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**A rise in depression among teens could be linked to social media use**

[**Daily News Article**](http://www.studentnewsdaily.com/archive/daily-news-article/) **—   Posted on March 15, 2019**



(by Patti Neighmond, NPR) – A study published Thursday in the **Journal of Abnormal Psychology** finds the percentage of U.S. teens and young adults reporting mental distress, depression and suicidal thoughts and actions has risen significantly over the past decade.

While these problems also increased among adults 26 and older, the increase was not nearly as large as among young people born from the early 1980s to the late 1990s.

The study findings suggest a generational shift says San Diego State University **psychologist Jean Twenge**, who headed the study. To see a significant increase in negative psychological states “among our vulnerable population of teens and young adults is absolutely heartbreaking,” she says.

Twenge and her colleagues analyzed data from the **National Survey on Drug Use and Health**, a government survey that tracks mental health and substance use in individuals age 12 and over in the U.S. They looked at survey responses from more than 200,000 adolescents ages 12 to 17 and almost 400,000 young adults ages 18 and over between 2005 and 2017.

They found the rate of individuals reporting symptoms consistent with major depression over the past year increased 52 percent in teens and 63 percent in young adults over a decade. Girls were more vulnerable than boys. By 2017 one out of every five teenage girls had experienced major depression in the last year.

Rates of psychological distress, which Twenge describes as “feeling nervous, hopeless or that everything in life is an effort” rose by 71 percent among people aged 18 to 25. Suicidal thoughts, plans and attempts also increased. Death from suicide increased by 56 percent among 18- to 19-year-olds between 2008 and 2017.

Understanding exactly why these trends are on the rise is always a challenge, says Twenge, since researchers can only point out correlations, not causes. But, she says, since the trends are “pretty large in a fairly short period of time, that helps us narrow what the likely cause might be.”

She thinks the rise in smartphone and social media use is a significant factor. By 2012, smartphones had become widespread, she says, and it’s around that same time that social media began to dominate young people’s lives. For example, in 2009 about half of high school seniors visited social media sites every day. That’s climbed to about 85 percent today, with Instagram and Snapchat replacing Facebook as the main “go to social media site,” she says.

It’s not just the phone or social media itself, says Twenge. It’s the amount of time teens and young adults spend with it. As Twenge found in earlier research, the more time they spend, the greater the risk of depressive symptoms. Twenge says it’s known from a body of research that in-person social contact is good for mental health. She questions whether spending that same amount of time on Instagram and Snapchat is just as beneficial, and says “it seems clear the answer is ‘No.’ ”

“Spending time on social media tends not to be in real time,” she says. “You’re not having a real time conversation with someone — usually you’re not seeing their face and you can’t give them a hug; it’s just not as emotionally fulfilling as seeing someone in person.”

The findings of the new study ring “completely true” for **clinical child psychologist Mary Fristad** with the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health at The Ohio State University, who was not involved in the study. Fristad, who treats children from age 10 through to college age, says her patients are concerned “not about how much fun they look forward to having over the weekend, but about what event can they post on Snapchat so that other people will know they have friends.”

Fristad says kids are developmentally more worried about peer status and approval during pre-teen and teenage years. Social media exaggerates that process, she says, because it’s so public, available, and highly visual. It’s like “taking what happens in typical adolescent development and putting it on steroids,” she says.

For example, as opposed to “going to school with ‘meh’ hair suddenly there’s a picture of you with ‘meh’ hair. Everybody’s going to see it, can comment on it, make fun of you,” she says. These experiences resonate enormously during adolescence and can deeply affect teen’s confidence and sense of self.

In order to better understand the impact of social media on this age group, Fristad organized a focus group of college students at Ohio State. The students had all received smartphones when they were 13 or 14. What they told her was was in line with current study’s findings. The students described “another realm of things to worry about, pressure to build your brand, sharing too much and making unrealistic comparisons to other kids … being constantly on the phone and not engaging in face-to-face interactions.”

“There’s just a lot of heightened tension around this,” says Fristad. And the advice from [the students who participated in the study]? “Phones Off, Friends On.”

…Researcher and clinical **psychologist Steve Ilardi**, with the University of Kansas tries to help anxious and depressed kids feel better. The good news, he says, is that it’s clear that they “intuitively grasp that how we live now is not ideal for us.” Teens get that spending hours surfing, bringing their phones to bed, “this relentless cascade of stressful notifications and images is not good for them and they get it.”

Ilardi developed a treatment approach, based on cognitive behavioral therapy, that helps young people make lifestyle changes, focusing on better diet and nutrition, exercise, exposure to sunlight and getting a good night’s sleep, all of which have been shown to reduce depressive symptoms.

“Kids buy into it,” says Ilardi, “when you lay it out for them and explain they can be empowered to make changes themselves that can make a big difference in how you feel, how your brain, mind and body functions.”

He says behavior change can “help kids get unstuck from their perpetual sense of anxiety, stress and depression.”

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#### Questions

1. The first paragraph of a news article should answer the questions who, what, where and when. Identify these below:

 Who

 What

 Where

(NOTE: The remainder of a news article provides details on the why and/or how.)

2. What data did they use in the study?

3. What statistics did they find?

4. How was Dr. Twenge able to determine what is most likely causing the drastic increase in these problems?

5. What did she determine the cause to be?

6. What facts did she use to back up her assertion?

7. What did research show about the amount of time spent on social media?

8. What did Ohio State psychologist Mary Fristad find is a main concern for her patients?