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Social Media Use of Adolescents as a Component of the Comprehensive Mental Health Assessment

Chandradasa M^{1,2*} and Rathnayake LC³

¹Department of Psychiatry, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

²School of Rural Health, Monash University, Australia

³Consultation Liaison Psychiatry, Latrobe Regional Hospital, Australia

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Letter to the Editor

The mental health assessment of an adolescent involves exploring the interactions with their family, teachers, peers and important others. The modern-day adolescent socially communicates through the social media frequently. Therefore, the mental health assessment needs to be modified to include information about their social media use. The western world has established specialized mental health services targeting unique patient populations. However, many settings in the developing world lack well-distributed subspecialist services including child and adolescent mental health expertise [1]. Due to the unavailability of subspecialists, mental health assessments of adolescents would be done by general specialists and primary-care physicians. This article provides simple instructions on how to assess the online media use of adolescents that could have a major impact on their mental health [2].

In relevance to South-Asia, in India alone, there are 270 million facebook users, more than any other country in the world [3]. Furthermore, the social media use is rising rapidly in South Asia,

Table 1: Screening questions for adolescents to identify social media related psychological issues in clinical settings.

For the adolescent	
•	Are there any concerns for you related to your online presence or social media use?
•	Do you think your social media use has become a problem for you or others?
•	Have you expressed any distressful feelings online recently?
•	Have you been exposed to online bullying?
•	In your opinion, what is the impact of social media on your feelings and behaviour?
•	What is the duration per day that you spend on social media?
•	Who are the people you interact online and what is their relationship mean to you?
•	Have you felt unsafe online?
•	Have you shared anything private and personal online?
•	Have you done things online that you or your family would regret?
For the parents	
•	Do you use social media?
•	Have you been worried about your son/daughter's social media use?
•	Are you aware of their online connections?
•	What are the devices available for them to go online?
•	What control do you have over their online presence?
•	What rules do you have at home on social media and internet use?
•	Are you capable of monitoring their behaviour online?
•	Do you use any protective software on their internet access?
•	Are they allowed to go online at school or other places away from home?
•	Are you connected through the social media with your son/daughter?

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*Correspondence:

Miyuru Chandradasa, University Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

E-mail: Miyuruc@Kln.Ac.Lk

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especially among the youth. With every year the number of devices and the time spent on social media networks increase. The usage may not solely depend on the socio-economic status of the family as in the United States adolescents from deprived racial and economic backgrounds were found to be spending more time on social media compared to their counterparts [4].

Emerging research is showing substantial mental health issues related to digital media use including social networks. These include worsening executive functioning such as attention and learning, a higher presence of depressive symptoms, aggressive behaviour and reduced sleep quality. In addition, physical health issues such as obesity and related complications are associated with excessive digital media use [5]. In other Asian countries such as china, research has shown that negative affectivity and vulnerable personality are associated with expressing suicidal ideation on social media platforms [6]. In Thailand which is a South East Asian country, research has shown that almost 42% of high school students surveyed in a high socio-economic region were found to have a facebook addiction. This addictive behaviour was associated with anxiety, insomnia, somatic symptoms and depressive symptoms [7].

The evidence shows that the social media use could cause mental health issues and also, psychological distress could be expressed on these platforms as well. Therefore, it appears important that the clinician assessing an adolescent gather information about their social media use. Potential key questions, ten each for the young person and the parents that could be used during the clinical assessment are shown in Table 1.

The impact of social media on the lives of adolescents is going to grow every decade. Therefore, health professionals need to find ways

of acquiring more relevant information for the management of the psychological health of the modern-day adolescent.

Author Contribution

MC and LC contributed to the concept, design, literature review and writing of the manuscript.

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