

Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health: A Gendered Perspective

Aynee Arif¹, Shazia Manzoor² & Javaid Rashid³

¹Researcher, Department of Social Work, University of Kashmir, J&K

²PhD, Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Kashmir, J&K. She is currently heading the Department

Email: shazia@uok.edu.in

³PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Kashmir, J&K

Abstract

This study attempts to understand the relationship between Social Media (SM) usage and Adolescent Mental Health (AMH) with a focus on the gendered coping mechanisms employed by adolescents to mitigate the negative impacts of excessive digital engagement. The objective is to examine the literature and evidence available as to how adolescent boys and girls develop distinct strategies to manage SM addiction and its associated stressors. Using a systematic literature review and thematic analysis of empirical studies, this research identifies key patterns in coping mechanisms and support systems. Findings indicate that adolescent boys predominantly adopt problem-focused strategies, such as seeking solutions or engaging in physical activities, while girls tend toward emotion-focused coping, including seeking emotional support and self-soothing practices. The study also highlights the influence of peer and family networks in shaping coping behaviours. However, a critical gap persists in empirical research concerning adolescents' perceptions of SM and how these coping strategies evolve over time and across diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts. The study emphasizes the need for longitudinal, culturally sensitive research to deepen our understanding of these dynamics. It concludes by advocating for tailored, gender-responsive interventions to support mental health in adolescents in the technological age, addressing both the risks and potential aspects of SM use.

Keywords: AMH, SM Addiction, Gendered Coping Mechanisms, Peer and Family Support, Digital Well-being

Introduction

The increasing integration of digital technology into everyday life has greatly changed how individuals, especially adolescents, interact with the world around them. Social Media (SM) platforms have emerged as pivotal spaces for communication, socialization, and self-expression. However, concerns regarding the potential negative effects of these platforms, particularly on mental health, have gained significant interest from researchers, academicians, and

psychosocial professionals. Among the most vulnerable groups to the adverse effects of SM are adolescents, who are still undergoing crucial developmental stages in their psychological and social lives (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). Adolescence is a time of heightened emotional and cognitive development, during which individuals are particularly sensitive to social influences. As a result, the nature and frequency of SM engagement can play a considerable role in shaping adolescents' mental well-being. Previous studies have

highlighted the potential links between excessive SM use and mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and sleep disturbances (Twenge et al., 2018). While these effects have been widely documented, less notice has been taken of the fact that how gender influences the nature and extent of these impacts. Gender plays a crucial role in influencing how adolescents engage with SM and how they experience its effects. For example, research has shown that females are more inclined to use SM for social comparison and emotional support, which can lead to heightened feelings of mental unease and dejection. In contrast, males may be more prone to using SM for gaming or competitive activities, which can lead to issues such as internet addiction or issues related to body image (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). These gender-specific patterns of engagement could result in different mental health outcomes, making it imperative to explore these variations in depth.

Objectives

This paper aims to understand gender-specific aspects of SM addiction and its impact on the mental health of adolescents. While analyzing usage patterns, psychological effects, coping strategies, and support systems, the study seeks to understand how SM addiction manifests differently in males and females, influencing their mental well-being. Through this exploration, the study intends to inform the development of targeted strategies and policies that can promote positive mental health in adolescents navigating the digital landscape.

Method

This study adopted a systematic literature review approach to examine

the psychological effects of social media use on adolescents, with a focus on gendered coping mechanisms and support systems. The review followed PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines that ensured a structured and transparent methodology. A comprehensive search was conducted across five academic databases—PubMed, SAGE, ScienceDirect, Cureus-Springer, and Google Scholar—using predefined keywords, including “Adolescent Mental Health,” “Social Media Addiction,” “Gendered Coping Mechanisms,” “Peer and Family Support,” and “Digital Well-being.” Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) were employed to refine search results and ensure the inclusion of peer-reviewed journal articles and reports published post-2000, a period marked by the rapid expansion of SM platforms. The initial search yielded relevant studies for the period 2000 onwards, which were then screened for eligibility based on relevance to adolescent psychological well-being. Studies were filtered using inclusion and exclusion criteria, focusing on those that explicitly examined the impact of SM on mental health dimensions such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and addiction. Following a two-stage screening process (title/abstract screening and full-text review), 34 studies were selected for thematic analysis. Thematic synthesis was employed to analyze and categorize findings, identifying recurring themes and patterns in how adolescents experience and cope with the psychological effects of SM use. Particular attention was given to gender-specific coping mechanisms and the influence of peer and family support systems in moderating negative psychological outcomes. This review not only synthesizes existing literature but also identifies key research gaps, providing recommendations for future

studies and intervention strategies aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of SM on adolescent mental health.

Understanding SM and Gender

SM has become an inescapable and integral part of contemporary life, particularly for adolescents, reshaping how they interact, communicate, and perceive themselves in a digital world. What began as a simple form of online communication has evolved into a global phenomenon, connecting billions of users across diverse platforms and offering unprecedented opportunities for self-expression, social interaction, and access to information (Best et al., 2014). For adolescents navigating the often tumultuous journey of identity formation, SM serves as both a playground and a stage for exploring their selves, connecting with others, and discovering new facets of their identity (Cataldo et al., 2020). Through SM, adolescents can engage with peers, share experiences, and participate in online communities centered around common interests and values (Best et al., 2014). While SM offers numerous benefits, it also presents significant challenges, particularly concerning AMH. Research has consistently highlighted the growing concerns surrounding the negative psychological effects of excessive SM use, including anxiety, depression, diminished self-esteem, and body image issues (Keles et al., 2020; Schønning et al., 2020). The constant exposure to idealized depictions of life—be it through meticulously curated posts or filtered photos—can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy, leading to unhealthy comparisons, particularly for adolescents who are shaping their self-concept and identity (Cataldo et al., 2020). As they seek validation and approval from their online peers, adolescents may feel disconnected from their true selves, heightening their vulnerability to mental health issues.

In addition to these psychological consequences, SM exposes adolescents to a range of risks, including cyberbullying, online harassment, and exposure to harmful or inappropriate content (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Popat & Tarrant, 2023). The relative anonymity and distance offered by online platforms create an environment where individuals may behave in ways they would not in face-to-face interactions, leading to heightened vulnerability and distress. For adolescents, these online behaviours can take a toll on their mental well-being, further complicating their ability to navigate the challenges of growing up in a hyper-connected digital world (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Despite these significant concerns, SM remains an inseparable part of adolescent life, with platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat dominating the digital landscape (Vogels & Gelles-Watnick, 2023). The prevalent use of SM-tools in adolescents underscores the need for a rigorous inquiry into its effects on their mental health, particularly through a gendered lens. Gender differences in SM use and its psychological impact are evident, as different genders engage with digital platforms in different ways, influenced by societal expectations and cultural norms, there is an urgent need for research that examines how gender shapes the nature of SM use and its corresponding mental health outcomes (Richards et al., 2015)

In India, where SM usage has surged in recent years, the mental health implications for adolescents are of particular concern. With over 448 million SM users as of 2021, India ranks second globally in terms of digital engagement, making its youth highly susceptible to both the positive and negative effects of SM (Gupta et al., 2022). Despite the increasing penetration of digital platforms, gender disparities in SM usage persist, with men often being

more active on SM than women. This disparity can contribute to women's under-representation in digital spaces, potentially exacerbating existing gender inequalities in the form of access to opportunities and resources. Understanding the intersection of SM use, gender, and AMH in the Indian context is crucial for crafting more effective and practical strategies that deal with the distinctive challenges faced by young people, especially adolescent girls. The influence of SM on the adolescent mental landscape is multifaceted and complex. While it offers significant opportunities for connectivity and self-expression, it also exposes adolescents to a variety of risks and challenges. SM's influence on mental health and well-being is not the same and uniform; it is shaped by how individuals engage with digital platforms and how gender differences mediate this engagement. The following sections of this paper delve into the major themes related to SM use and mental health, with a specific focus on gendered perspectives. Through a rich literature review, we aim to better understand these dynamics and provide recommendations for interventions that can be critical to lessen the adverse effects of SM on the mental health of adolescents.

The intersection of gender and SM tool's use has been the subject of growing academic interest. Gender-specific differences in SM engagement are not only impacted by individual preferences but also by overarching cultural and societal factors. For instance, studies have demonstrated that adolescent girls tend to be more focused on relational and emotional aspects of SM, using it as a means of social comparison and seeking validation (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). This tendency can increase the feelings of inadequacy and anxiety, as young girls often compare their lives and appearances to the curated,

idealized images of others online. The constant exposure to these unrealistic representations can significantly contribute to the development of body discontent and depression among adolescent females. On the other hand, adolescent boys may engage with SM in a more performance-driven way, focusing on self-presentation, gaming, and achievement-based activities (Khalaf et al., 2023). These behaviours can foster competitiveness and sometimes contribute to feelings of inadequacy when they fail to meet the standards set by their peers or the online community. Moreover, excessive use of gaming and other interactive forms of media can lead to issues like addiction, reduced face-to-face interactions, and neglect of other areas of life, further exacerbating mental health problems (Popat & Tarrant, 2023). Understanding these gendered experiences of SM use is essential for tackling the mental health concerns of adolescents in the technological age.

Analysis and Major Themes

The major themes discussed in this section emerged through a meticulous thematic analysis of the literature, guided by an objective to study the nuanced relationship between the usage of SM technologies and the mental health of adolescents. The thematic analysis, as a qualitative method, involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns within data. For this study, a structured, iterative approach was employed: first, a comprehensive review of relevant studies was conducted, followed by coding and categorization of key ideas. This process revealed significant patterns that coalesced into distinct themes reflecting social technological tools' impact on younger populations. Central to the findings is the paradoxical nature of SM—simultaneously a source of connection and a potential trigger for psychological distress. The themes

also illuminate how gender influences coping strategies, with adolescent boys and girls adopting distinct approaches to tackle the stressors connected with digital engagement. Moreover, the importance of social support systems, both virtual and offline, became evident as a critical factor in lessening adverse outcomes. These themes not only capture the intricacies of adolescents' engagement with SM technologies but also offer insights into potential interventions that can foster healthier digital habits. Each of these themes is discussed in detail in the following sections, offering a comprehensive knowledge of how adolescents manage the intricate digital terrain and its impact on their well-being.

1. Gendered Patterns of SM Use

The innovations of SM have basically changed the way individuals interact with the world, providing new avenues for interaction, communication, and self-expression. This digital shift is particularly pronounced among adolescents, a group that has become deeply integrated into the SM landscape. Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage characterized by significant physical, cognitive, and social changes during which individuals increasingly seek autonomy, explore their identities, and negotiate their social roles (Cataldo et al., 2020; Gross, 2004). As adolescents navigate these developmental milestones, SM serves as both a platform for experimentation and a tool for exploring their social environments. Gender has emerged as a key factor influencing adolescents' engagement with SM, shaping not only the frequency of use but also the patterns of interaction and the content consumed. While both males and females engage with SM in similar quantities, the nature and purpose of their use differ considerably.

Research shows that adolescent females, in particular, are more active on SM platforms than their male counterparts. They tend to check their accounts multiple times a day, often allocating substantial amounts of time to engage with content, interact with peers, and maintain social connections (Keles et al., 2020; Schonning et al., 2020). This pattern is partially explained by the role of SM in the lives of adolescent girls, where it serves as a primary space for social validation, emotional support, and relationship maintenance (Keleş et al., 2020; Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010). In contrast, adolescent boys typically use SM in a more passive, goal-oriented manner. Rather than engaging in ongoing social interactions, they mostly use SM tools for particular interests, such as accessing news, gaming content, or engaging in informational exchanges. This distinction highlights a key gender divide in SM usage: girls tend to prioritize social engagement, while boys are more focused on information consumption and entertainment. The gendered differences in SM use are further reflected in the content shared and the nature of interactions. Adolescent females are more likely to engage in self-disclosure, sharing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences on these platforms (Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010; Weiser, 2000). This openness is often linked to their desire for emotional connection and support from their peers. In contrast, adolescent males are more inclined to focus on content that aligns with their interests, such as sports, gaming, and competitive interactions. These gendered patterns suggest that the motivations behind SM use are shaped not only by personal preferences but also by broader cultural expectations and social norms (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). Moreover, the psychological impact of SM is experienced differently by adolescent boys and girls. Girls are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of SM,

including body image issues, anxiety, and cyberbullying, which often arise from exposure to idealized beauty standards and the pressure to conform to societal expectations of appearance (Kelly et al., 2018; Twenge & Martin, 2020). These concerns can exacerbate feelings of insufficiency and lead to challenges vis-a-vis mental health.

Boys, on the other hand, may experience issues related to excessive gaming, online violence, and exposure to unsafe content, which can also contribute to negative psychological outcomes. The types of SM platforms preferred by adolescents further underscore these gendered differences. Girls are drawn to visually oriented platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, which emphasize sharing images, videos, and personal moments to create a curated online identity. These platforms prioritize social validation through positive feedback, which includes likes, comments, and shares, reinforcing the importance of social feedback and interaction. Boys, however, tend to favour platforms like YouTube and gaming forums, where content creation and participation in gaming communities are more prevalent. This distinction highlights how gender influences the ways adolescents navigate digital spaces and engage with content that aligns with their interests and identities (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Spies Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). Privacy is another key area where gender differences emerge. Adolescent females are more likely to be concerned with protecting their online image and regulating their privacy settings, ensuring that their content is visible only to selected individuals (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). This careful curation of their digital presence reflects a desire to maintain control over their self-representation and manage how others perceive them online. In contrast, adolescent boys tend to be less concerned with

privacy settings, often sharing content more freely and without considering the long-term consequences of their online actions (Popat & Tarrant, 2023). This discrepancy suggests that boys may be less aware of or less concerned with the potential risks of online exposure, which can have implications for their digital safety and security. Both genders, however, experience peer pressure on SM, though the nature of this pressure varies. Girls are more susceptible to comparisons with online beauty standards, which can lead to body dissatisfaction and anxiety about their physical appearance (Barker, 2009; Twenge & Martin, 2020). On the other hand, adolescent boys may feel more influenced by peer pressure related to gaming preferences, technical interests, or competitive behaviour in online environments (Booker et al., 2018; Pujazon-Zazik & Park, 2010). These gendered experiences of peer pressure demonstrate how SM acts as a space where adolescents not only seek connection but also navigate societal expectations and group dynamics.

2. Gender Differential and SM Impact

The theme discusses the varying psychological consequences of SM tools use for adolescent of all genders, with a emphasis o mental health aspects like anxiety, despair, and self-esteem. It is divided into three sub-themes: Psychological Impact, which discusses how SM addiction contributes to negative mental health in the form of anxiety, depression, and identity struggles, with girls being more vulnerable; Social Comparison and Self-Esteem, which examines how adolescents' inclination to compare themselves to other users on SM platforms negatively affects their self-worth, with girls being more affected by appearance-related comparisons; and Cyberbullying and Harassment, which highlights the

gender differences in experiencing and responding to online bullying, with girls being more likely to be victims and suffering greater psychological distress. The theme collectively emphasizes the necessity for gender-sensitive strategies to address the unique impacts of SM on mental health of adolescents.

(a) Psychological Impact

The psychological consequences of SM addiction on adolescents are concerning, with excessive usage linked to anxiety, sadness, low self-confidence, identity issues, and poor sleep quality. Research suggests that girls may be more vulnerable to these negative impacts, particularly in terms of cyberbullying and mental health problems (Keleş et al., 2020). Popat and Tarrant (2023) systematic review reveals a connection between adolescent SM use and psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, self-esteem struggles, and body image concerns. Further studies confirm that SM addiction exacerbates feelings of isolation and depression in adolescents (Naslund et al., 2020). Research by Odgers and Jensen (2020) underscores the harmful impact of SM on self-esteem and identity, especially through constant comparisons to others and exposure to unattainable beauty standards. This finding aligns with the (Twenge et al., 2018) longitudinal study, which links SM use to heightened anxiety levels, particularly due to pressures to maintain a curated image. Also, the research highlights that disproportionate SM use is correlated with insomnia, negatively affecting mental health. Gender differences in SM's psychological impact are significant, with adolescent girls experiencing greater distress

compared to boys, especially concerning body image and mental health (Bergagna & Tartaglia, 2018). Parents' concerns about SM's harmful effects on their children's well-being are valid, as adolescents often encounter harmful content and engage in excessive use, amplifying their susceptibility to mental health issues (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Moreover, the surge in SM use among Indian young populations has significant mental health implications, particularly for young girls. Regular exposure to idealized online personas and impractical beauty values can lead to increased feelings of insufficiency, body displeasure, and despair. Gender-specific differences in SM engagement, with adolescent girls focusing more on relational and emotional aspects, contribute to heightened vulnerability to adverse psychological impacts such as unease, low self-confidence, and identity issues. Also, excessive SM use is linked to insomnia and exacerbated feelings of isolation, further compromising AMH. The gender disparities in the impact of SM on well-being underscore the need for tailored interventions and increased awareness among parents, teachers, and policy stakeholders to address this pressing complex issue of younger populations.

(b) Social Comparison and Self-Esteem

SM addiction exacerbates adolescents' tendency to engage in comparison behaviour, negatively affecting self-esteem. SM platforms provide adolescents with opportunities to compare themselves to peers, celebrities, and influencers, particularly in

terms of appearance, lifestyle, and achievements (Keles et al., 2020). Studies by (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016) show that passive SM use, such as viewing content without engaging, can increase feelings of inadequacy and envy, which in turn heightens depression risk. Research by Popat and Tarrant (2023) indicates that adolescent girls are more likely to experience detrimental effects of social comparison on their self-esteem. Long-term impacts include heightened feelings of inadequacy and a sense of social disconnection (Ardiana & Tumanggor, 2020; Schønning et al., 2020). The extensive use of digital platforms has made it easier for adolescents to engage in comparison behaviour, which often leads to feelings of inferiority and anxiety. These comparisons are not limited to appearance but extend to achievements, social status, and lifestyles, contributing to a complex web of psychological impacts (Vogel et al., 2015). Gender differences are notable, with adolescent girls being particularly vulnerable to appearance-related comparisons, leading to increased dissatisfaction with their physical appearance. In contrast, adolescent boys tend to be more affected by comparisons related to achievements and social status (Mingoa et al., 2017; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Understanding these gender-based differences is crucial for devising specific interventions to address the mental health implications of SM use. Addressing the negative psychological consequences of SM obsession among adolescents, particularly the disparate influence on girls, is essential for promoting their overall well-being and healthy development.

(c) Cyberbullying and Harassment

Cyberbullying is a major concern in the digital era, with both boys and girls experiencing its harmful effects. The anonymity and broad reach of online platforms amplify the psychological impact of cyberbullying, leading to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression (Schønning et al., 2020). Research shows that girls mostly fall into the trap and become victims of cyberbullying compared to boys, which suggests that gender differences play a paramount role in the experience and influence of online harassment. Female victims of cyberbullying tend to experience greater psychological distress than their male counterparts (Betts et al., 2020; Kowalski et al., 2014; Selkie et al., 2016). Gender norms also influence how adolescents respond to cyberbullying: girls generally defend victims, while boys mainly prefer silence. Also, females are more likely to engage in relational aggression in online spaces, whereas boys may exhibit more physical aggression (Snell & Englander, 2010). These gender differences underscore the need for gender-sensitive strategies in preventing and addressing cyberbullying. Moreover, engaging in cyberbullying has been linked to increased depressive symptoms and anxiety issues, underscoring its detrimental effect on adolescent well-being (Popat & Tarrant, 2023). While some research indicates that girls are disproportionately affected by cyberbullying, other studies find no significant gender differences in the experience of cyberbullying (Navarro & Jasinski, 2013). While understanding the nuances of gender-based differences, researchers and policymakers can develop more

effective strategies to mitigate the negative consequences and empower adolescents to tackle the digital world and its technologies in a productive, healthy, safe and resilient manner.

3. Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems

The ever-present and accessible SM technologies have raised significant concerns about its influence on mental health of adolescents, particularly regarding addiction and the resulting negative effects. This review explores the various coping mechanisms employed by adolescents to manage these challenges. While much research has focused on the harmful consequences of excessive SM usage, there is limited empirical evidence on how adolescents perceive these platforms and how they use coping strategies to manage their addiction to them (Khalaf et al., 2023). Research shows that adolescent boys and girls tend to employ different coping strategies to deal with the mental and psychological effects of SM addiction. Adolescent boys are often more likely to use problem-focused coping mechanisms, which involve actively seeking solutions and trying to change the circumstances that are causing stress or discomfort. For instance, they may look for answers to their concerns or take actions aimed at reducing the influence of SM tools on their self-concept and well-being. In contrast, adolescent girls typically use emotion-focused coping strategies, such as seeking emotional support from close friends or family members, or engaging in self-soothing activities like hobbies, exercise, or relaxation techniques (Mahon & Hevey, 2021; Khalaf et al., 2023). Further distinctions emerge when it comes to how each gender diversifies their coping methods. Boys might opt for distractions such as physical activities, sports, or hobbies

to alleviate the psychological stress of SM usage. In contrast, girls may turn to discussing their worries with others, seeking advice, or sharing their experiences in online or offline spaces as a means of emotional release (O'Reilly et al., 2019). The importance of gender-specific support networks also plays a critical role in adolescents' coping mechanisms. Research indicates that adolescent boys tend to seek assistance from their male peer groups, whereas girls are more likely to find support from female friends or family members. These gendered differences highlight the need for tailored support systems that can help adolescents manage SM addiction in a way that is sensitive to their unique needs and coping styles. For instance, therapeutic interventions and support programs can benefit from acknowledging these gendered approaches, ensuring that they provide the right type of emotional, social, or behavioural guidance to adolescents. Recognizing and addressing the different ways boys and girls cope with SM addiction is crucial for developing effective and practical interventions, strategies and support systems. By doing so, we can better equip adolescents to navigate the complexities of SM while protecting their mental health.

Discussion

This review, while critically examining the intricate relationship between mental health and SM usage, also focused on the coping mechanisms adolescents employ to manage the potentially addictive and adverse effects of SM technologies. The findings highlight several important gaps and complexities that require further exploration. The influence of SM on the psychosocial health of adolescents is multifaceted, and understanding how adolescents cope with its challenges requires a nuanced and context-sensitive approach. One of the most

striking observations from the literature is the clear gendered divergence in coping mechanisms. Adolescent boys tend to favour problem-focused coping strategies, such as engaging in physical activities or seeking to resolve the stressful situations that arise from SM interactions. In contrast, adolescent girls generally adopt psycho-social and emotion-focused coping mechanisms, seeking emotional support from their social circles or engaging in reflective, self-soothing activities. These findings suggest that coping mechanisms are not only shaped by individual preferences but are also deeply embedded in gender norms and expectations. Boys' tendency to engage in distraction through physical activities and girls' inclination toward emotional support underscores the necessity of considering gendered approaches when designing interventions for adolescents struggling with SM addiction. However, while gender differences were found to be significant, the intersectionality of several other factors and forces, such as age, socioeconomic status, and cultural context, also warrants further attention. It is crucial to specify that these coping patterns are not universal and may vary across different cultural and socio-economic contexts. The limitations of the existing studies in accounting for these variables should be addressed in future research. Moreover, the importance of support systems, particularly peer groups, is a recurring theme across the literature. Adolescent boys often rely on male friends, while girls seek comfort from female peers or family members. This gender-specific pattern in support-seeking behaviour highlights the role that social networks play in AMH. Peer relationships are crucial in offering both emotional validation and practical advice. However, these findings also point to a potentially under-explored area: the role of family support systems and the influence of adult figures such as parents, teachers,

and mental health professionals in shaping adolescents' coping strategies. Future studies must go beyond peer-based support to consider how parental involvement and guidance can help adolescents develop more adaptive coping mechanisms and improve their mental health outcomes. Despite the growing research and evidence, several methodological gaps remain. Most studies are cross-sectional, which limits our understanding of the long-term effects of SM usage on the mental health of adolescents. The short-term focus of existing research makes it difficult to discern whether the coping strategies adolescents develop in response to SM addiction are sustainable over time, or if they evolve as adolescents age. This lack of longitudinal research is a significant limitation and calls for the need for studies that track the same cohort of adolescents over an extended period, to better understand the lasting consequences of SM use on mental health. Moreover, much of the existing evidence fails to address the nuances of different SM platforms. While some studies examine the general impacts of SM, few provide insights into the specific features of platforms—such as Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook—and how these features might influence adolescents differently. The nature of SM, with its varying emphasis on image-sharing, videos, or live interactions, likely shapes adolescents' coping mechanisms in unique ways. It also emphasized that more platform-specific research be done to understand the differential impact of various types of SM on AMH and coping strategies. Cultural factors also play a critical role in shaping how adolescents engage, experience and cope with SM addiction. Much of the existing literature, particularly from Western contexts, fails to account for the diverse cultural dynamics that may influence coping mechanisms. In non-Western societies, where community structures, family roles, and societal

expectations differ, adolescents may adopt different coping strategies or rely more heavily on familial or community support. Cultural sensitivity in research is essential to understanding these differences and developing interventions that are not only effective but also culturally appropriate.

Critical Takeaways

Adolescent boys and girls employ distinct coping mechanisms, with boys tending to use problem-focused strategies like physical activity, while girls are more inclined toward emotion-focused coping, such as seeking emotional support. Interventions must, therefore, be gender-sensitive to effectively address SM addiction in adolescents. Further, peer groups play a central role in adolescents' coping processes, but the support from family members—particularly parents and educators—also needs greater emphasis. Future research should explore how adult involvement can enhance adolescents' ability to cope with SM-related stress. A significant gap in the literature is the dearth of longitudinal studies that study the long-term effects of SM use on the mental health of adolescents and how coping strategies evolve. Understanding these long-term effects is critical for designing sustained interventions. Future studies should focus on the specific nature of different SM platforms and how they affect adolescents in unique ways. The focus should shift

from general studies to platform-specific ones to understand the diverse impact of digital spaces on AMH. Similarly, the role of culture and context in shaping adolescents' experiences with SM addiction must be prioritized in future research. Studies should include diverse cultural perspectives to better understand how SM affects adolescents in various parts of the world. This review emphasizes the interwoven interplay between SM use and the psychosocial health of adolescents, underscoring the need for a multi-dimensional approach to studying coping mechanisms and support systems. While current research provides valuable insights into gendered coping strategies, peer support, and the need for more longitudinal studies, significant gaps remain in understanding the broader cultural, familial, and platform-specific factors that influence adolescent responses to SM. As digital platforms continue to evolve and get complicated while becoming an increasingly pervasive part of adolescents' lives, addressing these gaps will be crucial in developing more effective, tailored interventions to support mental health of younger populations in the complex digital age. Future research must adopt a more interdisciplinary, culturally aware, and long-term perspective to provide a clearer picture of how adolescents navigate and tackle the adverse aspects and challenges of SM technologies and its impact on their mental well-being of adolescents.

References

- Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018). Teens and their experiences on SM. *Pew Research Center: Internet & Science Technology*.
- Appel, H., Gerlach, A. L., & Crusius, J. (2016). The interplay between Facebook use, social comparison, envy, and depression. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 9, 44–49.
- Barker, V. (2009). Older adolescents' motivations for social network site use: The influence of gender, group identity, and collective self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 12(2), 209–213.

- Bergagna, E., & Tartaglia, S. (2018). Self-esteem, social comparison, and Facebook use. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 14(4), 831.
- Best, P., Manktelow, R., & Taylor, B. (2014). Online communication, SM and adolescent wellbeing: A systematic narrative review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 41, 27–36.
- Betts, L. R., Spenser, K. A., & Gardner, S. E. (2017). Adolescents' involvement in cyberbullying and perceptions of school: The importance of perceived peer acceptance for female adolescents. *Sex Roles*, 77, 471–481.
- Booker, C. L., Kelly, Y. J., & Sacker, A. (2018). Gender differences in the associations between age trends of SM interaction and well-being among 10–15 year olds in the UK. *BMC Public Health*, 18, 1–12.
- Cataldo, I., Lepri, B., Neoh, M. J. Y., & Esposito, G. (2020). SM usage and development of psychiatric disorders in childhood and adolescence: A review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 508595.
- George, M. J., & Odgers, C. L. (2015). Seven fears and the science of how mobile technologies may be influencing adolescents in the digital age. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(6), 832–851.
- Gross, E. F. (2004). Adolescent Internet use: What we expect, what teens report. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 25(6), 633–649.
- Gupta, C., Jogdand, S., & Kumar, M. (2022). Reviewing the impact of SM on the mental health of adolescents and young adults. *Cureus*, 14(10).
- Herring, S. C., & Kapidzic, S. (2015). Teens, gender, and self-presentation in SM. *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(3), 1–16.
- Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). A systematic review: The influence of SM on depression, anxiety, and psychological distress in adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 79–93.
- Kelly, Y., Zilanawala, A., Booker, C., & Sacker, A. (2018). SM use and AMH: Findings from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *EClinicalMedicine*, 6, 59–68.
- Khalaf, A. M., Alubied, A. A., Khalaf, A. M., & Rifaey, A. A. (2023). The impact of SM on the mental health of adolescents and young adults: A systematic review. *Cureus*, 15(8).
- Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, M. R. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073.
- Mahon, C., & Hevey, D. (2021). Processing body image on SM: Gender differences in adolescent boys' and girls' agency and active coping. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 626763.
- Mingoia, J., Hutchinson, A. D., Wilson, C., & Gleaves, D. H. (2017). The relationship between social networking site use and the internalization of a thin ideal in females: A meta-analytic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1351.
- Naslund, J. A., Bondre, A., Torous, J., & Aschbrenner, K. A. (2020). SM and mental health: Benefits, risks, and opportunities for research and practice. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, 5, 245–257.
- Navarro, J. N., & Jasinski, J. L. (2013). Why girls? Using routine activities theory to predict cyberbullying experiences between girls and boys. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 23(4), 286–303.
- Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2015). Using SM for social comparison and feedback-seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 43, 1427–1438.

- O'Reilly, M., Dogra, N., Hughes, J., Reilly, P., George, R., & Whiteman, N. (2019). Potential of SM in promoting mental health in adolescents. *Health Promotion International*, 34(5), 981–991.
- Odgers, C. L., & Jensen, M. R. (2020). Annual research review: AMH in the digital age: Facts, fears, and future directions. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 61(3), 336–348.
- O'Keeffe, G. S., & Clarke-Pearson, K. (2011). The impact of SM on children, adolescents, and families. *Pediatrics*, 127(4), 800–804.
- Popat, A., & Tarrant, C. (2023). Exploring adolescents' perspectives on SM and mental health and well-being—A qualitative literature review. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 28(1), 323–337.
- Pujazon-Zazik, M., & Park, M. J. (2010). To tweet, or not to tweet: Gender differences and potential positive and negative health outcomes of adolescents' social internet use. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 4(1), 77–85.
- Richards, D., Caldwell, P. H. Y., & Go, H. (2015). Impact of SM on the health of children and young people. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 51(12), 1152–1157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JPC.13023>
- Schønning, V., Hjetland, G. J., Aarø, L. E., & Skogen, J. C. (2020). SM use and mental health and well-being among adolescents—A scoping review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1949.
- Selkie, E. M., Fales, J. L., & Moreno, M. A. (2016). Cyberbullying prevalence among US middle and high school-aged adolescents: A systematic review and quality assessment. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 58(2), 125–133.
- Snell, P. A., & Englander, E. (2010). Cyberbullying victimization and behaviors among girls: Applying research findings in the field. *Journal of Social Sciences*.
- Spies Shapiro, L. A., & Margolin, G. (2014). Growing up wired: Social networking sites and adolescent psychosocial development. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 17, 1–18.
- Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among US adolescents after 2010 and links to increased new media screen time. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3–17.
- Twenge, J. M., & Martin, G. N. (2020). Gender differences in associations between digital media use and psychological well-being: Evidence from three large datasets. *Journal of Adolescence*, 79, 91–102.
- Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2009). Social consequences of the Internet for adolescents: A decade of research. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18(1), 1–5.
- Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Okdie, B. M., Eckles, K., & Franz, B. (2015). Who compares and despairs? The effect of social comparison orientation on SM use and its outcomes. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 86, 249–256.