

Cyberpsychology: Adolescent Public Health in the United States

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In the last decade, notably, the use of electronic display devices by adolescents within the United States has increased. Cyberpsychology is the sub discipline of psychology that investigates and interprets the interplay of human behavior and computer-technologies, namely Internet connected devices. Tracking screen-time has grown gradually as data fixture in studies involving youth and is commonly related to online behavior. Some longitudinal studies conducted nationwide, across the United States, indeed, support the finding that longer hours on computers contributed to larger social networks for adolescents, which contributed overall to better outcomes in mental health. Despite this, there are many health risks associated with this (Paulic et. al. p. 17).

“Clinicians should assess screen time usage and binge eating in children and adolescents and advise parents about the potential risks associated with excessive screen time.” (Nagata p. 1)

The longitudinal studies that are being conducted are interested in discovering the long-term effects associated with prolonged use of technology by young people ages ranging from about nine to nineteen years old. While other research is interested in the habits of college students, for example, examining the behaviors of adolescents independently has the benefit of connecting this cyberpsychology issue with Adolescent Behavioral Cognitive Development (ABCD) (Paulic et. al. pp 6-17). Because programmable devices, such as smart phones, smart TVs (televisions equipped with streaming services), smart watches (application driven and Internet connected timepieces), and personal computers all operate under Moore’s Law¹, technology in general will continue to be accessible and prevalent in society.

¹ It is specifically stated that the number of transistors on an affordable CPU would double about every 18 month's but more transistors is more accurate according to the prediction of Moore (University of Missouri–St. Louis)

This prospectus, includes sources from academic databases using keywords such as: adolescent, cyberpsychology, United States, screen-time, adiposity (which happens to be a significant health issue for developing youth), ABCD, cyberbullying, online social networking size. It would be too abstract to consider keywords such as “health,” since it is likely to produce results unrelated cyberpsychology. It is also worth mentioning this prospectus has used very recent sources. This occurred in part because cyberpsychology is still emerging and also because it is important to capture the most current methods for testing and assessing behavior to best address the concerns or develop mitigation strategies. Therefore, an academic search complete was performed on EBSCO library for journals produced in the last decade, from 2011-2021. The studies mentioned herein were conducted in that period of time.

Speculating on the interventions briefly would make the following assumptions. The first being that problem related to increased screen-time in adolescents has risks associated to brain development. The second assumption proposes there is a public that has the role, power, and authority to effect change in technological consumption in youths. In fact, that public may not be a distinct public at all, but rather the community of concerned parents. Clinicians can do their part to inform parents, and that is one such intervention that addresses the health issue.

One of the challenges addressing this matter is codifying the scope to a specific population. It may be worthwhile to look for correlations on a global scale between different countries examining the problem of screen time; however, the larger scale often creates more questions than valuable answers as Huang suggests, “more research is needed into the correlations of the number of close SNS friends with well-being and distress,” (Huang p. 13). Huang also states in a similar passage; the United States has no shortage of population size in studies. The final challenge one may have, is if this issue should be considered health related.

References

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