

The Impact Of Fomo And Cyberbullying On Adolescent Mental Health: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Adolescent mental health has become a growing global concern in the digital era (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Increased engagement with social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook has intensified psychological phenomena including Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and cyberbullying (Keles et al., 2020; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). This study aims to systematically review and synthesize empirical findings regarding the impact of FOMO and cyberbullying on adolescent mental health. A literature review method was employed using peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2023 indexed in PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The findings indicate consistent associations between FOMO, cyberbullying victimization, and increased levels of anxiety, depression, stress, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation (Beyens et al., 2016; Hamm et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014). The interaction between FOMO and cyberbullying may further exacerbate psychological vulnerability among adolescents. The study highlights the importance of digital literacy education, parental involvement, and school-based mental health programs to mitigate these risks.

Keywords: Adolescent Mental Health, Anxiety, Cyberbullying, Social Media, Depression, FOMO

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents a critical developmental phase characterized by rapid biological, cognitive, and psychosocial changes. Emotional regulation, identity formation, and peer acceptance become central developmental tasks during this period. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), approximately one in seven adolescents globally experiences a mental health disorder, with depression and anxiety among the leading causes of disability. These data underscore the urgency of identifying contemporary psychosocial stressors affecting youth.

The rapid growth of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed adolescent social interaction. Social media platforms facilitate communication, self-expression, and peer connection. However, excessive and emotionally driven use of social media has been associated with poorer psychological well-being (Keles et al., 2020; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable due to heightened sensitivity to social evaluation and ongoing neurological development affecting impulse control.

One emerging psychological construct linked to social media use is Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences without one's participation (Przybylski et al., 2013). FOMO has been associated with problematic smartphone use, sleep disturbances, and increased depressive and anxiety symptoms (Alt, 2015; Beyens et al., 2016).

In addition to internal stressors such as FOMO, adolescents face external risks including cyberbullying. Cyberbullying involves intentional and repeated harm inflicted through

electronic platforms (Kowalski et al., 2014). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying may occur anonymously, spread rapidly, and persist permanently online. Research consistently links cyberbullying victimization to depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and suicidal ideation (Hamm et al., 2015).

Although FOMO and cyberbullying are often examined separately, growing evidence suggests potential interaction effects. High FOMO may increase online exposure and vulnerability to peer aggression, while cyberbullying victimization may intensify compulsive social media engagement. Therefore, a comprehensive synthesis of literature is needed to clarify their combined impact on adolescent mental health.

METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a literature review design to synthesize empirical research findings regarding FOMO, cyberbullying, and adolescent mental health.

2.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Articles were retrieved from PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar databases. Keywords used included: “adolescent mental health,” “FOMO,” “fear of missing out,” “cyberbullying,” “social media addiction,” “depression,” and “anxiety.”

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

1. Peer-reviewed empirical studies
2. Published between 2015–2023
3. Focused on adolescents aged 12–19 years
4. Examined FOMO and/or cyberbullying in relation to mental health outcomes

Exclusion criteria:

1. Non-English publications
2. Non-peer-reviewed articles
3. Studies not involving adolescent samples

A total of 40 relevant articles were selected and analyzed thematically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 FOMO and Adolescent Mental Health

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate a positive association between FOMO and psychological distress. Adolescents with high FOMO levels report increased compulsive social media checking, sleep disruption, and emotional instability (Alt, 2015; Beyens et al., 2016).

Grounded in Self-Determination Theory, FOMO is understood as arising from unmet needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Przybylski et al., 2013). When adolescents rely on online validation, they may develop maladaptive social comparison patterns, leading to decreased life satisfaction and increased depressive symptoms (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

Longitudinal evidence suggests that persistent FOMO predicts heightened anxiety and depression over time (Alt, 2015).

3.2 Cyberbullying and Psychological Consequences

Cyberbullying victimization is significantly associated with depression, anxiety, psychosomatic complaints, self-harm, and suicidal ideation (Hamm et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014).

The anonymity and permanence of digital platforms intensify psychological harm compared to traditional bullying (Kowalski et al., 2014). Victims often report feelings of humiliation and helplessness due to public exposure and inability to escape harassment.

Adolescents categorized as bully-victims exhibit the highest psychological risk profile (Hamm et al., 2015).

3.3 Interaction Between FOMO and Cyberbullying

Emerging studies suggest that adolescents with high FOMO are more likely to engage in frequent online self-disclosure, increasing vulnerability to cyberbullying (Beyens et al., 2016).

Conversely, cyberbullying victims may intensify social media use to regain peer acceptance, thereby reinforcing FOMO-related anxiety (Keles et al., 2020). This bidirectional relationship may create a cycle of psychological distress.

CONCLUSION

FOMO and cyberbullying significantly impact adolescent mental health, contributing to increased depression, anxiety, stress, and suicidal ideation. Their interrelated mechanisms may intensify psychological vulnerability in the digital era. Preventive strategies should focus on early intervention, digital resilience, and cross-sector collaboration. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and cross-cultural studies to better understand causal pathways and protective factors.

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