

Impact of Technology Use on Adolescent Health

TX RPC Project Legislative Rapid Response Request

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. More than 60% of Texas 8th and 11th graders report spending more than 4 hours in front of a screen per day. Increased screen time has been associated with sedentary behaviors, and negative physical and mental health outcomes.
2. Despite some negative outcomes associated with screen time, social media networking has helped adolescents discuss and seek advice for mental health questions. Clinicians and researchers have also utilized digital tools to reach adolescent populations.
3. Recommended policies to address screen time include helping teenagers balance the positive and negative effects of technology, providing parents with resources to set consistent limits on their child's social media time and use, and supporting research on how to best use technology to reduce health inequities and increase positive health outcomes in adolescents.

PROBLEM

Teenagers are spending increased time online. Approximately 46% of U.S. teens say they are online almost constantly. (1-4)

Adolescent (ages 13-17) use of social media and cell phones has increased in recent years, with 95% of teens reporting owning or having access to a smartphone in 2022, compared to 73% of students from 2015-2016. (3)

There are concerns about how technology influences adolescent lives, including contribution to lower levels of physical activity, decreased interpersonal connection skills, and increased rates of depression and anxiety. (5-7)

Increased use of screen time can increase sedentary behaviors, which are associated with negative health outcomes such as: (1,2)



Increased overweight or obesity

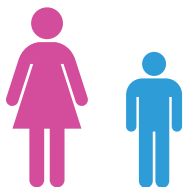


Decreased physical activity



Lower self-esteem

Social media exposes youth daily to thousands of images of celebrities and other online influencers, which leads to the internalization of unattainable beauty standards, resulting in higher rates of dissatisfaction with body image. (8)

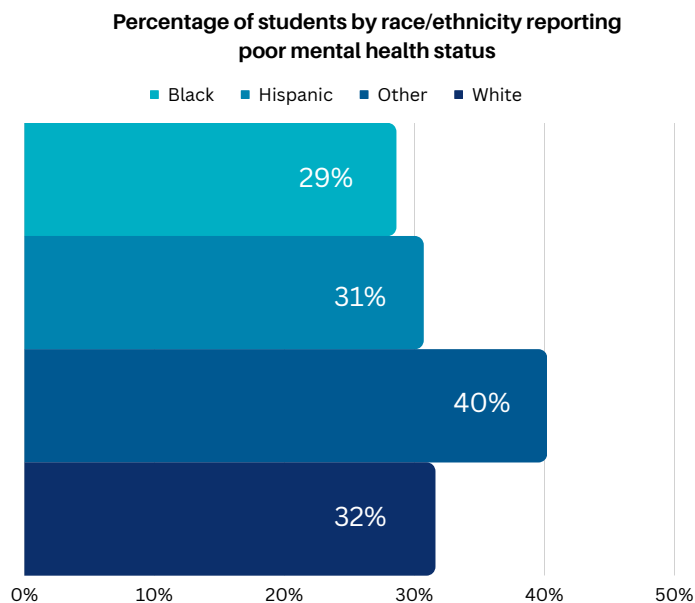


Approximately 46% of girls report feeling worried often or always about their body image, compared to 25% of boys. (9)

- Body dissatisfaction has been linked to risk-taking behaviors and mental health problems, with poor body image also preventing adolescents from engaging in healthy behaviors. (9)
- Approximately 40% of adolescents say that images from social media have caused them to worry about their body image or weight. (9)
- As adolescents develop their own definition of the "ideal appearance," media and other personal factors may contribute to low self-esteem, feelings of depression, and the need to conform to influences on body image. (9)

TEXAS DATA

In Texas, 63% of 8th-grade students and 61% of 11th-grade students reported spending more than 4 hours using screens per day. (2) Approximately 92% of the latter age group have electronic devices in their bedrooms. (1,2)



The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) found that approximately 1 in 3 Texas high school students, regardless of their race or ethnicity, reported poor mental health a majority of the time. (10)

Around 30% of Texas high school students ages 13 to 15 reported poor mental health, compared to 32% of students ages 16 to 17. (10)

The highest number of Texas students reporting poor mental health occurred in high schoolers who were 18 years or older, with 35% reporting poor mental health. (10)

Sleep is essential to good mental and physical health. Healthy sleep habits include regular morning and bedtime routines, as well as limited screen time at night and in adolescents' rooms. (1,2)

SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Teenagers in the U.S. have reported mixed reviews about social media's effect on their age group, with some adolescents reporting both positive and negative effects and others reporting no effect at all. (11)

31% said social media **positively** affected their peers by helping them connect to friends and family. (11)

24% said social media **negatively** affected their peers because of bullying and lack of personal relationships. (11)

45% said social media had no effect on their peers. (11)

Adolescents who live in lower-income households in the U.S. are less likely to report having a computer or game console, but still report having a smartphone. (3) Access to smartphones, desktop/laptop computers, and gaming consoles was highest among adolescents whose household incomes were above \$75,000 per year. (3)

There is a small association between increased screen time and depressive symptoms. While adolescents with more depressive symptoms are more likely to report increased time spent online, social media has also supported online and offline friendships. Therefore, cause and effect cannot be determined. (11,12)

YOUTH REPORT GOING ONLINE WHEN SEEKING OUT HEALTH RELATED INFORMATION

Social media has shown to help adolescents “bounce back” after social rejection by making virtual connections with peers. (11) However, studies have shown that adolescents who report struggling with their offline lives (in-person relationships) often report more negative experiences online, especially negative feedback on social media. (11,13)

Additionally, social networking has helped adolescents to discuss and seek advice for mental health questions. Research suggests that adolescents who report moderate to severe depressive symptoms may be twice as likely to use social media to find support than their peers who report fewer depressive symptoms. (14)

Digital tools have also helped clinicians and researchers to reach populations they otherwise would not with in-person strategies, helping to reduce disparities in program participation and reducing barriers to resources. (15)

Adolescents' preference for social media platforms has changed over the years. (3) The percentage of U.S. adolescents who say they have ever used any apps or websites:

95%

YouTube



67%

TikTok



62%

Instagram



59%

Snapchat



SOLUTIONS

- 1** Parents should be supported in placing limits on their child's social media usage, the types of media used, and making sure media use does not disrupt sleep routines, physical activities, and other health-related behaviors. (1,2)
- 2** Policies and research should support screen-time programs to help address health inequities and increase positive health-related outcomes. (11)
- 3** Policies should examine how social media can be utilized to help teens build digital and interpersonal skills for the future. (11)



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