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# The Psychological Impact of Social Media Usage on Teenage Mental Health

A Survey-Based Study

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12th Standard · Independent Research Project  
Survey conducted among 43 respondents · Ages 15–20

**43**

**Respondents**

**79.1%**

**Felt Emotionally Low**

**39.5%**

**Use Social Media 4+ Hrs/Day**

## ABSTRACT

Social media has quietly become one of the most defining forces in teenage life today. From the moment most teenagers wake up to the moment they fall asleep, platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, and WhatsApp shape how they communicate, how they see themselves, and how they feel. This study explores how that constant digital presence is affecting teenage mental health through survey responses collected from 43 participants between the ages of 15 and 20.

The findings reveal that a large portion of teenagers spend more than four hours a day on social media. Many reported feeling emotionally drained, anxious, or stressed on a regular basis. Sleep problems were common, and an overwhelming 79% said they had recently experienced emotional lows. This paper examines these patterns and suggests practical solutions for teenagers, parents, and schools to promote healthier digital habits and stronger emotional well-being.

## INTRODUCTION

There was once a version of teenage life where comparison happened mostly within immediate surroundings: school, neighborhood, relatives, and close friends. Those pressures existed, but they

were limited by geography and familiarity.

That world has changed.

Today, a teenager growing up in a small town can compare themselves to influencers living in luxurious apartments, students studying at elite universities, or people displaying lifestyles that feel completely unreachable. Social media has made the world smaller, but in doing so, it has also made self-doubt much bigger. The standards teenagers now compare themselves against are no longer local. They are global, curated, filtered, and often unrealistic.

This research was conducted to understand how that shift is affecting teenage mental health. The purpose is not to present social media as entirely harmful, but to study how it influences mood, stress, anxiety, sleep quality, and emotional well-being among teenagers today.

Understanding this relationship is important because teenage emotional patterns often shape adult mental health, self-worth, and decision-making later in life.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study the impact of social media usage on teenage mental health
2. To analyze the relationship between screen time and emotional well-being
3. To examine stress, anxiety, and sleep quality among teenagers
4. To understand how social media affects mood and emotional stability
5. To suggest practical solutions for healthier social media usage

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have shown that excessive social media usage can negatively affect teenage mental health. Researchers have found strong links between high screen time and increased levels of anxiety, depression, emotional stress, and reduced concentration.

Teenagers who spend long hours on social media are more likely to experience sleep disturbances, lower self-esteem, and emotional instability. One of the strongest psychological effects identified is social comparison, where teenagers measure their appearance, academic success, financial background, and lifestyle against others online.

Humans have always compared themselves to others, but social media has changed the scale and intensity of that comparison. Instead of comparing themselves only with classmates or neighbors, teenagers are now measuring themselves against carefully curated highlight reels of influencers, celebrities, and strangers across the world. This often creates unrealistic expectations and emotional dissatisfaction.

At the same time, some studies show that social media can have positive effects when used in moderation, such as educational support, communication, creativity, and access to supportive communities. This research builds upon these findings by directly studying how teenagers between the ages of 15 and 20 experience these effects in their own daily lives.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a quantitative survey-based research method using Google Forms for data collection. The survey was conducted among 43 respondents between the ages of 15 and 20. Responses were collected anonymously to ensure honesty and comfort, especially since topics such as stress, anxiety, and emotional struggles are often sensitive for teenagers.

The questionnaire included multiple-choice questions related to:

- Daily social media usage
- Emotional well-being
- Stress and anxiety levels
- Sleep quality
- Mood changes caused by social media
- Feelings of emotional lows

The collected data was analyzed using percentage-based interpretation and represented through pie charts to identify clear patterns and understand the psychological influence of social media on teenagers.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Finding	Result	Key Insight
Age Group (15–17)	55.8%	Majority are younger teens
Social Media 4+ hrs/day	39.5%	Excessive usage very common
Social Media Affects Mood	41.9% Yes / 30.2% Maybe	Strong emotional link
Feel Stressed / Anxious	81.3% (Sometimes to Always)	Stress is near-universal
Felt Emotionally Low Recently	79.1% Yes	Strongest finding of study
Sleep Quality: Average or Poor	69.8%	Most teens sleep poorly

### Age Group Analysis

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Among the 43 respondents, 55.8% belonged to the age group of 15–17 years, while 44.2% were between 18–20 years. This shows that the majority of participants were younger teenagers, making the study strongly focused on adolescent mental health.

### Daily Social Media Usage

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39.5% of students reported spending more than four hours daily on social media, while 34.9% spent between two and four hours, and 25.6% spent less than two hours. This means that nearly three out of four teenagers spend at least two hours daily on social media, showing how deeply digital platforms have become part of everyday life.

### Social Media and Mood

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41.9% of respondents stated that social media affects their mood, while 30.2% selected "Maybe," and 27.9% selected "No." This suggests that a large majority of teenagers recognize a direct emotional connection between their online activity and how they feel mentally.

### Stress and Anxiety Levels

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39.5% reported feeling stressed or anxious "Sometimes," while 30.2% selected "Often," and 11.6% selected "Always." Only 18.6% selected "Rarely." This shows that emotional stress is highly common among teenagers and may be influenced by academic pressure, social expectations, and digital overstimulation.

### Emotional Well-Being

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79.1% of respondents reported feeling emotionally low recently, while only 20.9% selected "No." This was the strongest finding of the study and highlights the seriousness of emotional struggles among teenagers today.

### **Sleep Quality**

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44.2% rated their sleep quality as average, 25.6% as poor, and only 30.2% as good. Poor sleep quality is often linked to excessive screen time, especially late-night scrolling, which affects concentration, emotional control, and academic performance.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that social media has a significant influence on teenage mental health. While social media offers communication, entertainment, education, and connection, excessive usage appears to be closely linked with emotional stress, anxiety, poor sleep quality, and emotional instability.

One of the most concerning findings is that 79.1% of respondents reported feeling emotionally low recently. This suggests that emotional struggles among teenagers are not rare. They are common. Social media often amplifies these struggles by increasing comparison, validation-seeking, and unrealistic standards of success, beauty, and lifestyle.

In earlier generations, comparison was usually local. Teenagers compared themselves to classmates, neighbors, relatives, or family friends. Those comparisons were real, but limited. Today, social media has removed those boundaries.

Now, a teenager from an ordinary background may compare their life to influencers, celebrities, or students from wealthy families living in completely different realities. A student from a modest household may compare themselves to someone displaying luxury lifestyles in cities like Mumbai or New York City. These comparisons are often unrealistic because social media shows carefully filtered highlights, not real life. This creates dissatisfaction, insecurity, and pressure.

Another major issue is the validation loop. Likes, comments, followers, and online attention often become measures of self-worth. For teenagers, whose identity and confidence are still developing, this can be psychologically harmful. A simple post performing badly can feel like personal rejection.

The survey also shows that excessive screen time affects sleep quality. Late-night scrolling, blue light exposure, and emotional overstimulation before sleep disrupt healthy sleep patterns. Poor sleep then worsens stress, anxiety, and concentration problems, creating a cycle that becomes difficult to break.

However, social media itself is not entirely harmful. It can be valuable for education, creativity, networking, and emotional support when used responsibly. The problem lies in unhealthy dependency, compulsive usage, and emotional overinvestment.

The real gap is not technology. It is awareness. Teenagers are rarely taught how to manage digital life in a healthy way. Schools, parents, and institutions must help young people understand emotional boundaries, healthy screen habits, and self-worth beyond online validation.

Teenage mental health should not be dismissed as temporary moodiness. Emotional patterns formed during adolescence often shape adulthood itself, which makes this issue deeply important.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that social media has a major influence on teenage mental health, affecting emotional well-being, stress levels, sleep quality, and self-esteem.

The findings show that emotional lows, anxiety, and poor sleep are not rare experiences among teenagers. They are common. While social media is not the only cause of these struggles, it clearly acts as a strong contributing factor by increasing unhealthy comparison, digital dependency, and emotional pressure.

The solution is not to eliminate social media, but to create healthier relationships with it. Teenagers need awareness, emotional resilience, and practical guidance to use digital platforms without allowing those platforms to control their self-worth.

Balance is possible, but it must be taught, supported, and practiced.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Digital Awareness Programs**  
Schools should organize awareness sessions about healthy social media usage and the psychological effects of excessive screen time.
- 2 Healthy Screen Time Habits**  
Teenagers should be encouraged to set daily screen time limits and avoid excessive late-night social media use.
- 3 Mental Health Education**  
Educational institutions should promote open discussions about stress, anxiety, emotional well-being, and self-esteem.
- 4 Counseling Support**  
Schools and colleges should provide counseling support systems where students can discuss emotional struggles without fear of judgment.
- 5 Parental Guidance**  
Parents should maintain healthy communication with teenagers and guide them toward balanced digital habits rather than strict control.
- 6 Positive Social Media Usage**  
Students should be encouraged to use social media for learning, skill development, networking, and supportive communities rather than unhealthy comparison.

## REFERENCES

1. American Psychological Association – Social Media and Mental Health Research

2. World Health Organization (WHO) – Adolescent Mental Health Reports
3. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
4. Pew Research Center – Teens, Social Media and Technology Reports
5. Google Forms Survey Responses (Primary Data Collection)
6. Academic journals related to social media psychology and teenage emotional well-being

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Survey conducted via Google Forms · 43 respondents · Ages 15–20 · Data collected anonymously for academic purposes