Social Media and Fear of Missing Out in Adolescents: The Role of Family Characteristics

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## Sample

831 students who were (mostly) aged 13 to 18years from secondary schools in Flanders, the northern, Dutchspeaking region of Belgium, and Brussels, the capital region of Belgium. They collected a disproportionate quota sample, in which strata were composed based on educational type, province, and municipality.

# Abstract

Adolescents are particularly susceptible to development of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) by using social media. Closely connected to social media addiction, this phenomenon is not exclusively dependent on individual characteristics but is also affected by the family environment. Family structure, parental relationship quality, and parenting style are factors influencing adolescents’ media use, and therefore likely contribute to the development of FoMO. Despite an increasing focus on the relationship between family characteristics and children’s online behavior, not much research has been conducted that relates the family to FoMO. Therefore, this study serves as an exploration. Using online survey data from Flemish and Brussels adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (N=831), we developed a structural equation model. As expected, social media use is positively associated with FoMO. Moreover, family structure and parenting style play an important role in the development of FoMO: being part of a non-intact family, fathers’ parenting style, and perceived high-quality relationships with parents are protective factors for FoMO, while perceived high-quality relationships between parents is a risk factor for FoMO. These results demonstrate that an adolescent’s family context is associated with their experiences of FoMO, and also indicate that more insight in this issue is required.

# Outcome

"FoMO occurs when three needs are not met: the competence to participate in the world, personal independence, and feelings of social connectedness. Adolescents from intact families (married or unmarried but cohabitant) experienced more FoMO than adolescents from non-intact families (legally or de facto divorced), which is not in line with much of the existing literature. In addition, adolescents from non-intact families use SNS more frequently than adolescents from intact families. Adolescents from non-intact families often face additional household tasks and caretaking responsibilities for younger siblings and are “thus likely to become more independent at an earlier age”. Potentially, these adolescents connect with this (non-familial) support through social media, which may explain why the higher social media use of adolescents from non-intact families does not stimulate higher FoMO when compared to adolescents from intact families.
Relationship quality with and between parents is directly and indirectly associated with FoMO. The relationship with the father with FoMO is stronger than the association with the relationship with the mother. Additionally, higher perceived relationship quality between parents is positively associated with FoMO too. This is also inconsistent with the findings that poor family functioning and conflict between parents are important predictors for the development of internet addiction in adolescents. Both associations can be explained by the fact that the role of relationships with the father is more imortant in the development of anxiety considering that high quality, positive relationships with fathers are less 'taken for granted' than with mothers." (Bloemen De Coninck, 2020, pp. 7-9)