



Social media use & adolescent wellbeing

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The Digital Generation

The use of electronic media has rapidly increased over the past decade among adolescents.

Social media has become the main platform for establishing their identity, building social capital, exchanging information and support.

Concerns regarding its consequences for adolescent health and wellbeing.



HBSC 2022 Survey

Social Media Use Items

1. SMU Intensity

Indicates how much time adolescents spend on SM.

Asked how often they were in contact with four categories of people via SM (five frequency options). Intense contact was defined as contact 'almost all the time throughout the day' with at least one group.

2. Problematic SMU

Addiction-like symptoms that reflect one's inability to control SMU to the extent it causes impairments in daily life.

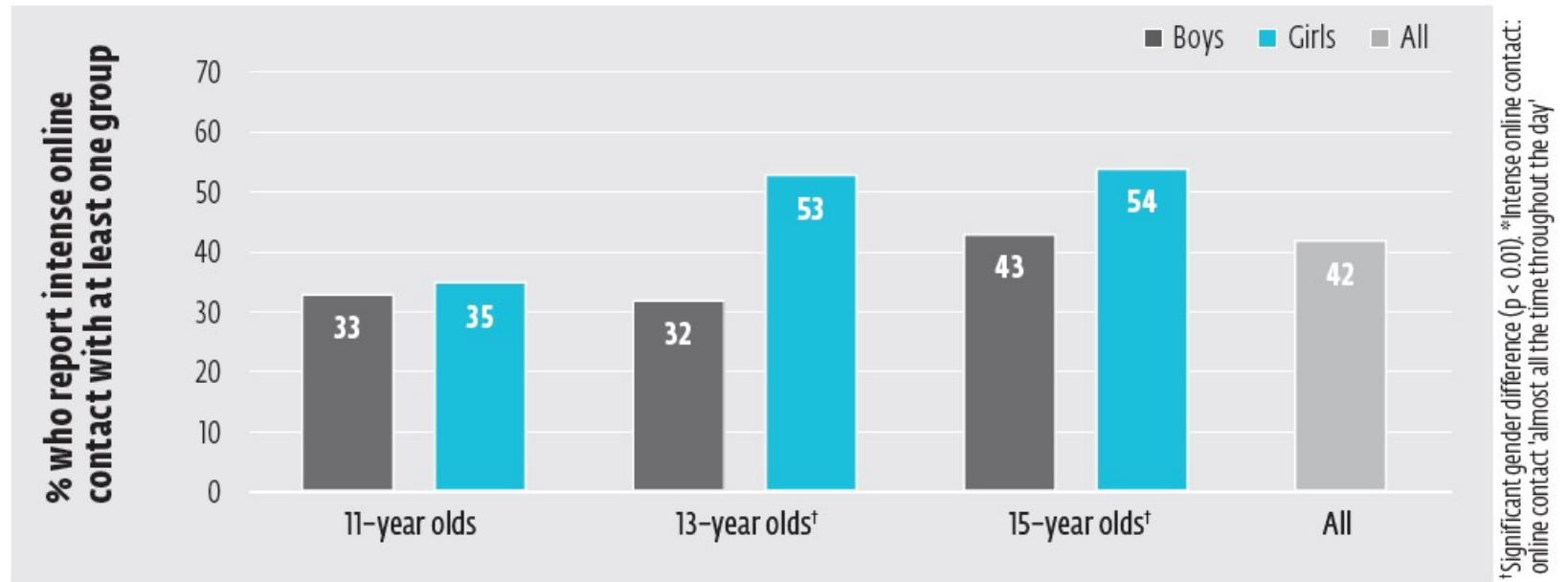
Respond 'yes' to 6 or more of the 9 items (preoccupation, tolerance, withdrawal, persistence, displacement, problem, deception, escape, conflict)

The Social Media Disorder scale -Van den Eijnden et al., 2016



Intense social media use

ELECTRONIC MEDIA USE – INTENSE ONLINE CONTACT* WITH AT LEAST ONE GROUP Source: HBSC Scotland 2022 Survey



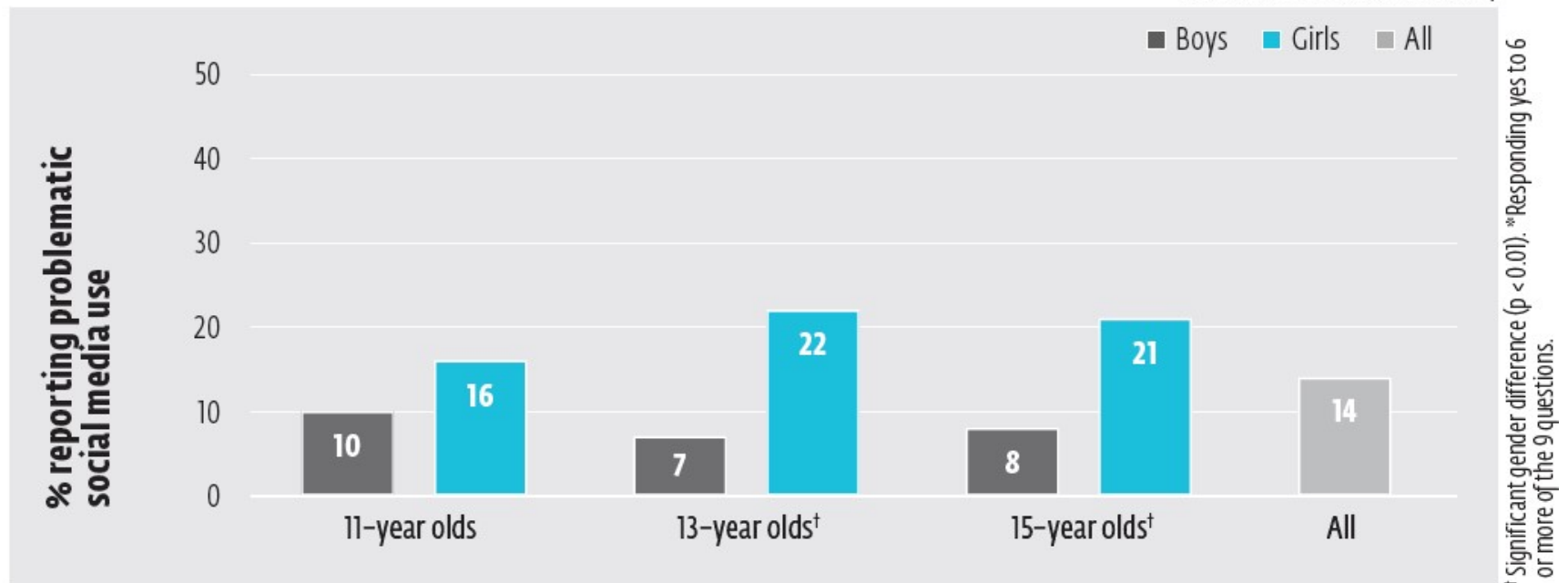
- 47% of girls, 36% of boys
- No change since 2018



Problematic social media

PROBLEMATIC SOCIAL MEDIA USE*

Source: HBSC Scotland 2022 Survey



- 20% of girls, 8% of boys
- Increase in problematic social media use among girls, 11% of 13-year-old girls in 2018, 22% in 2022



HBSC International studies using data from 2018 survey

Important to differentiate between different levels of SMU in order to understand the effect of SMU on adolescent wellbeing

Use classification that takes into account **intensity** of SMU and **problematic** SMU

- Boniel-Nissim, M. et al. (2022) International perspectives on social media use among adolescents: implications for mental and social well-being and substance use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 129, 107144. [190,089 young people from 42 countries](#)
- Boniel-Nissim, M. et al. (2023) Adolescent use of social media and associations with sleep patterns across 18 European and North American countries. *Sleep Health*, 9, 314-321. [86,542 young people from 18 countries](#)

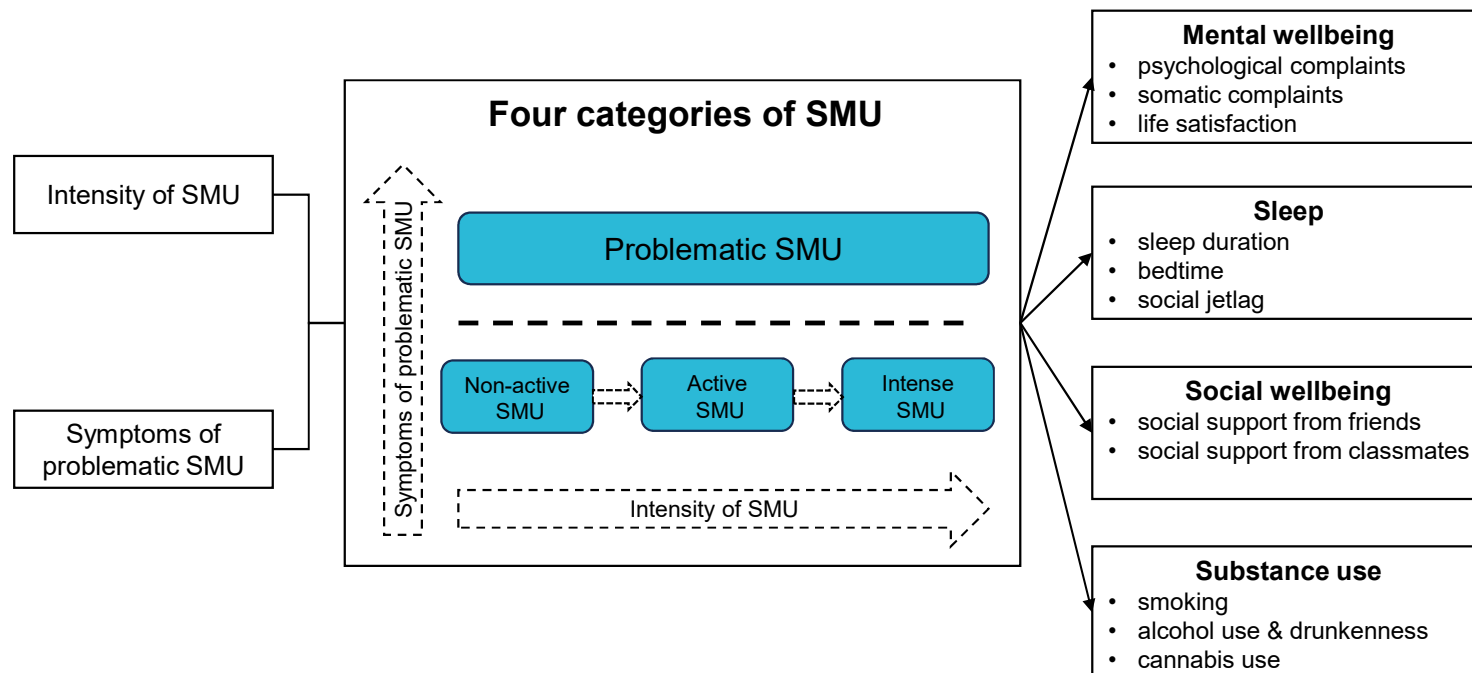


Four categories of SMU

1. **non-active user** (online contact with others not at all or at most weekly AND non-problematic user) **15%** (9%)
2. **active user** (online contact with others daily but not all the time AND non-problematic user) **46%** (45%)
3. **intense user** (online contact almost all the time throughout the day with at least one of the groups AND non-problematic user) **31%** (32%)
4. **problematic user** (six or more symptoms regardless in intensity of SMU) **7%** (14%)



Associations investigated





Results

- **Non active users** reported low mental and social wellbeing and the lowest substance use levels
- **Intense non-problematic users** showed the highest levels of social wellbeing
- **Problematic users** showed the least favourable mental and social wellbeing profile and the highest level of substance abuse
- Both **intense** and **problematic SMU** were associated with shorter sleep duration, later bedtimes and greater social jetlag

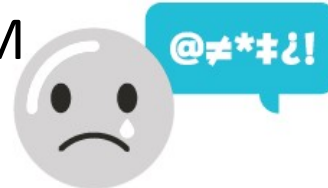
Comparison group - active users





Conclusion & Implications

- Highlights the importance of assessing intense and problematic components of SMU
- Supports the digital **Goldilocks hypothesis** (*Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017*) of moderation (“just right”). “Too little” technology deprives young people of important social information and peer pursuits, “too much” may displace other meaningful activities
- For the majority of adolescents there appears to be benefits to their mental and social wellbeing of active engagement with SM
- Potential risks to very low levels of SMU and problematic users





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Participants:

Local authorities, schools & young people

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