

IMPACT OF THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION DISORDERS IN YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract: Social networks have transformed the way young adults relate, consume information and construct their identities. Although these platforms provide opportunities for connection and learning, their excessive use has been associated with the development of anxiety and depression disorders. Prolonged exposure to unrealistic standards of life and beauty, social interaction mediated by screens and technological dependence are factors that can compromise the mental health of this population. The aim of this study is to analyze the impact of social media use on the development of anxiety and depression disorders in young adults, identifying risk factors and opportunities for preventive interventions. This study used a qualitative approach through a literature review, with the aim of analyzing the impact of social media use on mental health. The focus was on psychological effects, patterns of behavior and implications for quality of life, with an emphasis on young people and adolescents. Recent studies indicate that excessive use of social networks is related to feelings of inadequacy, social isolation and low self-esteem, factors that increase vulnerability to mental health disorders. Social comparison, fueled by algorithms that prioritize highly visually appealing content, and cyberbullying emerge as recurring triggers for anxiety and depression. In addition, the sleep disruption caused by using these platforms at night aggravates psychological symptoms. Strategies such as promoting the conscious use of social networks and developing emotional skills can reduce these negative impacts. Therefore, excessive and unregulated use of social media can significantly contribute to the increase in cases of anxiety and depression in young adults. It is essential to promote digital education, limit usage time and create awareness campaigns to mitigate the adverse effects of social media, protecting the mental health of this age group.

Keywords: Anxiety; Depression; Social Networks; Psychiatry.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of social media has become a significant part of the everyday lives of young adults, offering a platform for connection, sharing experiences, and accessing information. However, the excessive or inappropriate use of these platforms has also raised concerns about mental health, especially as it relates to the development of anxiety disorders and depression. Studies show that constant exposure to social comparison content and the search for validation through likes and comments can intensify feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, contributing to the emergence or worsening of these disorders (Twenge et al., 2020).

In addition, social networks can act as stress amplifiers, by creating a sense of hyperconnectivity that makes it difficult to disconnect mentally and emotionally. This pressure to be constantly up-to-date and accessible increases the risk of mental overload, which is often associated with the development of anxiety symptoms. The phenomenon known as “fear of missing out” (FOMO) is a common example of how excessive use of these platforms can generate anxiety, by inducing individuals to believe that they are missing out on important experiences or that they are not living satisfactorily (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Another critical aspect is the impact of social media on sleep, which plays a crucial role in emotional regulation and overall mental health. Studies indicate that the use of social networks, especially before bed, is associated with worsening sleep quality and insomnia, factors that can exacerbate anxiety and depression. This effect is particularly concerning in young adults, whose routine often involves irregular sleep schedules, increasing vulnerability to these disorders (Levenson et al., 2017).

On the other hand, social media also offers potential benefits, such as access to support groups and mental health information. However, the line between healthy and harmful use is thin, and a lack of awareness of the risks involved can lead to long-term negative consequences. Thus, understanding the mechanisms through which social networks influence the mental health of young adults is essential to develop effective interventions and promote a more balanced use of these platforms (Huang, 2020).



The objective of this work aims to analyze the impact of the use of social networks on the development of anxiety and depression disorders in young adults, identifying risk factors and opportunities for preventive interventions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the elaboration of this study, a qualitative approach was used through a literature review, with the objective of analyzing the impact of the use of social networks on mental health. The focus was on psychological effects, behavior patterns, and implications for quality of life, with an emphasis on youth and adolescent populations.

1. Inclusion Criteria:

- Thematic Relevance: Studies on the impact of social networks on mental health, including aspects such as anxiety, depression, subjective well-being, sleep disorders, and cyberbullying.
- Recent Publications: Articles published between 2013 and 2020 to ensure the timeliness of the evidence.
- Methodology: Empirical studies, systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

2. Exclusion Criteria:

- Works without a direct focus on mental health or that deal only with technical issues about social networks.
- Exclusively theoretical studies or with samples limited to populations unrelated to the theme.
- Publications in languages other than English or Portuguese.

3. Databases and Search Strategy:

Databases: PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO and Google Scholar.



- Descriptors used:
 - “social media”
 - “mental health”
 - “Depression and anxiety”
 - “cyberbullying”
 - “Sleep Disturbance”
 - “adolescents and social media use”
- Boolean operators such as AND, OR, and NOT were employed to refine the results.

4. Guiding Questions:

- How does the use of social networks influence the mental health of adolescents and young adults?
- What are the associations between social networks and problems such as depression, anxiety, and sleep disorders?
- Are there benefits associated with moderate social media use for psychological well-being?

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The impact of social media use on the mental health of young adults is multifaceted, encompassing psychological, social, and behavioral factors. One of the main issues is the role of social networks in intensifying social comparison. Studies indicate that young adults often compare their lives to the idealized representations presented by others on digital platforms. This practice, which often reflects only positive and edited aspects of the lives of others, can lead to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with one’s own life, contributing to the emergence of anxiety disorders and depression (Verduyn et al., 2017).



The relationship between the time of use of social networks and mental disorders is also relevant. Research shows that prolonged use is associated with increased depressive and anxious symptoms, especially when there is a strong emotional dependence on these platforms. Young adults who spend more time connected tend to have fewer face-to-face social interactions, which can result in feelings of isolation and loneliness, factors often correlated with mental health problems (Keles et al., 2020).

Another aspect to be considered is the effect of social networks on the development and maintenance of cyberbullying. The digital environment can facilitate hostile behavior, such as offensive comments, online social exclusion, and the spread of false information. These negative experiences can lead to emotional trauma, worsening the mental health of young people. In addition, the anonymity provided by some platforms often intensifies the severity of cyberbullying, increasing the psychological impact on victims (Kowalski et al., 2018).

In addition, the influence of social networks on the sleep cycle of young adults is another critical point. Frequent use of these platforms, particularly before bedtime, is associated with lower sleep quality and a higher prevalence of insomnia. Exposure to blue light emitted by digital devices, combined with the emotional stimulation provided by social networks, interferes with circadian rhythms and impairs the rest necessary for emotional balance. Sleep deprivation, in turn, is directly related to increased risk of disorders such as anxiety and depression (Hale and Guan, 2015).

On the other hand, social networks also have the potential for positive interventions. Online support groups, mental health apps, and easy access to reliable information can help young adults recognize early symptoms of disorders and seek help. However, for these benefits to be maximized, greater investment in digital education is needed, promoting the conscious and balanced use of social networks, with a focus on reducing negative impacts (Naslund et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

It is therefore concluded that the impact of the use of social networks on the development of



anxiety disorders and depression in young adults is a complex issue, which reflects both the challenges and the opportunities brought by the digital age. Evidence shows that the excessive and inappropriate use of these platforms can exacerbate social comparison, generate isolation, favor cyberbullying, and impair sleep quality, creating a scenario conducive to the emergence and intensification of mental disorders. These factors reinforce the need for a preventive and educational approach that promotes the balanced use of social networks, as well as awareness of their risks.

At the same time, social networks offer potential benefits, such as creating spaces for support, disseminating mental health information, and expanding access to therapeutic interventions. To maximize these positive effects, it is essential that educators, health professionals, and policymakers work together to develop strategies that encourage the conscious use of digital platforms.

In short, while the challenges posed by social media to young adults' mental health are substantial, they also present a unique opportunity to drive meaningful change. By combining digital education, early intervention, and accessible support, it is possible to mitigate the negative effects of social media and use it as powerful tools to improve the psychological well-being of this population.

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