

Social Media and Adolescent Mental Health – An Essay

"Save me, save me from tomorrow. I don't want to sail in this ship of fools." World Party

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Abstract

The simple truth is on our watch we have destroyed the planet that our youth will inherit, through brutal dictatorships, wars, and inaction on climate change: causing fire, flood, drought and famine. Additionally we have a small greedy wealthy class that owns almost everything while the rest struggle. And while social media can cause cyber-bullying and suicide, violence against women and girls, depression and anxiety, it may also through its endless hype and distraction be attempting to deliberately blind young people to what is happening, particularly the obscene distribution of wealth. This is a double edged sword.

There may even be reason for having concern about those youth not showing signs of anxiety and depression. They may have just given up while those adversely affected are still fighting for their life and have some hope yet.

This paper looks at the mental health issues of adolescents using social media and at what some governments (Australia, India, UK and the US) are doing about it.

Keywords: adolescents, social media, mental health, suicide, depression, anxiety, cyber-bullying, violence



Overview and Case History

As is the pattern with our modern world every innovation that can bring positive benefits to people and society can eventually fall foul of the marketers and exploiters, while social media which had the promise of bringing the world together is now falling into the hands of the greedy, the devious and indeed organised crime.

The many depressing 'real life problems', of this perilous world that young people are born into are the stuff of nightmares; wars, dictatorships, genocide, violence, trafficking, sexual predation and looming planetary destruction to name a few. Anyone who does not recognise this appalling legacy needs to open their own eyes. Sadly far too many people are far too involved in their own problems to bravely confront the real issues. Those young people who do succumb are often the intelligent and sensitive youth among us or the direct victims of the dross and insanity themselves. Some of the poison comes from, and is broadcast by, social media. This study on the topic suggests it is not the primary cause but the catalyst in far too many cases and the media shows little conscience in their bid to exploit their users financially and psychologically. Those mentally and psychologically robust may benefit from aspects of social media and ensure they don't fall victim, but the grinding away, and the shallow disregard for the breadth of their 'customers' is not being addressed by the social media giants and the situation is becoming worse, especially with the advent of AI. The AI myth is mostly a means for the social media and tech giants

to also get some ownership of the world's knowledge; to fluff it up and put it in new clothing and thus sell it to further their own financial or monopolistic aims.

Further one could say that social media is the drug, the diversion that stops youth and all of us confront the destructive and greedy human society that keeps us all down. Youth suicide, depression and anxiety and violence, particularly against females, are compounded by social media which is both a mask and a perpetrator of human disorder.

I will start this essay with a real life case history. As a postgrad medical educator working in innovative global education solutions using ICT to overcome both a global disparity in health care and medical education resources I was asked by our government, top schools and those representing disadvantaged children locally and regionally to take on work experience students - both high IQ students and those with disadvantages (of isolation/distance and of access to resources etc.). About 70% of my work has always been philanthropic so the hope was to also inspire young people.

I start all new student sessions with an outline of the company's high end ICT work and how it is also used for our philanthropic work

Among our students in one intake was a tall, handsome boy from an isolated, low population area of the country. On the first day when I went to personally check on how he had settled in he showed me a suicide website he frequents.

I recognised it was a cry for help, and that my reaction was going to be so important and I knew I had a week to turn his life around. I also considered if I should alert his parents but felt that was a huge breach of trust at that stage. During the week he kept coming into my office to ask me questions about his life and life generally, so I didn't have to initiate our long talks. On the last day I always wish my students 'a good life' - he came back and hugged me tight for a long while.

Both his school and his parents later wrote to me to say I don't know what you did or said but he is a changed boy and is studying hard (he had told me he had no friends and I said you are a big fish in a small pond and will find people like yourself when you go to university).

The lesson this boy *taught me* was such adolescents don't want to die; he was desperately seeking a reason and a way to live. He also wanted to know how to find the resilience he needed to face each day on planet earth.

Many countries are currently struggling with the issue of adolescent mental health, and adolescent suicide which until the Covid pandemic was rising rapidly in some countries, while falling in others. It seems that like civilians in war situations, civilians in global pandemics also rally to survive.

Conversely the global pandemic saw a rise in youth violence and gender based violence - creating its own survival problems for women and girls. While suicide has improved generally in some countries in many countries it has now resumed its upward trajectory.

In our current age along with the 'advertisers', malevolent scammers, hoaxers, predators and dictators who use electronic media to spread lies and propaganda, "social media" has contributed to the worsening situation in many ways. The owners of these platforms have used their unlimited power to make money through manipulation, both financial and psychological. While access to friends and peers, healthy interests and study material is a benign aspect of social media's global presence in many ways the uncontrolled and often uninvited access to a range of destructive forces is causing and exacerbating mental illness and anti-social behaviours.

These forces include: doomscrolling (particularly regarding the wanton destruction of our planet – the place where the youth of our day were meant to live and leave to their own children), body dysmorphia and mutilation, misogyny, sexual stalking and entrapment, online bullying leading to suicide, extreme violence, radicalism online and so many other antisocial activities.

While honest, good and brave journalism still exists, generally the days of global editorial integrity, self-censorship (etc) have long gone. Rather the hype we see in the media generally, in most countries is increasingly political and commercial, malevolent misinformation, commercial hype and 'baits' for the media giants to get

more hits to impress their advertisers, and peddlers of misogyny, hate, racism and prejudice. How is a young person, not schooled in sifting through the moral soup of global society, to know? Even if they hap upon the truth there are forces to push them to extreme views.

Surely there is a human right to education and truth. We as a human society have valued education and passed that on to the next generation. Education itself is now not a clear human right – since the 'birth' of so-called AI was lauded, it has increasingly become commercialised. Already some appalling examples of misuse, indeed insidious use have started to emerge. The real problem is that evil and criminal behaviours have permeated their way through our global society and all media, including social media has fallen to its gospel of hate and privilege.

Acts of murder, and all pervasive violence against women is encouraged and abetted by various media and at the same time people are told what to believe, how to behave and who and what to "like".

The Tate brothers, the Incel movement and violent pornography are examples of those who aid and abet these views. Many mass murderers target women solely these days. Examples are Incel in Canada and the Bondi mall stabbings in Australia, both because 'they couldn't get (a) girlfriend(s)'. Of course the plethora of violent, misogynistic and disrespectful pornography (i.e. all pornography) abounds resulting in the debasement of women and girls and when it is normalised, body dysmorphia leading to dangerous surgical procedures to become gross caricatures of pornography objects resulting in even more disrespect of women and girls.

Women are targeted with images of surgically altered and inflated caricatures of real women – ugly and stupid versions of women, with over inflated lips and breasts like a scene from some dystopian brothel. Many see the malevolence behind this but so many don't, especially those who have been abused by some narcissist. In hand with that is the movement to inflict derision on those who do not hold those 'values'. Oft times to speak the truth is also a 'crime' it seems, so the forces of derision and division are well protected by media creating division and controversy.

Online misogyny, Sexual violence and harassment

The growing sexual and physical violence against women and children generally and globally is being fed by and through social media – for example women are demeaned by the Tate brothers – with Andrew Tate now imprisoned in Romania for sexual trafficking and rape. Andrew Tate, the controversial social media figure known for his sexist and inflammatory views, has garnered significant attention online. Here are some notable points about him:

TikTok Influence: The Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) identified over 100 TikTok accounts frequently promoting Tate's content, resulting in a total of 250 million video views and 5.7 million followers.

TikTok Hashtag: Videos with the hashtag #andrewtate have accumulated an impressive 13 billion views on TikTok.

In Australia there have been several recent notorious acts against school girls by their male classmates.

An Instagram post recently circulated online, ranking female students from a Gold Coast secondary school in deeply disturbing and sexist categories. The post, which has since been deleted, categorized some students from Foxwell State Secondary College into labels such as “abduction material,” “one night stand,” “average,” and even the horrifying term “unrapeable”. The Queensland Department of Education swiftly responded to this vile content, describing it as unacceptable. They acted immediately to have the post removed and are currently investigating the matter. The impact on the students involved is concerning, and the department has offered counseling to those affected. Unfortunately, this incident is not isolated. Just a few weeks prior, a similar misogynistic list emerged at Yarra Valley Grammar School in Melbourne, where male students had compiled an offensive spreadsheet rating their female classmates by looks .

Female teachers are also being attacked and held to ridicule by male students.

This male violence is being associated with ready online access to violent and misogynist pornography (ie all pornography) but may also be because in Australia women DO have full human rights, which some men resent. However in India which has an epidemic of young female suicide it is in many cases down to the fact that women DON'T have proper rights. Again it is a double edged sword.

Born into a world of brutal dictatorships where wealth is in the hands of the greedy few and with the natural world sullied, with the oceans, land and air polluted and climate change causing endless natural disasters, an uncertain future faces us all. Our youth have many real things to be depressed about. Of course many generations of people have faced such uncertainties but now they are apparent everywhere and global disaster is imminent.

Social media has been both a purveyor of the awful truths and an (unreliable) escape.

Social media may also be an ‘opiate’ for young people to divert them away from what is really happening on the planet they will inherit. Therefore those not addicted to social media may be in a worse condition than those committing suicide. They may have already ‘given up’.

Further, social media’s opiate offerings can lead the young away from the real issues and sugar coat’ an increasingly violent and corrupted world. While this offers immediate relief it is not a good longterm approach to life.

Pornography and sexual abuse of women and children

Abuse of children is not just on the ‘dark web’ - it can be accessed via Meta and Facebook, Twitter, TikTok Google and Instagram

An Australian report finds that the majority of teen respondents age 13–17 have watched pornography online. While some have come across it accidentally while browsing, a significant number of teens are viewing pornography intentionally.

The new study highlighted the extent of porn consumption among Australia’s youth. Researchers warn it’s “likely to be having harmful effects”.

Researchers say a growing body of evidence indicates that young people’s pornography exposure and use has public health implications. Source: Getty / Marcus Brandt

Key Points

It found the majority of 15-20 year olds, especially males, have been exposed to porn.

The study’s authors are calling for public health strategies to address the potential harms.

Exposure to pornography among children could lead to gender-based violence and risky sexual practices and should be treated as a public health issue, researchers have suggested.

A growing body of evidence indicates pornography “plays a role in shaping young people’s sexual understandings, expectations, and experiences”, says a study from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

While some research finds exposure to pornography can have positive implications for young people’s sexual experiences, the new study refers to other data which suggests this view is too narrow and doesn’t take into account porn’s negative influences, especially regarding gender inequalities and violence.

Previous studies have said pornography consumption is associated with harmful behaviours and attitudes, including sexual coercion and aggression, rape myth acceptance, and risky sexual behaviours.

It could also make people more likely to sexually objectify others, hold stereotypical views of women and perpetrate sexual violence.

The QUT study, released in the Australia and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, provides the first national look at how young people in Australia are exposed to pornography.

Administering an anonymous online survey, researchers from OurWatch, the national organisation working to stop violence against women and children, recruited

1,985 young Australians aged 15-20 from a range of geographical locations and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to discuss pornography.

“The takeaway is that exposure to pornography is common, particularly among boys and young men, and is likely to be having harmful effects,” he said.

Of all the young people surveyed who reported they had seen pornography, most were first exposed to it years before their first sexual experience with another person. Meanwhile, 89 per cent of both male and female study participants were most likely to view porn at home, with 94 per cent viewing it on an electronic device like a smartphone or laptop.

One “particularly confronting” finding of the study, Flood said, was the young age at which respondents reported first seeing pornography.

The age of first exposure is likely trending downwards as the spread of technology makes porn more accessible, said Flood, who also co-authored the first Australian research on children’s exposure to pornography in 2003.

“Young people’s access to pornography is essentially unfettered,” he said.

“Because of rates of smartphone use and internet use, and because of the ease of availability of pornography, there’s every reason to think that those ages of first exposure are declining over time.”

The researchers said the study shows pornography likely has a “significant influence” on sexual attitudes and behaviours in young people in Australia, especially boys and young men.

They also argue that it “supports the need for public health strategies to address the potential harms associated with pornography use”.

Sex education in Australia should cover porn more comprehensively, and invite young people to think more critically about it. Parents should be better equipped to have productive conversations about porn with their children. Large-scale social marketing campaigns should raise community awareness about the sexist and harmful content in pornography and foster more gender-equitable and inclusive social norms.

The government should play a role in supporting legal and regulatory strategies to lessen the exposure of minors to pornography.

The study suggests in its concluding remarks that reducing pornography’s potential harms could play an important role in the prevention of future sexual violence.

“There’s certainly a solid body of evidence to suggest that pornography use is one risk factor — not the only risk factor, but one risk factor — for sexual violence, perpetration and victimisation,” he said.

A 2015 longitudinal study — a method that measures individuals over a prolonged time period — found that pornography use predicts later sexually violent attitudes and behaviours.

That study noted that “consumption was associated with sexual aggression in the United States and internationally, among males and females”, and that “associations were stronger for verbal than physical sexual aggression, although both were significant.”

“Sexual violence is getting worse in Australia,” he said. “And one factor that may be driving that is pornography.” (Published 20 March 2024 5:49am)

In Australia one female is savagely murdered every 4 days, usually by her ‘partner’. In the recent “Bondi stabbings” where the murderer targeted only females - his victims included a baby girl.

Australian women are very angry and demanding action. Fortunately we have a decent PM.

The social media and right wing press backlash

Social media critics, along with those warning about the near destruction of our planet are being called “catastrophists”. It is their latest buzz word to use against people like Greta Thunberg and all the other young people demanding change.

Of course some young people recognise exactly what is going on such as the Members of Extinction Rebellion, Greta Thunberg and her ilk.

Greta’s crime / telling the truth – showed how incredibly evil the right wing media can be. Their only interest is protecting their wealth.

She is personally insulted, and was pilloried for catching a plane that was already flying on a certain schedule. A decent young girl trying to save her home planet has borne the wrath of greedy monopolies and their spokespeople the right wing press. The greedy wealthy classes that own most of the world and keep the rest impoverished, that carry out their planet destroying activities are the biggest concern to young people and should be. And what carries their messages of hate and revenge – right wing social media platforms. Why the right wing media? Because these are the very same people who have made huge fortunes out of destroying the planet and emptying it of such resources, for all time.

They cannot stop themselves from wanting more. Looking at their personality profiles it seems they, like their brutal dictator counterparts, enjoy their power of planetary and human destruction. They are psychopaths.

Government responses

Many Governments and world authorities have been questioning the safety of uncontrolled social media on as well as other aspects, adolescent and child health.

There is a proliferation of research and articles and data on the topic but those responsible for its dissemination, for controlling it, have little sway against the social medial giants and their right to earn money at the expense of their victims.

Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing cognition, perception, and behaviour. According to World Health Organization, it is a “state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community”. It likewise determines how an individual handles stress, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making. Mental health includes subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence, and self-actualization of one’s intellectual and emotional potential, among others. From the perspectives of positive psychology or holism, mental health may include an individual’s ability to enjoy life and to create a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience. Cultural differences, personal philosophy, subjective assessments, and competing professional theories all affect how one defines “mental health”. Some early signs related to mental health difficulties are sleep irritation, lack of energy, lack of appetite, thinking of harming oneself or others, self-isolating, and frequently zoning out.

Australia

Australia which is one of the most highly computerised societies in the world, has a rising and accelerating youth suicide (and male violence) problem, stemmed by the Covid pandemic– (when you are trying to stay alive suicidal thoughts are put aside.) I also suggest unlike the exponential growth of suicide among Indian girls – these cohorts of young people have not yet ‘given up’. They still believe in a brighter future for themselves the planet and humanity generally and are protesting in numbers.

Suicide due to bullying on social media is common due to its anonymity; bullying of both young men and young women, radicalism online, leading to acts of mass violence and deliberate targeting of women for murder. In Australia a peaceful nation where guns are banned a female is murdered, usually by her partner, every 4 days. Of course the place of violent misogynistic pornography accessible by all age groups online contributes greatly to the problem and the Australian and some other governments are now looking into this availability. The men who are not adversely affected by this rubbish are those who have no wish to view it in the first place. It is a self-perpetuating problem.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au) advises suicide is the leading cause of death among Australians aged 15–24 (Deaths in Australia). The proportion of all deaths that are deaths by suicide is relatively high among children and young people. This is because people in these age groups do not tend to die from other causes.

In 2022:

304 Australian young people (aged 18–24 years) took their own lives.

77 deaths by suicide occurred among children and adolescents (aged 17 and below) with the majority occurring in those aged 15–17 (83.1%)

Deaths by suicide represented 30.9% of all deaths in young people aged 15–17 years and 32.4% of all deaths in those aged 18–24 years—up from 16.5% and 23.9% respectively of all deaths in these age groups in 2001. In children aged 14 and below, the proportion of all deaths that are deaths by suicide is low compared with the two older age groups. In 2022 deaths by suicide represented 0.9% of all deaths in children aged 14 and below.

India

In India with a much higher population, every hour, one Indian woman of age 15-39 years takes her own life. (National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB))

India’s young women face a serious suicide crisis. NCRB reports a rise from 12.7 to 17.5 per 1,00,000 (2011 to 2021), with one woman aged 15-39 ending her life every hour. This highlights a dire need for protection.

Relative Deprivation: Despite advances in education and empowerment, stigma persist creating conflicts for young women (Status inconsistency). This tension is evident more in South India, where modern perspectives clash with traditional norms [Lancet (2018)].

Changing Family Dynamics: Globalization has led to shifts in relationship dynamics, contributing to feelings of isolation among young women. The decline in joint families leaves housewives more vulnerable to mental health issues.

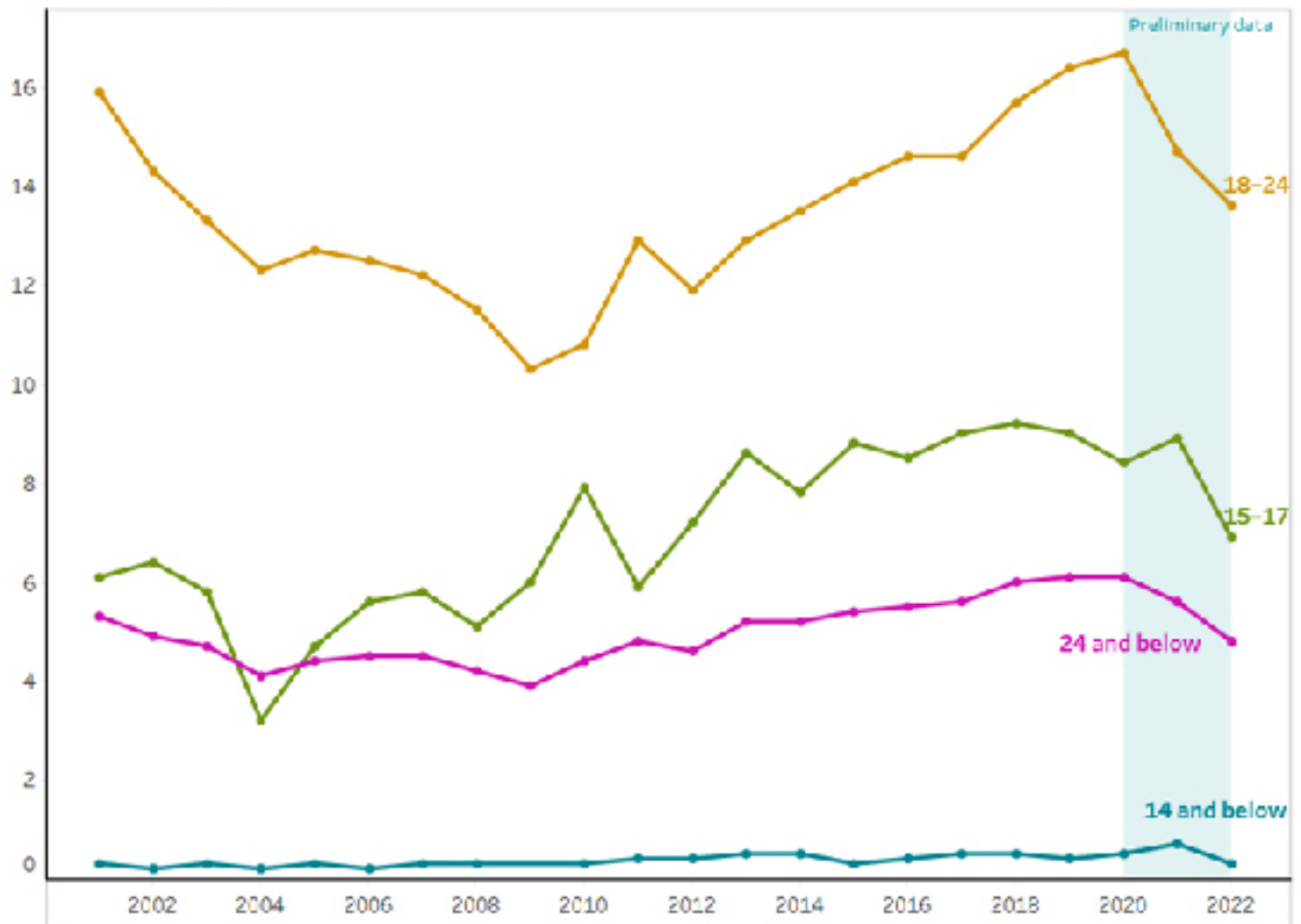
Patriarchal Structure: Gender discrimination limits education, healthcare, nutrition. Marriage pressure stigmatizes unmarried women. Married women (Early Marriage) endure violence, deepening gender bias and despair.

Limited economic Opportunities: results in lack of independence (glass ceiling) and contributes to pessimism and self-doubt.

Mental Health Issues: Unrealistic standards (beauty) and excessive burden due to dual role performed by women worsen the situation.

Suicide deaths of children and young people, Australia, 2001 to 2022

Age-specific rate (per 100,000)



Select measure:

- Age specific rate (per 100,000)
 Number
 Per cent of all causes of death

- 24 and below
 14 and below
 15-17
 18-24

From: Suicide deaths of children and young people, Australia, 2001 to 2022.

United States

(February 20, 2024 AT 7:30 AM)

In January, Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook's parent company Meta, appeared at a congressional hearing to answer questions about how social media potentially harms children. Zuckerberg opened by saying: "The existing body of scientific work has not shown a causal link between using social media and young people having worse mental health."

But many social scientists would disagree with that statement. In recent years, studies have started to show a causal link between teen social media use and reduced well-being or mood disorders, chiefly depression and anxiety.

A New York Times guest essay from Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy calls for warning labels on social media platforms has Pitkin County leaders discussing how to protect local youth from the negative mental health effects of social media.

Pitkin County Public Health Director Jordana Sabella introduced Murthy's essay during a Thursday board of health meeting to jumpstart the discussion in Pitkin County about the harm of social media.

"It really draws the connection between social media among young people and the mental-health crisis that we're currently undergoing, knowing that there's a direct connection there," she said. "Science hasn't come to share exactly what percentage is affecting what, but the goal is we need to act now; we know enough to put the warning out."

Most teens use social media, often for hours on end. Some social scientists are confident that such use is harming their mental health. Now they want to pinpoint what explains the link.

There is also a growing problem that some social media owners are not addressing fake news and malicious posts; rather in the case of fake news they seem to encourage it and are entering relationships and deals with untrustworthy political entities to deliberately spread mistruth and propaganda.

Concern, and the studies, come from statistics showing that social media use in teens ages 13 to 17 is now almost ubiquitous. Two-thirds of teens report using TikTok, and some 60 percent of teens report using Instagram or Snapchat, a 2022 survey found. (Only 30 percent said they used Facebook.) Another survey showed that girls, on average, allot roughly 3.4 hours per day to TikTok, Instagram and Facebook, compared with roughly 2.1 hours among boys. At the same time, more teens are showing signs of depression than ever, especially girls (SN: 6/30/23).

As more studies show a strong link between these phenomena, some researchers are starting to shift their attention to possible mechanisms. Why does social media use seem to trigger mental health problems? Why are those effects unevenly distributed among different groups, such as girls or young adults? And can the positives of social media be teased out from the negatives to provide more targeted guidance to teens, their caregivers and policymakers?

In one longitudinal study, researchers — including Orben and Przybylski — used survey data on social media use and well-being from over 17,400 teens and young adults to look at how individuals' responses to a question gauging life satisfaction changed between 2011 and 2018. And they dug into how the responses varied by gender, age and time spent on social media.

Social media use was associated with a drop in well-being among teens during certain developmental periods, chiefly puberty and young adulthood, the team reported in 2022 in *Nature Communications*. That translated to lower well-being scores around ages 11 to 13 for girls and ages 14 to 15 for boys. Both groups also reported a drop in well-being around age 19. Moreover, among the older teens, the team found evidence for the Goldilocks Hypothesis: the idea that both too much and too little time spent on social media can harm mental health.

Concerns over the effects of social media use in children have been circulating for years, resulting in a massive body of scientific literature. But those mostly correlational studies could not show if teen social media use was harming mental health or if teens with mental health problems were using more social media.

Cause and effect

That was the approach Makarin and his team used in their study of Facebook. The researchers homed in on the staggered rollout of Facebook across 775 college campuses from 2004 to 2006. They combined that rollout data with student responses to the National College Health Assessment, a widely used survey of college students' mental and physical health.

The team then sought to understand if those survey questions captured diagnosable mental health problems. Specifically, they had roughly 500 undergraduate students respond to questions both in the National College Health Assessment and in validated screening tools for depression and anxiety. They found that mental health scores on the assessment predicted scores on the screenings. That suggested that a drop in well-being on the college survey was a good proxy for a corresponding increase in diagnosable mental health disorders.

Compared with campuses that had not yet gained access to Facebook, college campuses with Facebook experienced a 2 percentage point increase in the number of students who met the diagnostic criteria for anxiety or depression, the team found.

When it comes to showing a causal link between social media use in teens and worse mental health, “that study really is the crown jewel right now,” says Cunningham, who was not involved in that research.

The social media landscape today is vastly different than the landscape of 20 years ago. Facebook is now optimized for maximum addiction, Shrum, a consumer psychologist, says, and other newer platforms, such as Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok, have since copied and built on those features. Paired with the ubiquity of social media in general, the negative effects on mental health may well be larger now.

Orben and Przybylski’s 2022 work suggested, a teen not on social media might well feel worse than one who briefly logs on.

UK

One ongoing effort to understand social media use from this more nuanced vantage point is the SMART Schools project out of the University of Birmingham in England. Pedagogical expert Victoria Goodyear and her team are comparing mental and physical health outcomes among children who attend schools that have restricted cell phone use to those attending schools without such a policy. The researchers described the protocol of that study of 30 schools and over 1,000 students in the July BMJ Open.

Goodyear and colleagues are also combining that natural experiment with qualitative research. Talking to teens and those in their orbit is the best way to get at the mechanisms by which social media influences well-being — for better or worse, Goodyear says. Moving beyond big data to this more personal approach, however, takes considerable time and effort. “Social media has increased in pace and momentum very, very quickly,” she says. “And research takes a long time to catch up with that process.”

The real world consequences of all this evidence and where to from here

In many ways we are back in the dark ages thanks to social media; lawlessness, gossip and predation abound.

Even without malfeasance on social media, occupying young minds with endless trivia is not a healthy pastime in a fragile world being physically torn apart. Rather the planet and their future is being controlled by greedy, amoral miscreants.

Recognised negative issues related to social media include

- Doomscrolling
- Body dysmorphia
- Online/cyber bullying
- Misogyny
- AI generated sexual imaging

And the following issues that affect youth greatly are being ‘screened out’.

- Destruction of planet
- Greed and inequality
- Dictatorships /coercive control

Born into a world of brutal dictatorships where wealth is in the hands of the greedy few and with the natural world sullied, the oceans land and air polluted and climate change causing endless natural disasters, an uncertain future faces us all. Our youth have many real things to be depressed about. Of course many generations of people have faced such uncertainties but now they are apparent everywhere.

Social media has been both a purveyor of the awful truths and an unreliable escape.

Social media may also an ‘opiate’ for young people to divert them away from what is really happening on the planet they will inherit. Therefore those not addicted to social media may be in a worse condition than those committing suicide. They may have already ‘given up’.

Further social media’s opiate offerings can lead the young away from the real issues and ‘sugar coat’ an increasingly violent and corrupted world. While this offers immediate relief it is not a good longterm approach to life.

Give children back their carefree days of childhood - social media has no real regard for anything but money - time to treat them as they are, ignorant.

Millions of Australian children could be barred from using social media platforms under changes put forward by state premiers who want better protection of minors from online harm.

The leaders of States of NSW, Queensland and Victoria united on Monday in a push to lift age minimums on major platforms such as TikTok and the Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram.

All of the platforms require users to be at least 13 years old, but that limit could be lifted to as high as 16 under a proposal from NSW.

State leaders concede they might not have the power to legislate controls on the platforms, with several calling for a national regime.

NSW Premier Chris Minns said he wanted a minimum age of 16 for social media users, while Queensland counterpart Steven Miles nominated 14.

Victoria Premier Jacinta Allan did not specify a minimum age but called for the platforms’ limits to be raised or for Australia to set its own limits.

Meta and TikTok have been contacted for comment.

Mr Minns said he was moved to act after seeing social media's impact and his experience as a father of three boys. "Obnoxious" social-media algorithms were "designed to keep children glued to the device rather than ripping it away and speaking with family and friends and getting out of the house", he said.

NSW preferred a national approach but would go it alone if a federal age minimum of 16 could not be made to happen quickly, Mr Minns said.

His government was yet to determine what power it had to regulate platforms at a state level, he said.

The federal Labor government has indicated it supports tighter restrictions on children accessing social media, which Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has identified as a national issue.

Health Minister Mark Butler said a potential age limit was still being worked out while a verification trial was completed using funding allocated in the recent budget.

"We've got to get the age right and we've got to get the technological implementation right," he said.

Mr Miles said he had seen little evidence social media companies cared what Australian policy makers thought and it was time for tighter federal regulation.

WA Health Minister Amber-Jade Sanderson said her government was looking at what levers were available to protect minors from social media harm.

The NSW government on Monday also announced a state summit to look at the impact of social media platforms on young people involving policy makers, academics and company representatives.

This comes after the Australian eSafety Commissioner lost a Federal Court bid that would have forced X, formerly Twitter, to continue hiding videos of a stabbing that occurred in Western Sydney.

The debate in the UK took on a fresh resonance after Esther Ghey, the mother of the murdered teenager Brianna Ghey, added her voice to those highlighting the dangers of smartphones.

"We'd like a law introduced, so that there are mobile phones that are suitable for under-16s," she told the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg last Sunday. "So if you're over 16, you can have an adult phone, but then under the age of 16 you can have a children's phone, which will not have all of the social media apps that are out there now."

In demanding tougher curbs on big tech, she echoed other bereaved parents who believe social media played some role in the loss of their children – including Ian Russell, whose daughter Molly took her own life after viewing harmful content online.

Ghey's intervention came days after social media bosses including the Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg faced a ferocious grilling in the US Senate over their companies' role in facilitating child sexual exploitation and drug use. He told them: "I'm sorry for everything you've been through."

Some US lawmakers are already going further than castigating the titans of big tech: the conservative state of Florida is debating legislation aimed at banning under-16s from using social media.

In the UK, reports before Christmas suggested Rishi Sunak was considering tougher curbs on social media use by children – though the new Online Safety Act, years in the making and meant to protect children online, is still in the process of being implemented.

Esther Ghey has called for under-16s to have phones that do not feature social media apps.

A government spokesperson said ministers were focused on the act, but added: "We will always look at ways that children and other internet users can be kept safe online."

The Tory MP Miriam Cates, the co-chair of the New Conservatives caucus of MPs, recently called for the UK to follow Florida's lead with a social media ban – warning that "ordinary mums and dads are completely unequipped to do battle with the goliaths of Meta, TikTok and Apple". Calls for a crackdown come on the back of a growing body of evidence about the dangers of unfettered social media access.

The US surgeon general, Vivek Murthy, issued an advisory statement last year, warning of "growing evidence that social media use is associated with harm to young people's mental health".

He cited a study that showed adolescents who spent more than three hours a day on social media "face double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes, such as symptoms of depression and anxiety".

Another US academic paper, which mapped the staggered rollout of Facebook across college campuses against data on students' health, showed that the arrival of the social network coincided with "increased symptoms of poor mental health, especially depression".

Despite the acknowledged dangers, few experts and campaigners the Guardian spoke to believed an outright ban on social media use by under-16s was workable, or even desirable – though all are united in believing tech firms must do more.

"The people we really want to be taking responsibility for children being safe online are the tech companies," said Rani Govender, the senior policy officer at the NSPCC.

“We completely recognise why so many parents and families are worried about this, but we think it keeps coming back to: how can we make these apps, these games, these sites, safer by design for children?”

She pointed to the importance of implementing requirements in the Online Safety Act for firms to take a tougher approach to enforcing minimum age limits for creating social media accounts, which are widely flouted. Lady Beeban Kidron, who campaigns for children’s rights online, said there was understandable focus on removing harmful content from apps – but policymakers should also be focusing on their underlying design.

“What we have to concentrate on is: why are we allowing companies to give addictive products to children? There is no reason on God’s earth that they have to be designed to be addictive. That is a business choice,” she said. “You’ve basically got a faulty product here: they need to fix it.”

Toxic masculinity

The world’s increasing list of brutal and insane dictators are already an example of toxic masculinity but the social media platforms are now also getting into the act.

Academic research suggested the video-sharing app TikTok would serve up increasingly misogynistic content to boys who sought content about loneliness, or asked questions about masculinity.

“Algorithmic processes on TikTok and other social media sites target people’s vulnerabilities – such as loneliness or feelings of loss of control – and gamify harmful content,” warned the lead author, Dr Kaitlyn Regehr, who carried out the study in partnership with colleagues at the University of Kent.

A TikTok spokesperson rejected the findings, insisting: “Misogyny has long been prohibited on TikTok and we proactively detect 93% of content we remove for breaking our rules on hate. The methodology used in this report does not reflect how real people experience TikTok.”

Deana Puccio, a former New York prosecutor, runs workshops in schools to help teens tackle issues such as sexual harassment and negative body image – including coping with the onslaught of social media.

She said the role of parents and schools was crucial. “This is about us all banding together, and the social media companies, and having an interdisciplinary approach to recognising the fact that, yes, our kids are suffering with mental health issues more than ever before – anxiety, depression, body image, self-harm – because of what they’re seeing. There’s no log off time,” she said.

This comes after the eSafety Commissioner lost a Federal Court bid that would have forced X, formerly Twitter, to continue hiding videos of a stabbing that occurred in Western Sydney.

A healthy family media use plan that is individualized for a specific child, teenager, or family can identify an appropriate balance between screen time/online time and other activities, set boundaries for accessing content, guide displays of personal information, encourage age-appropriate critical thinking and digital literacy, and support open family communication and implementation of consistent rules about media use.

However, there is an overall climate of cyberbullying, lack of physical and personal contact, lack of physical exercise and team sports, lack of peer, social and community interaction, etc which are all mental health risks.

The Dangers That Come With Young Adults Utilizing Social Media

A study found that 14.8% of young people who were admitted to mental hospitals because they posed a risk to others or themselves had viewed internet sites that encouraged suicide in the two weeks leading up to their admission. The research was conducted on young people who were referred to mental hospitals because they constituted a risk to others or themselves. They prefer to publish pictures of themselves on social networking sites, which results in a steady flow of messages and pictures that are often and painstakingly modified to present people in a favorable light. This influences certain young individuals, leading them to begin making unfavorable comparisons between themselves and others, whether about their achievements, their abilities, or their appearance.

Summary

Digital technology is neither good nor bad in and of itself but safeguards and standards are necessary to protect the vulnerable. This should never be the role of the social media millionaires – they do not have the appropriate skills.

We all still live in a physical world; we need food, exercise, physical and social relationships, knowledge, compassion, human touch, empathy and intelligence. Are young people getting that from the passive ‘screen world’?

It may also help if young people were ASKED what they want to see online and not have addictive material foisted upon them.

Negative effects of social media on teenagers include:

- Distraction from homework, exercise, and family activities.
- Disruption of sleep.
- Exposure to biased or incorrect information.
- Spreading rumours or sharing too much personal information and explicit photos.
- Feelings of envy, inadequacy, and less satisfaction with life.
- Correlation with depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and loneliness.
- Lack of sport and communication with peers with positive feedback.

Online social interaction can promote healthy socialization among teens, especially when they're experiencing stress or social isolation. For youth who have anxiety or struggle in social situations, practicing conversations over social media can be an important step toward feeling more comfortable interacting with peers in person. Social media can also help kids stay in touch with their support networks. That can be especially important for kids from marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+ adolescents who may be reluctant or unable to discuss their identity with caregivers (Craig, S. L., et al., *Social Media + Society*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2021). In such cases, online support can be a lifeline.

"We know from suicide prevention research that it's critical for people to know they aren't alone," Alvord said.

The young also learn about themselves online. At the extreme, social media use can interfere with sleep, physical activity, schoolwork, and in-person social interactions. "The risk of technologies that pull us in is that they can get in the way of all the things we know are important for a teen's development, like sport and teamwork"

Parents should talk to their children often about social media and technology and also use strategies like limiting the amount of time kids can use devices and removing devices from the bedroom at night. Caregivers should also keep an eye out for problematic behaviors, such as strong cravings to use social media, an inability to stop, and lying or sneaking around in order to use devices when they aren't allowed.

There are efforts to make such changes. The Kids Online Safety Act (US), a bipartisan bill introduced in April, establishes a duty of care for social media companies to protect minors from mental health harms, sex trafficking, narcotics, and other dangers. Social media recommendations

Youth using social media should be encouraged to use functions that create opportunities for social support, online companionship, and emotional intimacy that can promote healthy socialization.

Social media use, functionality, and permissions/consenting should be tailored to youths' developmental capabilities; designs created for adults may not be appropriate for children.

In early adolescence (i.e., typically 10–14 years), adult monitoring (i.e., ongoing review, discussion, and coaching around social media content) is advised for most youths' social media use; autonomy may increase gradually as kids age and if they gain digital literacy skills. However, monitoring should be balanced with youths' appropriate needs for privacy.

To reduce the risks of psychological harm, adolescents' exposure to content on social media that depicts illegal or psychologically maladaptive behavior, including content that instructs or encourages youth to engage in health-risk behaviors, such as self-harm (e.g., cutting, suicide), harm to others, or those that encourage eating-disordered behavior

(e.g., restrictive eating, purging, excessive exercise) should be minimized, reported, and removed; moreover, technology should not drive users to this content.

To minimize psychological harm, adolescents' exposure to "cyberhate" including online discrimination, prejudice, hate, or cyberbullying especially directed toward a marginalized group (e.g., racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious, ability status), or toward an individual because of their identity or allyship with a marginalized group should be minimized.

Adolescents should be routinely screened for signs of "problematic social media use" that can impair their ability to engage in daily roles and routines, and may present risk for more serious psychological harms over time.

The use of social media should be limited so as to not interfere with adolescents' sleep and physical activity.

Adolescents should limit use of social media for social comparison, particularly around beauty- or appearance-related content.

Adolescents' social media use should be preceded by training in social media literacy to ensure that users have developed psychologically-informed competencies and skills that will maximize the chances for balanced, safe, and meaningful social media use.

Substantial resources should be provided for continued scientific examination of the positive and negative effects of social media on adolescent development.

As a result, teen social media use often correlates with:

- depression
- anxiety
- low self-esteem
- envy
- loneliness.

Research carried out by the Australian government's eSafety Commissioner revealed that in a 6-month period in 2020, 4 in 10 teens (44% of those surveyed) had a negative experience online. This included being contacted by a stranger, sent inappropriate content or being deliberately excluded from events or social groups.

We are destroying their world and robbing them of their future and their innocence. Social media is distracting them from this obscene injustice - that is the insidious part - we are 'fiddling while Rome burns'.

The amazing reality of our situation as living, breathing conscious universe is squandered through greed and brutality of individual humans.

'Ours' are the children of the generations where far too many did not care about creating a better world for their children - or did not create children. I know the odds are stacked against us all but we should never stop fighting as our forebears never stopped fighting. Okay 'we' have no power and 'they' have all the power but it is the hallmark of decent humans to fight against all odds - that is how we achieve and up until recent times we did achieve - now we are too busy holidaying or on Foxtel or social media ourselves, not fighting for our mutual survival - some do of course, but most don't.

Maybe depression and despair rules all our lives but we are better than that, and if we looked up from our devices we would be astonished by who we are, and ask what are we here for, this eternally self-replicating being called life. Is all the pain necessary? Is it a vital part of our existence to move us toward a better and brighter future for all life? Do we think it is all just about 'us'?

What about the other species we are selfishly killing en masse? Once they were our cousins and earlier still our genetic brothers and sisters. None of us would be here without them. They know who and what we are. When you bond with a wild creature in love and trust you realise how incredibly intelligent and how incredibly forgiving they are.

We are not 'lucky' to live in the digital world and have a long and full life - we are wanton and destructive and indulgent.

Despair/anxiety is not a mental illness when it is a direct result of conditions faced. A world population doing little to nothing to address its major problems and where the world's wealth is in the hands of criminals, dictators and the greedy, who are greedy for even more - is depressing.

Apathy in a dying world can be a symptom of extreme mental health problems. Unlike sadness or anger, apathy doesn't involve strong emotions; rather, it's a general lack of interest or motivation.

It is time to be a little less selfish and perhaps CREATE wonderful online experiences and facilities for all our children that improve mental health and provide realistic and positive approaches for their lives - that will help them have faith in humanity and help them build a better future than the current one we have created for them.