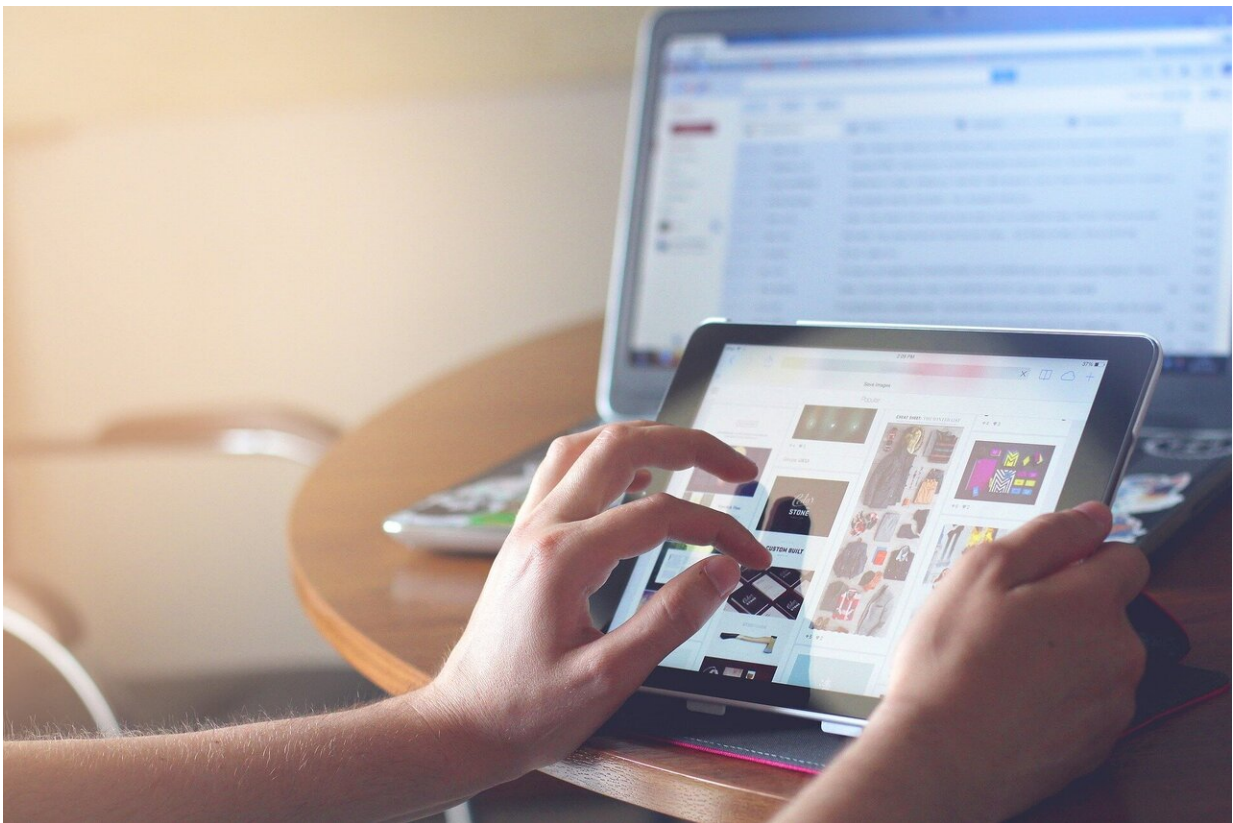


# No 'smoking gun' mental health harm from internet: Study

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Links between internet adoption and psychological well-being are small at most, despite popular assumptions about the negative psychological effects of internet technologies and platforms, according to a major

international study published by the Oxford Internet Institute.

The study examined data from two million individuals aged 15 to 89 in 168 countries, yet found smaller and less consistent associations than would be expected, if the internet were causing widespread psychological harm, according to the research team. The paper, "Global Well-Being and Mental Health in the Internet Age," has been published in the journal *Clinical Psychological Science*.

Professor Andrew Przybylski, Oxford Internet Institute and Assistant Professor Matti Vuorre, Tilburg University and Research Associate, Oxford Internet Institute, carried out the study, which shows the last two decades have seen only small and inconsistent changes in global well-being and [mental health](#).

Professor Przybylski says, "We looked very hard for a 'smoking gun' linking technology and well-being and we didn't find it."

Professor Vuorre notes, "We studied the most extensive data on well-being and internet [adoption](#) ever considered, both over time and population demographics. Although we couldn't address causal effects of internet use, our descriptive results indicated small and inconsistent associations."

Filtering the results by age group and gender has not revealed any specific demographic patterns among [internet users](#), this includes women and young girls. In fact, for the average country, [life satisfaction](#) had increased more for females over the period.

According to Professor Przybylski, "We meticulously tested whether there is anything special in terms of age or gender, but there is no evidence to support popular ideas that certain groups are more at risk."

The team maintains, "We put our findings under a more extreme test to see if there are matters which we have missed and we did find increased mobile broadband adoption predicted greater life satisfaction, but this association was too small to be of practical significance."

But, the team insists, [technology companies](#) need to provide more data, if there is to be conclusive evidence of the impacts of internet use. The research says, "Research on the effects of internet technologies is stalled because the data most urgently needed are collected and held behind closed doors by technology companies and online platforms.

"It is crucial to study, in more detail and with more transparency from all stakeholders, data on individual adoption of and engagement with Internet-based technologies. These data exist and are continuously analyzed by global technology firms for marketing and product improvement but unfortunately are not accessible for independent research."

In this study, the researchers contrast two different studies of data on well-being and mental health against the countries' per capita internet users and mobile broadband subscriptions and use, to see if internet adoption predicts [psychological well-being](#).

In the second study they use data on rates of anxiety, depression and self-harm from 2000–2019 in some 200 countries and analyze their associations with [internet](#) adoption.

Well-being was assessed using data from face to face and phone surveys by local interviewers in the respondents' native languages. Mental health was assessed using statistical estimates of depressive disorders, [anxiety disorders](#) and [self-harm](#) in some 200 countries from 2000 to 2019, as estimated by aggregated health data from World Health Organization member states.

**More information:** Global well-being and mental health in the internet age, *Clinical Psychological Science* (2023).

[journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/21677026231207791](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/21677026231207791)

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