KN company recruited 1,030 participants aged 13-17 years old through probability-based sampling
- KN utilized address-based sampling and random-digit dialing to select a panel of participants.
- The final data set of 1,030 was based on complete interviews that included both the teens' and their parents' responses.

Measures

- Social Media Use was measured using six questions to assess a teen's access to technology including questions such as "Do you have any of the following items in your home?: A laptop or desktop computer." and "Do you personally have your own: Cell phone?". A single item assessed whether or not participants felt they were addicted to their cellphone. The following was asked, "Would you describe yourself as addicted to: Your cell phone?"
- Perceptions of Using Social Media was measured by asking five Likert questions on whether teens agree or disagree with statements like "The time I spend using my social networking site has taken away from time I could be spending with friends in person". The following question was used to assess whether teens felt that social media use was a positive or a negative influence in their lives. "Using my social networking site makes me feel: Better or worse"
- *Mental Health/Emotional Wellbeing* was assessed by asking teens six questions measuring how well statements would describe them and included statements such as: "I'm lonely" and "I often feel sad or depressed".

RESULTS

Pearson Correlation Coefficient

■ White ■ Black ■ Other ■ Hispanic ■ 2+ Races, Non-Hispanic

2+ Races, Non-

Hispanic

6%

• The results indicated a statistically significant and positive relationship between the teen's mental health/well-being and their perception of social media, r(837)=.176, p<.001

Table 2.

Variables	m	ξd	1	2	3
Mental Health/Wellbeing	3.1450 g	.63962			
Perceptions of Social Media	2.7669	.89477	.176*		

Intercorrelations for Mental health/well_heing and Percentions of Social Media Variables

Figure 1.

61%

Sample Demographics

Race/Ethnicity

*p < .001

Table 1.

Teen Gender

Teen Age

Demographic Variables

White, Non-Hispanic Black, Non-Hispanic Other, Non-Hispanic

Number of Teens Age 13 to 17 in

Household Internet Access

Parental Education Level

Teen Age

Less Than High School

Hispanic 22%

Other

4%

Bachelor or Higher

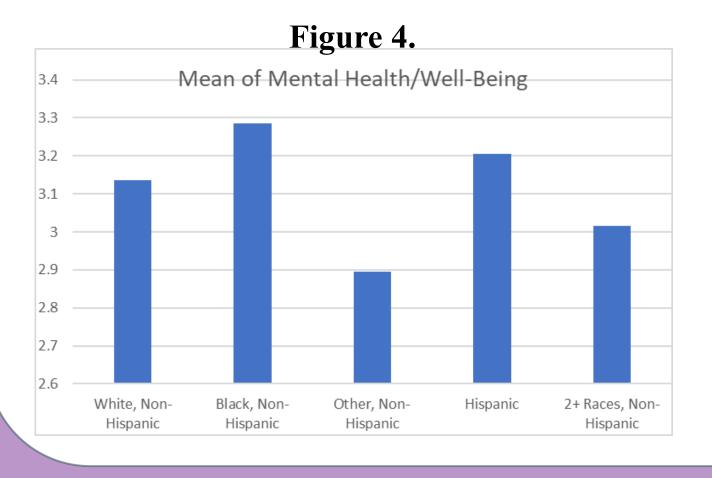
Hispanic 2+ Races, Non-Hispanic

Independent Samples *t* **Test**

- The mean perceptions of social media use of the males (m=2.68, sd=.90) was significantly lower from the mean perceptions of social media use of the females (m=2.89, sd=.88); (t(842)=-3.290, p<.001)
- The mean mental health/well-being of those addicted to their cellphones (m=3.0840, sd=.61832) was significantly different from those reportedly not addicted to their cellphones (m=3.2154, sd=.64056); (t(834)=-2.977, p=.003)

One-Way ANOVA

• The study participants who identified as Black (m=3.2843, sd=.68784) reported a significantly higher wellbeing than those who identified as Other (m=2.8947, sd=.63721); (F(4,796)=3.471, p=.008)



Multiple Linear Regression

- A significant regression equation was found (F(7,708)=6.451, p< .001), with R^2 of .060 indicating that 6% of the variance in mental health/well-being was explained by the regression model
- Participants perception of social media use significantly and positively predicted their wellbeing (*b*=.124, p<.001)
- Participants who identify as Black were more likely to report positive wellbeing (b=.226, p=.027)
- Participants who identify with two or more races were less likely to report positive wellbeing (b=-.201, p=.042).

Figure 2.

Positive Perceptions of Social Media Use

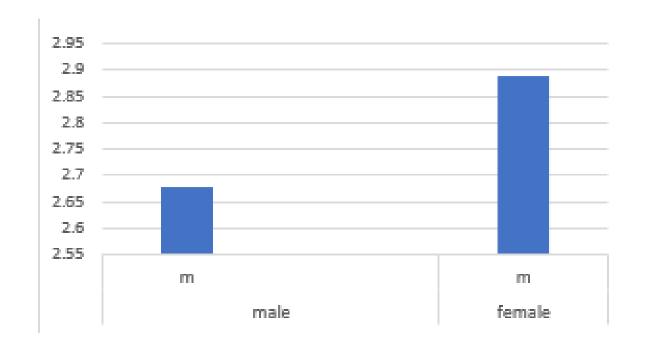


Figure 3.

Addicted to Cellphone?

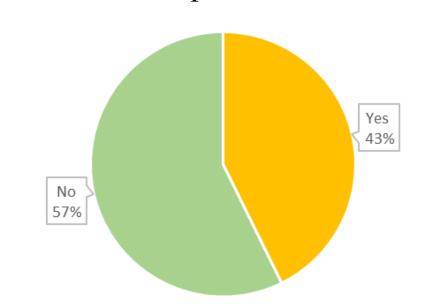


Table 3.

Multiple Linear Regression for Mental Health wellbeing

	Mental H	g	
Independent Variables	b	SE	В
(Constant)	2.813	0.90	3.471
Perception of Social Media	.124	.027	.176*
Addicted to Cellphone	076	.049	060
Gender	.034	.048	.026
Black, non-Hispanic	.226	.102	.082*
Other, non-Hispanic	117	.131	033
Hispanic	.093	.058	.060
2+ races, non-Hispanic	201	.099	075*

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Mental Health and Perception of Social Media

• Findings from this study indicate that positive perceptions of social media use were associated with higher reports of mental health and wellbeing.

Gender

• Females in the current sturdy reported more positive perceptions of social media use than males.

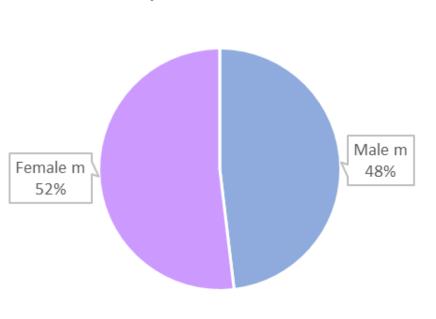
Mental Health and Social Media Use

• Results showed that those who reported being addicted to their phones also reported lower mental health/wellbeing.

Mental Health and Ethnicity

- Findings indicated that the participants who identify as Black reported a significantly higher wellbeing.
- Those who identify as Other and two or more races reported lower mental health/wellbeing

Figure 5.
Positive Perceptions of Social Media Use



■ Male m ■ Female m

Practice & Policy Implications

- Community mental health workers should be aware of mental health stigmas affecting communities of color.
- Professionals in the field need to advocate for policies that will provide this community with better access to health care and integration of medical health facilities that employ clinicians with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds as the clients.
- Professionals in the health and human development field will be able to promote a teen's mental health and wellbeing by providing psychoeducation on the positive and negative effects of social media and how to manage a teen's social media and frequency of use

Strengths & Limitations

- The research was limited in the operationalization of social media use and the frequency of social media use; social media is also a rapidly evolving experience and the inclusion of new technology and opportunities for social media engagement should be included in future research.
- It is also recommended that future research clearly state or inquire about a teen's definition of cellphone addiction since they may not be aware of what is considered an appropriate amount of cellphone and social media use.
- It is also unclear whether social media contributes to mental health issues or if social media is utilized more by those with mental health issues.

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