



Exchanging Social Media for Mental Health Social Helping

By Dr. George Williams
June 10, 2024

As social media proliferates worldwide—with Facebook alone boasting 2.96 billion users—concerns about its impact on individual and collective well-being have grown significantly. Despite the widespread use of these platforms, social media companies are not always forthcoming about the potential negative effects on mental health. An investigation by the Wall Street Journal revealed that Facebook was aware of the mental health risks linked to its Instagram app but kept these findings secret.¹

Mental Health Risks

Research has consistently shown that social media use is linked to increased rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and reduced self-esteem.² A study published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* found that limiting social media use to 30 minutes per day led to significant reductions in depression and loneliness over three weeks.³ The comparison culture and unrealistic expectations perpetuated by social media are particularly damaging, especially to adolescents during critical periods of identity development.

Physical Health Concerns

In addition to mental health impacts, excessive use of social media can lead to physical health problems. Prolonged screen time is associated with poor sleep quality and sedentary lifestyles, contributing to a range of health issues such as obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and musculoskeletal problems.³ The constant influx of information and notifications can also lead to digital fatigue and reduced attention spans, impacting productivity and cognitive functions.

Academic and Job Performance

Social media can negatively affect academic and job performance by consuming time that could be spent on productive activities. A study in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* indicated that students who frequently use social media tend to have lower academic performance due to

the distraction it creates.⁴ Similarly, in the workplace, employees who spend substantial time on social media exhibit reduced efficiency and job satisfaction.

Privacy and Security Risks

Privacy and security concerns are significant when it comes to social media use. Users often share personal information that can be exploited for malicious purposes, including identity theft and cyberbullying. Furthermore, the misuse of personal data by social media companies themselves, as highlighted in numerous scandals, raises serious privacy issues.⁴

The Issue of Loneliness

One of the most pressing issues in the U.S. today is loneliness. Despite being more connected digitally, many people feel increasingly isolated. Social media can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and inadequacy by presenting an illusion of connection while lacking genuine social interaction. A study showed people who use social media for the motive of maintaining their relationships feel lonelier.⁵ Studies have shown that face-to-face interactions are crucial for mental health and can significantly reduce feelings of loneliness.⁶

The Role of Companionship Care

Our Companionship Care program teaches how to support individuals in distress through compassionate presence and active listening. While primarily marketed to adults, this program can be equally beneficial for youth. Training young people in companionship care can equip them with the skills to support their peers, fostering a more connected and supportive community.

A Call to Action

Let's work to convert some of our social media time into social helping time. By reducing our time spent on social media and increasing face-to-face interactions, we can improve our mental health and well-being. This shift can start with small steps, such as setting limits on daily social media use and dedicating time to engage in meaningful conversations with family and friends.

Pathways to Promise P.O. Box 9768, Kansas City, MO 64134
(816) 937-4710
admin@pathways2promise.org
www.pathways2promise.org



To learn more about how you can contribute, please visit pathways2promise.org. You can find resources, join our training programs to become a social helper, or donate to support our mission. Together, we can create a more supportive and mentally healthy community.

References

1. Ahigren, M. (2024). 55+Facebook Statistics & Trends. Retrieved from <https://www.websiterating.com/blog/research/facebook-statistics/>
2. Zubair U, Khan MK, Albashari M. Link between excessive social media use and psychiatric disorders. *Ann Med Surg (Lond)*. 2023 Mar 27;85(4):875-878.
3. Hunt, M.G., Young, J. (2018). No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 37(10):751-768.
4. Erfani, E., Boroon, L. & Abedin B. (2021). The Dark Side of Using Online Social Networks: A review of Individuals' Negative Experiences, *Journal of Global Information Management*. 29(6).
5. Bonsaksen T, Ruffolo M, Price D, Leung J, Thygesen H, Lamph G, Kabelenga I, Geirdal AØ. Associations between social media use and loneliness in a cross-national population: do motives for social media use matter? *Health Psychol Behav Med*. 2023 Jan 1;11(1):2158089.
6. Laermans J, Scheers H, Vandekerckhove P, De Buck E. (2023). Friendly visiting by a volunteer for reducing loneliness or social isolation in older adults: A systematic review. *Campbell Syst Rev*. 19(4):e1359.
7. O'Keeffe, G.S. & Clarke-Pearson, K. (2011). The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families. *Council on Communications and Media Pediatrics*. 127 (4): 800–804.