

Social Networking: Prevalence and Trends

In this document service providers will find some statistics and trends on gender, diverse populations, peer pressure, relationships with family and community, pre-existing mental health and addiction issues, and personality traits.

Gender

Young people adapt to new technologies faster than adults and are more likely to lose track of time while on social media [1, 2, 3]. Recent studies suggest youth are more susceptible to involvement in unsafe and illegal activities such as harassment, privacy violation, defamation of character, intentional infliction of emotional distress, bullying, and exposure to inappropriate information [4].

Problematic social media use is higher in girls than boys. Girls are possibly more inclined to develop addictive behaviours in activities involving social interaction, whereas boys may tend to develop problematic use of more solitary activities such as video gaming [1, 3, 5-7]. Boys take more risks when disclosing personal information than girls [4]. Teenage girls who have body image concerns and spend time on social networking sites worry more about being thin and dieting, and have lower self-esteem [1].

While girls use these sites for communication with peer group members, entertainment, passing time and socialization, boys use them for social reward, learning, and social identity gratifications [8].

Diverse Populations

Youth in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning), and others (LGBTQ2S+) communities may use social networking sites for self-expression. LGBTQ2S+ youth tend to disclose their sexual orientation more comfortably on social networking sites than in person, and find those sites provide a useful context to connect with their LGBTQ2S+ peers [9].

Social media can be used to target vulnerable children and youth. Research shows that Canadian Indigenous girls are at higher risk of recruitment and sexual exploitation through social media avenues than other girls [10].

People who have intellectual disabilities or psychological symptoms and disorders, such as depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), are also more likely to engage in socially risky behaviours, exploitation, and abuse. Using the internet increases their vulnerability [8, 11]. These vulnerabilities are based on research that analyses patterns of youth experiences related to drug smuggling, threats, and trafficking [12]. It is important to note that it should not be predicted that a young person with similar features described above will become a victim of these experiences.

Peer Pressure

When younger children encounter a difficult experience on social media, they may ask their parents for help. Older children are more likely to turn to friends, potentially exposing themselves to even more harmful information and risks. Youth can access unsafe information or make online connections with people who encourage self-harm and eating disorders.

Social Networking: Prevalence and Trends | 2

Youth with low self-esteem may be at risk for these behaviours because they do not want to lose the virtual interaction with peers, and their self-confidence relies on feedback from these sites [9].

Relationships with Family and Community

Students who use the internet to study may be easily distracted by checking their social networking sites, so their grades may drop [3]. Moreover, if students are struggling in school, having trouble with peers and family, and generally feeling like failures, they may increasingly turn to the internet and social networking sites as a coping mechanism [8]. When parents use social networking sites excessively, it may be more likely their children will too. The absence of appropriate role modelling, lack of supervision, and lack of recognition can result in isolation, lack of comfort, trust, security, and most importantly, desperation to feel loved by family [8].

Pre-Existing Mental Health and Addiction Issues

A correlation exists between the problematic use of social networking sites and pre-existing mental health issues, such as ADHD, obsessive-compulsiveness, anxiety, and depression. High impulsivity and poor inhibitory control may also correlate with problematic use of such sites. This implies that youth with these issues could be susceptible to excessive use of social networking sites, which in turn may intensify symptoms of anxiety and depression [3].

Personality Traits

Some personality characteristics, such as narcissism and low self-esteem, are associated with the problematic use of social media [5]. Narcissism is expressed by self-centered grandiosity, overconfidence, manipulation, feeling special and unique, and a lack of empathy [4, 13].

Social networking sites allow people to showcase their ambitions and successes to a potentially large audience, and also provide perceptible recognition through “likes,” comments, and emoticons from other social media users. People with a narcissistic personality tend to be more active on Facebook and other sites, as the virtual environment empowers them to construct their ideal selves [14].

Basic cognitions also play a role in addictive social media use. These include attributions, core beliefs, automatic thoughts, and schemata that have the power to cause problematic behaviours on social media. If a person believes “I am not likable” or “I have poor social skills”, this may trigger continued use of social networking sites in order to get approval from other users. Some users believe that having a large number of friends or followers will change self-conceptions [13].

In summary, people who are young, single, and experiencing relationship difficulties and underlying mental health issues tend to be at greater risk for problematic use of social networking sites [1, 2, 6].

References

1. Andreassen, C. S., Billieux, J., Griffiths, M. D., Kuss, D. J., Demetrovics, Z., Mazzoni, E., & Pallesen, S. (2016). The relationship between addictive use of social media and video games and symptoms of psychiatric disorders: A large-scale cross-sectional study. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 30*(2), 252–62. doi: [10.1037/adb0000160](https://doi.org/10.1037/adb0000160). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26999354>
2. Andreassen, C. S., Torsheim, T., Brunborg, G. S., & Pallesen, S. (2012). Development of a Facebook Addiction Scale. *Psychological Reports, 110*(2), 501–17. doi:[10.2466/02.09.18.PR0.110.2.501-517](https://doi.org/10.2466/02.09.18.PR0.110.2.501-517)
3. Kuss, D. J., Griffiths, M. D., Karila, L., & Billieux, J. (2014). Internet Addiction: A Systematic Review of Epidemiological Research for the Last Decade. *Current Pharmaceutical Design, 20*(25), 4026-4052. doi: [10.2174/13816128113199990617](https://doi.org/10.2174/13816128113199990617)
4. Ferrara, P., Ianniello, F., Villani, A., & Corsello, G. (2018). Cyberbullying a modern form of bullying: Let's talk about this health and social problem. *Italian Journal of Pediatrics, 44*(1), 14. doi: [10.1186/s13052-018-0446-4](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13052-018-0446-4)
5. Bányai, F., Zsila, Á., Király, O., Maraz, A., Elekes, Z., Griffiths, M. D., Andreassen, C. S., & Demetrovics, Z. (2017). Problematic Social Media Use: Results from a Large-Scale Nationally Representative Adolescent Sample. *PLOS One, 12*(1), 1-13 [e0169839]. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0169839>
6. Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. (2011b). Online Social Networking and Addiction—A Review of the Psychological Literature. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 8*(9), 3528–3552. doi: [10.3390%2Fijerph8093528](https://doi.org/10.3390%2Fijerph8093528)
7. Van Deursen, A., Bolle, C., Hegner S., & Kommers, P. (2015). Modeling habitual and addictive smartphone behavior. The role of smartphone usage types, emotional intelligence, social stress, self-regulation, age, and gender. *Computers in Human Behavior, 45*, 411-420. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.039](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.039).
8. Frith, E. (2017). *Social media and children's mental health: a review of the evidence* (PDF file). Retrieved from <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Social-Media-Mental-Health-EPI-Report.pdf>
9. Spies Shapiro, L. A., & Margolin, G. (2014). Growing up wired: social networking sites and adolescent psychosocial development. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 17*(1), 1-18. doi: [10.1007/s10567-013-0135-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-013-0135-1)
10. Louie, D. (2017). Social Media and the Sexual Exploitation of Indigenous Girls. *Girlhood Studies, 10*(2), 97-113. doi: [10.3167/ghs.2017.100208](https://doi.org/10.3167/ghs.2017.100208)
11. Michigan State University. (2016, May 19). Social media poses threat to people with intellectual disabilities. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved February 21, 2020 from <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/05/160519120928.htm>
12. Shira, R. (2016, January 26). Daring human smugglers use social media to lure

Social Networking: Prevalence and Trends | 4

migrants fleeing Syria. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/01/26/migrants-smugglers-social-media-syria-turkey-greece-facebook/79347784/>

13. Alarcón, R. D., & Sarabia, S. (2012). Debates on the narcissism conundrum. Trait, domain, dimension, type or disorder. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 200(1), 16–25. doi: [10.1097/NMD.0b013e31823e6795](https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0b013e31823e6795)
14. Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. (2011a). Excessive online social networking: Can adolescents become addicted to Facebook. *Education and Health*, 29(4), 68–71. Retrieved from <https://sheu.org.uk/sheux/EH/eh294mg.pdf>