The Impact of Social Media on Children & Teenagers

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- *Ex Board Director of GP Federation - Rochdale Health Alliance in HMR Borough .*
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Responsible to manage healthcare needs of a population of circa 55000 through strategic planning along side working with NHSE and other local providers services. Over last 20 years, I successfully headed and delivered various Clinical NHS projects to Greater Manchester Population.

Background

- Internet fundamental element for connecting people worldwide.
- January 2023, there were 5.16 billion internet users worldwide = 64.4 % of the global population.
- Out of above 4.76 billion = 59.4 % were social media users.

- An essential and integral part of our lives, especially for teenagers.
- It enables them to connect with people and keep them updated with the latest trends.
- But associated with some negative impacts on teenagers' mental health and well-being.

Major Issues of Social Media

- **Mental health issues:** A study by the Royal Society for Public Health in the UK found that social media platforms like Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter have been linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and poor sleep in teenagers. (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017)

- **Cyberbullying**: Social media provides an anonymous platform for bullies to harass, intimidate, and humiliate their victims. According to a study by Cyberbullying Research Center, 34% of teenagers have experienced cyberbullying, and 81% of teenagers who have witnessed cyberbullying have ignored it. (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018)

- **Addiction:** A study by Common Sense Media found that 50% of teenagers felt addicted to their mobile devices, and 27% of them felt addicted to social media specifically. (Common Sense Media, 2016)

- **Poor academic performance:** Reason for huge distraction leading to poor academic performance. A study by the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health found that teenagers who spent more time on social media had lower grades in school than those who spent less time on social media. (Ryan, Chester, Reece, & Xenos, 2014)

References:

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Royal Society for Public Health. (2017). #StatusOfMind: Social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Retrieved from https://www.rsph.org.uk/static/upload/pdf/Status_of_Mind_RCPsych_summary_report.pdf

Ryan, T., Chester, A., Reece, J., & Xenos, S. (2014). The uses and abuses of Facebook: A review of Facebook addiction. Journal of Behavioural Addictions, 3(3), 133-148.

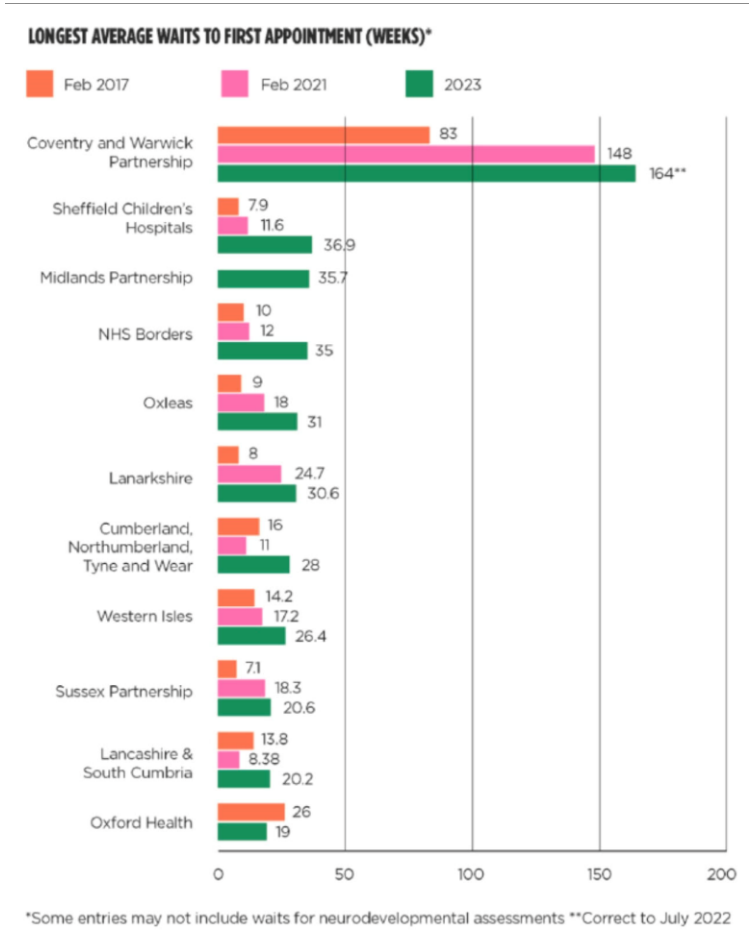
Statistics

- 1:5 teenagers suffers from some sort of mental health condition, with depression and anxiety being among the most common disorders (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2022).

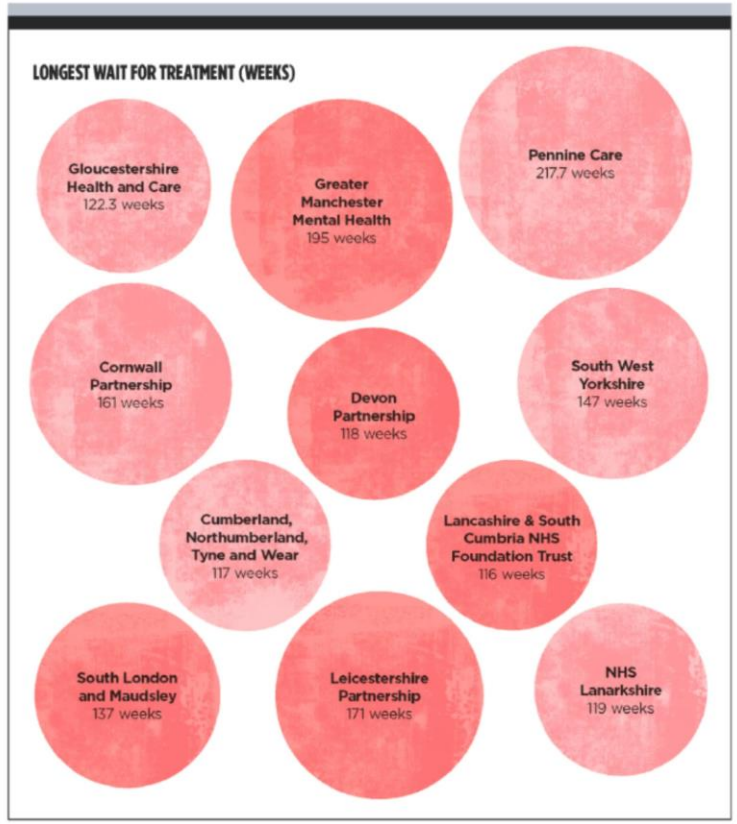
- Research published in the journal Paediatrics found that "there has been a substantial increase in depressive symptoms in adolescents in recent years, with rates nearly doubling in the last decade" (Twenge et al., 2023).

- The House magazine sent FOI requests to 70 UK trusts and boards providing children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) - Average trust waits for a first appointment varying between 10 days and three years.

- Data from the Office for National Statistics, analysed by YoungMinds, has found that suicide rates among under-18s rose by a third from 2020 to 2021. Just a third of those young people were in touch with mental health services.



Source: House FOI research



Source: House FOI Research

Challenges

- Lack of national guidelines and policies that primarily focus on preventing and addressing mental health in children and youth including social media management.
- Unavailability of real data as most of the cases remain unreported.
- Training and education for healthcare professionals (SPLW), parents, and teachers to better detect, assess and manage.
- Lack of evidence- base programs and interventions in schools and colleges to address the mental health needs of children and teenagers.
- Lack of appropriate funding in specific populations of children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, and children and youth who identify as LGBTQ+.
- Work force challenges

Steps Needed

- Develop national guidelines and policies that focus on preventing and addressing mental health in children and youth.
- Conduct research on the incidence and prevalence of mental health disorders.
- Provide training and education for healthcare professionals, parents, and teachers to better detect, assess and manage mental health problems.
- Implement programs and interventions in schools that are evidence-based and tailored to their needs
- Establish effective referral pathways for children and youth who require specialist mental health services.
- Promote mental health literacy and awareness among children, youth, and families to help reduce stigma around mental health support.
- Develop partnerships with charities, community organizations, and other stakeholders to support the delivery of evidence-based interventions
- Monitor and evaluate mental health programs and initiatives for children and youth to ensure they are effective, efficient, and meet the needs of the target population
- Increase investment in mental health services for children and youth, and for greater parity between physical and mental health services
- Training and recruitment of more staffing

Policymakers

- According to a report by the National Association of School Psychologists, "School-based mental health services have demonstrated effectiveness at reducing mental health problems and symptoms for students who receive services" (2022). However, these services need adequate funding to deliver their services effectively.

- Stigma often deters teenagers from seeking help and can also impact their confidence and wellbeing. According to research published in the Journal of Adolescent Health, "stigma is a significant barrier for adolescents who need help, and it plays an important role in their decision to seek mental health treatment or not" (Santos et. al, 2022).

Questions