

Social Media Harm To Teen Mental Health

Parents in particular are concerned that their teenage children are spending too much time on social media. This is not just a values question. An increasing body of literature points to how **severe mental health problems** are associated with excessive social media time for teens. The promise of social media has been to connect people and sustain relationships. But the reality particularly for teens may be the opposite. Rates of teen depression have doubled (from 8 % to 16 %) between 2009 and 2019. This predates the COVID pandemic. So clearly there is a larger social trend going on. ¹

Other metrics of social engagement for teens have also declined during this period. The rate of adolescents engaged in 60 minutes of **sports participation** daily has declined by almost 20% in the past decade. In a fairly shocking statistic, it is described that one in five 15 year-old girls spends more than seven hours a day on social media.

It is difficult to construct a scientific model to “prove” that social media is the primary culprit in these trends, but many psychologists are coming to this conclusion and many parents and individuals feel this is supported by their common sense. By definition, **an hour spent on social media is an hour not spent doing something else** such as taking up a sport, playing games with friends, engaging in religious observance or enjoying the outdoors. Therefore, it seems fairly obvious that spending six or seven hours a day on social media is going to severely restrict the amount of time for engagement in other activities.

There are some nuances. For example a 2018 study cite pointed to more depressive symptoms for “passive” use of social media as opposed to people who are more active in posting photographs and their own statements. ² This study involved adults, and even if applicable to teens, may only illustrate that active, as opposed to purely passive media use, may be the *least bad* alternative. But in the larger picture it appears the consensus of evidence (and common-

¹ *Social Media Fueling the Epidemic of Teenage Depression* (Epoch Times, 10/8/23).

² *Passive and Active Social Media Use and Depressive Symptoms Among United States Adults* (Escobar-Viera, et al., *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 7/1/18).

sense) points to the conclusion that too much social media in teens is not good for their development, physical or mental health.

Health and Wellness is a complicated matter. But for parents of teens, particularly at ages when they are still amenable to more parental influence, they may be well advised to limit screen time generally, and social media in particular if they want to reduce their child's chances of significant depression and increase their opportunities for engagement in the real world.

--Laurence M. Deutsch (10/29/23)