



Social Media and Adolescents (Opportunities and Threats): A Letter to Editor

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

Adolescents and youth use social media more than other members of the society do. They use a wide range of media daily to communicate with their peer groups (1). The literature on social media and adolescents shows associations between time spent using social media and increased self-esteem, social capital (resources accessible through one's social relationships), secure identity exploration, and social support (2). Social media allows adolescent users to strengthen bonds with existing friends and create new friendships online, which reduces social isolation and loneliness and indirectly improves mental health (3). Social network interventions specifically use the characteristics of social networks to create, accelerate or maintain health behaviors and positive health outcomes or change them (4). Some studies have used social media as a promising channel to provide smoking cessation interventions in adolescents and youth (5). Social media acts like a double-edged sword. In addition to the benefits they have, if used problematically, they endanger physical and mental health (6). Aside from excessive use of social media, typically defined on the basis of hours of use, the term of problematic use characterizes individuals who experience addiction-like symptoms as a result of their social media use. Problematic social media use reflects a

non-substance related disorder by which detrimental effects occur as a result of preoccupation and compulsion to excessively engage in social media platforms despite negative consequences (7). Evidence from various cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies have shown the impact of problematic use of smartphones and social media on the physical and mental health of adolescents and youth, including chronic sleep deprivation, violence and aggression, anxiety and depression (8). An important point in the impact of social media on the health of adolescents is the mediating role of lifestyle habits, which few studies have investigated.

Social media affects the happiness of adolescents through changes in the lifestyle habits of adolescents, such as sleep, physical activity, and nutrition. From a psychological perspective, activity theory claims that more mobility and social activities are associated with higher happiness. In the meantime, sedentary behaviors such as using the media suppress the release of happiness hormones (serotonin, noradrenaline and dopamine). This issue leads to a decrease in the perceived positive feelings of physical activity.(9). Moreover, social media affects the sleep of adolescents through the alarming effects of light screens. Specifically, as the sun sets and it gets dark, the



pineal gland releases melatonin to reduce alertness and increase sleep. Media exposure before sleep significantly prolongs sleep onset, delays the circadian clock, suppresses melatonin, and reduces morning alertness (10).

Therefore, social media along with the benefits they have, if not used correctly, create possible negative consequences on the lifestyle and consequently the physical and mental health. If adolescents are not aware and don't know about the incorrect functions of these social media, this tool will become a serious threat for them and the incorrect use of these media will cause damage seriously. Considering the sensitivity of adolescence and the fast advances in technology, education to parents, educators and students regarding online communication and social media activity should be updated. In addition, instead of prohibiting adolescents and youth from using social media, it is better to inform them about the threats and opportunities of these social media. Future researches should focus on studies based on intervention and training for adolescents and parents in order to use the media properly and manage it. Parents are concerned about adolescent social media use and endorse positive attitudes toward monitoring, yet parents perceived little control over monitoring. Use of school-based interventions among parents and adolescents about time management, media literacy, and authoritative parenting style (Authoritative parents are warm and communicative, but they also exert appropriate control) will be useful.

Therefore, paying attention to these points can prevent the negative consequences problematic use of the media on lifestyle habits and consequently, the impact of unhealthy lifestyle habits on the physical and mental health of adolescents.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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