Tumultuous Teens: Online Peer Support as a Zero Barrier Entry Point
Social Media & Teen Mental Health: Results From a National Survey

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Hopelab is a social innovation lab focused on designing science-based technologies to improve the health and well-being of teens and young adults.
We believe the toughest health challenges facing teens and young adults can be met with scientific rigor, innovation, and empathy.
Does Social Media Cause Depression?
How heavy Instagram and Facebook use may be affecting kids negatively

Social Media and Teen Depression: The Two Go Hand-In-Hand

Is Social Media Messing with Your Teen’s Mental Health?
The scary risks and possible benefits of living in a social media dependent world.

Is social media causing childhood depression?
By Jane Wakefield
Technology reporter
Digital Health Practices, Social Media Use, and Mental Well-Being Among Teens and Young Adults in the U.S. A National Survey Sponsored by Hopelab and Well Being Trust

How are teens using social media?

What are the **good** and the **bad** aspects?
- At the population-level?
- For depressed teens?
Deeper Dive into Methods of the National Survey

• Nationally representative sample of 1337 teens age 14-22 (49.3% female; 53.9% white)
• Extensive quantitative and qualitative data on social media usage
• Clinical measures of depression and anxiety
How Often are Teens on Social Media?

- 93% use social media
- 81% use social media \textit{at least} daily
- The majority (73\%) are comfortable with the amount of time they spend on social media
- 1 in 4 feel they spend too much time on social media
WHAT PLATFORMS DO THEY USE MOST OFTEN?

- Snapchat: 30%
- Instagram: 22%
- Facebook: 21%
- Twitter: 6%
- Reddit: 5%
- LinkedIn: 2%
- Other: 7%
- Don't Use Social Media: 7%
- Other: 7%
The good: Why teens value social media

- Communicating with close friends: 77%
- Keeping up with what's going on in social circle: 70%
- Expressing oneself creatively: 51%
- Getting inspiration from others: 57%
- Feeling less alone: 45%
- Making new friends: 46%
- Getting support or advice when needed: 43%

“Social media makes me laugh and keeps me distracted so that I have time to breathe and collect myself.” — 22 year-old respondent

“Lets me know that others are going through the same things that I am.”
— 17-year-old Latino male

“I can read encouragement and find inspiration to keep myself motivated when I am feeling anxious. I can reach out or comment on a photo or a post that I relate to or that I admire to make the other person feel good too.”
— 19 year-old female
The bad: Negative aspects of using social media

- Feel like other people are doing better than they are: 57%
- Feel like they have to show the best version of themselves: 53%
- Post something but get hardly any comments or likes: 56%
- See so much bad news in social media that it makes them stressed and anxious: 46%
- Feel left out when using social media: 34%
- Use social media as a way to avoid dealing with problems: 28%
- Get negative comments from others: 26%

“I feel like I am not good enough compared to other people. I often look at other people[‘s] pages and compare myself to them.” — 19 year-old White female

“Social media, most times, makes things worse simply because I have told myself time and time again that I wouldn't spend so much time mindlessly scrolling through other people's lives. On a very rare occasion is something made worse due to actual content on social media.”
— 22 year-old White female

“Being broke but seeing your friends go out to fun places or eat but [you] can’t join because [you have] no money or just seeing how successful they are while you struggle just to get by.” — 21 year-old Latino male
Social media and depression

Teen / Young Adult Depression is **not** associated with

Frequency of social media use

“Active” vs “Passive” social media use
Double Bind:
Depressed teens are more reliant on social media for creative expression & social support.
Double Bind:
But they feel less supported by others on social media

- Positive comments on social media:
  - Among teens with no depressive symptoms: 89%
  - Among teens with moderate to severe depressive symptoms: 73%

- Negative comments on social media:
  - Among teens with no depressive symptoms: 17%
  - Among teens with moderate to severe depressive symptoms: 38%

- No comments or likes on social media:
  - Among teens with no depressive symptoms: 43%
  - Among teens with moderate to severe depressive symptoms: 71%

Double Bind:
And report more distress

- Feel like others are doing better than they are
  - Among those with no depressive symptoms: 4%
  - Among those with moderate to severe depressive symptoms: 7%

- See so much bad news that it makes them feel stressed or anxious
  - Among those with no depressive symptoms: 1%
  - Among those with moderate to severe depressive symptoms: 4%

- Feel left out when using social media
  - Among those with no depressive symptoms: 1%
  - Among those with moderate to severe depressive symptoms: 18%

- Use social media to avoid dealing with problems
  - Among those with no depressive symptoms: 3%
  - Among those with moderate to severe depressive symptoms: 14%

““I have a lot of internet friends who always pick me up when I’m down, so the second I feel down, I turn to them and all is right again.””
— 20-year-old Latina female

“Usually friends post happy things—getting together with others, accomplishments, bragging—I don’t always want to see it when I’m feeling down about myself so I stay off social media.”
— 14-year-old White female

“When I’m depressed and anxious, creating another perfect alternative life for others to see feels validating to me. It reinforces the idea that maybe I’m not as badly off as I perceive myself to be. If others can believe it, I can almost convince myself.”
— 22 year-old White female
Social media represents a unique opportunity to meet depressed teens where they’re already seeking support.

- **Tried to find people w/ similar health concerns through social media**
  - Moderate to Severe Depressive Symptoms: 31%
  - No Depressive Symptoms: 11%

- **Accessed others’ health stories online**
  - Moderate to Severe Depressive Symptoms: 75%
  - No Depressive Symptoms: 54%

- **Shared their own health stories online**
  - Moderate to Severe Depressive Symptoms: 29%
  - No Depressive Symptoms: 5%

“I’m able to talk to people who have experienced what I have and are able to share what they did to fix their issue.”
— 21 year-old Black female

“I don’t know how to describe it, but whenever I feel down, there are always people there to help me, whether my friends or strangers I’ve only met through the internet.”
— 15-year-old White male

“Sometimes, I can temporarily distract myself when I’m feeling down, or I can look up tips for self-help (ex. links to guided meditation, yoga, etc.)”
— 22-year-old female
Summary & Implications

- Social media - it’s not going away and it’s not all bad
- It’s a mixed bag: especially for depressed teens
- Teens interactions and reactions to social media are more strongly related to depression – not their frequency of use
- Depressed teens are turning to social media for support: how can we as practitioners, parents, designers, and youth advocates increase the likelihood that they’ll find meaningful support there?
Other Topics Examined: Digital Health Practices

- Online health information searches
- Use of mobile health apps
- Connecting to health providers online
- Peer-to-peer health support online
- Demographic differences in digital health use
- Digital health use and depression
- Other mental health and wellness variables
Full Report Available:
www.hopelab.org
Supportiv
THE SUPPORT NETWORK

Helena Plater-Zyberk, Co-Founder
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Why don’t people go to therapy?

“\textit{I’d rather talk to my friends.}”
Community is broken.
Mental Wellness Options

- Therapy
- Meditation
- Peer Support
*General Hospital Psychiatry*

Seven RCTs of peer support versus usual care for depression, 869 participants. **Peer support interventions were superior to usual care in reducing depressive symptoms.**

Seven RCTs with 301 total participants compared peer support to group cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). **There was not a statistically significant difference between group CBT and peer interventions.**

*Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation*

Meta-analysis of ten studies demonstrated benefits in:
- Reduced substance use
- Treatment engagement
- Higher self-efficacy
Sadness
Family
Expectations
STRESS
Loneliness
Political
Worry
Sibling Rivalry
RELATIONSHIP
CONFLICT
Anger
Bullying
Bruised Ego
overwhelmed
Jealousy
Burnout
Underperformance
Disconnected
Academic
Time Obligations
Pressure
DEPRESSION
Guilt
Toxic
"Friends"
Worried About Friends
Grief
Financial Worry
ANXIOUS
Unfulfilled Aspirations
Malaise
Impact of Peer Recommendations

75% identify peers as the source of “truth” at the moment of making a purchase. 

Edelman Earned Brand Study

83% say they trust word of mouth and peer recommendations above all other forms of advertising.

Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey
Supportiv asks 1 question

What’s your struggle?

- Relationship Conflicts
- School Stress
- Family Drama
- Anxiety

1 million+ Conversation Data Points
Matching via Natural Language Processing

I got shoved today at my locker

Freaking out about major test

I’m scared to walk home because some kids started following me

If I don’t get an A on this presentation, I won’t get into college

1 Group: “Teens”

Group A: “Academic Pressure”

Group B: “Bullying”
We Call It “Precision Peer Support”

- 24/7 instant access, app or web *chat*
- Anonymous!
- (Super) human moderator keeps it safe and troll-free
  - Trolls get timed-out or kicked out
  - One-tap emergency triage
- *Magical* recommendations
  - Relevant hyperlink referrals to articles, videos, podcasts + health service ecosystem appear in-line
Live, Human Moderators for Safety

1 MODERATOR per Group of up to 10 Users

- College/Masters/PhD Students w/ proprietary training
- Mobile push alert system; login activates new peer group
- Super-human, AI-driven admin, recommendations, escalations
96% feel they have been helped by the app

68% feel happier after helping others
Testimonials

“This app is so inspiring! I got on the app feeling super sad and depressed. At first, it felt nice to speak anonymously about how I felt, and have people respond to me. However, what really helped me was being able to respond to other people, and make them feel better as well!!!”

“The people that are chatting with me about my thoughts feel like my guardian angels. It feels so good to not just keep it in my head.”