Is social media use associated with children's well-being? Results from the UK Household Longitudinal Study

# Details

## Year

2020

## DOI

10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.02.002

## Issued

2020

## Language

English

## Volume

80

## Start Page

## End Page

## Authors

Twigg L.;Duncan C.;Weich S.

## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Journal of Adolescence

## Publisher

Elsevier BV

## Topics

## Sample

7596 children aged 10–15 from 7 waves of the UK Household Longitudinal Study

# Abstract

Introduction: There are concerns about young people's increasing use of social media and the
effects this has on overall life satisfaction. Establishing the significance of social media use requires
researchers to take simultaneous account of other factors that might be influential and it is
essential to adopt a longitudinal perspective to investigate temporal patterns.
Method: Measures of happiness for children aged 10–15 from 7 waves of the UK Household
Longitudinal Study were examined (n = 7596). Multilevel models were used to assess the relative
association between these measures, children's social media use and individual, household
and community characteristics.
Results: High use of social media was found to be significantly associated with change in happiness
scores but was not associated with worsening life satisfaction trajectories. The most
consistent factor was gender, with girls experiencing the largest decline in happiness between
two time points (0.18 points) and being more likely to have a worsening trajectory over time (OR
1.77, 95% CI 1.36–2.32). Parental mental health, household support and household income were
also important.
Conclusion: Moderate use of social media does not play an important role in shaping children's
life satisfaction. Higher levels of use is associated with lower levels of happiness, especially for
girls but more research is needed to understand how this technology is being used. As well as
focusing on high levels of social media use, policy makers should also concentrate on particular
demographic groupings and factors affecting the social fabric of the households in which children
grow up.

# Outcome

"The evidence for the influence of social media use is mixed. Moderate to low use of the technology (ie less than 4 h per day) does
not appear to have any significant association with life satisfaction changes. However heavier use is associated with deteriorating life
satisfaction scores over two time points and this negative effect is of a similar magnitude to the positive effect that a supportive family has on life satisfactions scores. Interestingly the interaction results between gender and social media use in the change in life satisfaction model suggest that the detrimental associations between high social media use and life satisfaction are more important
for girls than boys." (Twigg et al., 2020: 81).