

the depressive symptoms which can occur when young people spend a great amount of time on social media.

It is estimated that in 2016 2.5 million UK children aged 13-17 used Facebook, one of many social [media](#) sites linked to the phenomenon. Moreover, despite rules banning under-13s from creating social media accounts, a report published by the London School of Economics suggested that 43 per cent of nine to 12 year olds have a social network account, with more and more children accessing social media with time.

Increasingly, evidence suggests that the use of social media by [young people](#) is having a negative effect on their [mental health](#). A survey by Young Minds suggests that a greater number of young people view social media as having a negative impact on the way they feel about themselves than those who report positive impacts. The most commonly cited effect is depression, or [depressive symptoms](#), with one study, which did not specifically look at young people, suggesting that greater social media use is linked to lower moment-to-moment happiness and life satisfaction.

These effects are thought to occur for a range of reasons, for example, the comparison of one's own life to friends on social media sites can result in a young person feeling inadequate or worse-off than others. This effect can be exacerbated if young people are comparing themselves to celebrities whose lives may appear so much more glamorous and exciting than their own. Indirect causes of depression have also been identified with social media use, such as young people developing body dysmorphia, which can lead to depression.

Although the majority of the evidence on the effects of social media use link to depression in young people, there are a wide range of other mental health effects which can occur. A survey of 1,500 14 to 24 year olds in the UK, published by Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH)

and the Young Health Movement (YHM), found that Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook were the three worst [social media platforms](#) for having negative mental health effects on children. The report states that this might be related to depression, but there may also be links to an increase in cyberbullying, worsening sleep, and feelings of social isolation and anxiety.

These effects appear to become worse as time spent on social media increases. A report from the Education Policy Institute suggests there is a dose-response relationship between these, with every additional hour spent on social media increasing the risk of social or emotional problems in young people.

As a result of their survey findings, RSPH and YHM made a number of [recommendations](#) to reduce or prevent the negative effects of social media. The recommendations focus on both the users and social media companies. These include warning young people when they have spent too much time on social media and implementing a mechanism which can identify young people who are showing signs of mental health issues on social media.

From the [report](#) it appears that educating users to help manage the increased mental health risks from social media is just as important as action from the companies. It might require safe social media use to be taught as part of a child's education, or a social media component to be included in the training of youth-workers and other professionals who engage with young people.

Despite the potential negative effects, there are also some positive mental health benefits from using social media, particularly through the support networks it can provide. Children and young people report that they are able to create better relationships with their friends through social media. Also those suffering from health problems are able to have

better access to other people's health experiences, as well as expert health information. Finally, social media can help young people with self-expression and self-identity, which are important aspects of their development throughout the teenage years.

Although evidence does link the use of social media to poor mental [health](#) outcomes, social media companies cannot entirely take the blame for this. Managing the risks of depression from social media sites is the joint responsibility of both the user and the social media companies.

In fact, the focus may need to shift towards educating younger people in how to cope with the emotions that social media may bring and make them aware of the potential risks of using it excessively. Social media depression is only likely to get worse, so now is the time to educate young people about the potential pitfalls of [social media](#).

More information: G. S. O'Keeffe et al. The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families, *PEDIATRICS* (2011). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2011-0054](#)

Ethan Kross et al. Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults, *PLoS ONE* (2013). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0069841](#)

epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/..._ealth_EPI-Report.pdf

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