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The impact of mobile phone use on mental health of the youth

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Abstract

The widespread adoption of mobile phones among youth has raised concerns about its potential impact on mental health. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between mobile phone use and mental health outcomes, including stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep quality, among a sample of 186 youth aged 16-30 years. A mixed-methods approach combining survey data and in-depth interviews revealed a significant positive correlation between mobile phone use and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress. Excessive mobile phone use was also found to disrupt sleep patterns, leading to poor sleep quality. The qualitative findings highlighted the role of social media, fear of missing out (FOMO), and cyber bullying in aggravate mental health concerns. The study's findings have implications for mental health professionals, policymakers, and parents, emphasizing the need for responsible mobile phone use, digital literacy, and targeted interventions to mitigate the negative effects of mobile phone use on youth mental health.

Keywords: Smart phones, social media, mental health

Introduction

The impact of mobile phone usage on the mental health of youth has become a pressing concern in recent years. With the widespread adoption of smart phones and social media adolescents are exposed to a unique set of challenges that can affect their mental wellbeing. Studies have shown that there is a correlation between the increase in smart phone usage and the rise in mental health issues among youth. For instance, in Ontario, the proportion of teenagers reporting moderate to serious mental distress increased from 24% in 2013 to 39% in 2017. Similarly, in the United States, the number of adolescents experiencing depressive symptoms and suicidal thoughts has also increased significantly.

Social media, in particular, has been identified as a significant contributor to mental health issues among youth. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can foster social comparison, cyber bullying, and the normalization of self-harm and suicidal behaviour. The constant stream of curated and manipulated content can create unrealistic expectations and promote feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and anxiety.

Another critical factor is sleep deprivation, which is often linked to excessive smartphone usage. The blue light emitted from screens can interfere with sleep patterns, leading to chronic sleep deprivation. This, in turn, can exacerbate mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.

It's essential to note that individual differences play a significant role in determining the impact of smartphone usage on mental health. Some youth may be more vulnerable to the negative effects of smartphone usage due to factors such as personality traits, family dynamics, and pre-existing mental health conditions. Overall the effect of mobile phone usage on the mental health of youth is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive and nuanced approach. By understanding the underlying factors and mechanisms, we can develop effective strategies to mitigate the negative effects and promote healthy smart phone usage habits among adolescents.

In India there is lack of studies conducted specifically on the impact of mobile phone use on mental health of the youth, however a study published in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry found that internet addiction is a significant predictor of depression, anxiety and stress among Indian college students. Another study published in the Journal of Family Medicine

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and primary care found that excessive mobile phone use is associated with poor sleep quality, eye strain and headaches among Indian adolescents.

Review of past studies

The widespread adoption of mobile phones among youth has raised concerns about its potential impact on mental health. This literature review aims to synthesize existing research on the relationship between mobile phone usage and mental health outcomes on youth.

Research has consistently shown that excessive mobile phone usage can lead to addiction, which is associated with negative mental health outcomes.

- **Kuss and Griffiths (2011)** ^[1]: found that mobile phone addiction was linked to symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.
- **Cao et al. (2011)** ^[2]: Found that mobile phone addiction was associated with decreased self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social relationships.
- **Singh R., & Kaur, H. (2020)** ^[14]: Found a significant correlation between mobile phone addiction and depression, anxiety, and stress among Indian adolescents.
- **Gupta A., & Gupta S. (2019)**: This study reported a prevalence of mobile phone addiction among 34.6% of Indian college students and found significant correlations with depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances.
- **Burke et al. (2010)** ^[3]: This study found that social media usage was associated with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Social media, a key feature of mobile phones, has been identified as a significant contributor to mental health issues among youth.
- **Kiriakidis et al. (2015)** ^[4]: Found that social media usage was linked to decreased self-esteem, body satisfaction, and life satisfaction.
- **Cain and Gradisar (2010)** ^[5]: found that sleep deprivation was associated with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and irritability. Sleep deprivation, often linked to excessive mobile phone usage, has been shown to exacerbate mental health issues.
- **O'Brien and McLellan (2015)** ^[6]: Found that sleep deprivation was linked to decreased cognitive function, mood regulation, and emotional well-being.
- **Kumar, A. & Sharma, A (2020)** ^[9]: Found that excessive social media use was associated with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and loneliness among Indian young adults.
- **Gupta, S. & Singh, S. (2019)** ^[10]: This study reported that social media use was associated with increased stress, anxiety, and depression among Indian adolescents.
- **Kaur, H., & Singh, R, (2020)** ^[14]: This study found that mobile phone use before bedtime was associated with poor sleep quality, reduced sleep duration, and increased risk of sleep disturbances among Indian adolescents.
- **Sharma, A., & Gupta, S. (2019)**: This study reported that mobile phone use was associated with delayed sleep onset, reduced sleep duration, and poor sleep quality among Indian college students.
- **Hinduja and Patchin (2010)** ^[7]: found that

cyberbullying was associated with increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Cyberbullying, a growing concern among youth, has been linked to negative mental health outcomes.

- **Slonje et al. (2013)** ^[8]: Found that cyber bullying was linked to decreased self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social relationships. Studies on Mobile Phone Addiction and Mental Health.
- **Singh, S., & Kumar, A. (2020)** ^[14]: Found that excessive mobile phone use was associated with poor academic performance, reduced attention span, and decreased motivation among Indian college students.
- **Gupta, S., & Sharma, A. (2020)** ^[9]: Reported that mobile phone use was associated with decreased academic achievement, reduced study habits, and increased distraction among Indian adolescents.

The review of past studies suggests that excessive mobile phone usage is associated with negative mental health outcomes among youth, including addiction, depression, anxiety, and sleep deprivation. Social media, cyberbullying, and sleep deprivation are key factors that contribute to these negative outcomes. Further research is needed to explore the complex relationships between mobile phone usage, social media, and mental health outcomes among youth.

Objectives of the Study

Overall, the effect of mobile phone usage on the mental health of youth is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive and nuanced approach. By understanding the underlying factors and mechanisms, we can develop effective strategies to mitigate the negative effects and promote healthy smartphone usage habits among adolescents.

The widespread adoption of mobile phones among youth has raised concerns about its potential impact on mental health. This literature review aims to synthesize existing research on the relationship between mobile phone usage and mental health outcomes among youth.

Data Collection and analysis methodology

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between mobile phone use and mental health outcomes, including stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep quality, among a sample of 186 youth aged 16-30 years. A mixed-methods approach combining survey data (collected through questionnaire) and in-depth interviews was used, to collect primary data.

Findings of the study

After collecting the data, analysis and interpretation was done according to the objectives. 186 respondents gave their responses through the questionnaire that was prepared by the researcher using Google form.

The dataset of respondents contains a total number of 186 responses from age group ranging from a minimum of 16 years to a maximum of 30 years. The distribution of age shows a concentration in the late teens to early twenties, reflecting a relatively young demographic. A higher number of respondents are identified as female (approximately 60.2% of total responses). Male respondents accounted for roughly 39.8%. This data suggests a greater representation of female participants in the survey.

The educational level of respondents is depicted in figure 1, with the majority actively pursuing graduation (62.9%) or diploma programs. The representation of post-graduation students (12.4%), 10+2 students (14.5%) and job holders (10.2%)

(10.2%) provides insights into the progression from education to professional engagement. This indicates the need for tailored support, such as career guidance or advanced study resources, for this audience.

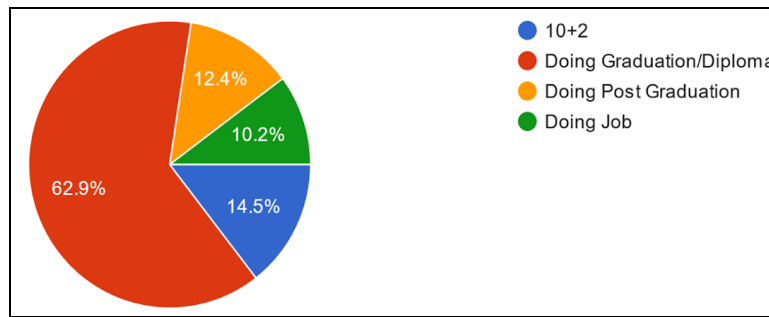


Fig 1: shows primarily educational level of respondents.

The responses received from young respondents relating to time spent on usage of mobile phones show that majority of respondents spend time between 2-5 hours, indicating that moderate mobile phone usage is common. A significant number of respondents spend 6-8 hours or more daily, often suggesting dependency on phones for work or entertainment. A smaller group reports 1-2 hours of usage, potentially indicating intentional phone use or limited reliance on mobile devices. A handful of extreme cases (12+ hours or "whole day") could reflect excessive screen time

requiring attention. This breakdown shows varied mobile usage habits, with a trend toward moderate to high engagement.

Majority of respondents (65%) being student, report no monthly income. Those earning ₹10 k - ₹50 k form the second-largest group, with 18% of responses. A minority (10%) report incomes above ₹50 k showcasing significant variance in earnings. The data indicates a wide disparity in income levels, with a significant proportion reporting no income.

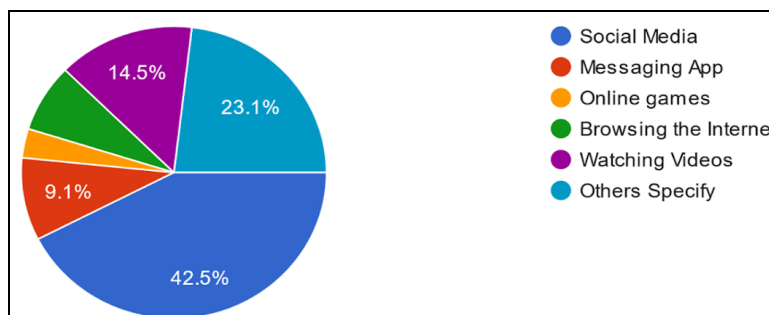


Fig 2: shows primary mobile phone uses

The responses to the question about primary mobile phone uses show a wide range of activities, with notable trends. Social Media emerges as the most frequently selected activity, indicating its significant role in mobile phone usage. Watching Videos and Browsing the Internet are also highly popular, reflecting the importance of entertainment and information-seeking on mobile devices. Messaging Apps are another common choice, highlighting the central

role of communication in mobile usage. A smaller but notable proportion of respondents mentioned Online Games, while some selected Others Specify, indicating additional uses not covered by the given options. Overall, the data illustrates the multifunctionality of mobile phones, with a primary focus on social connectivity, entertainment, and online browsing.

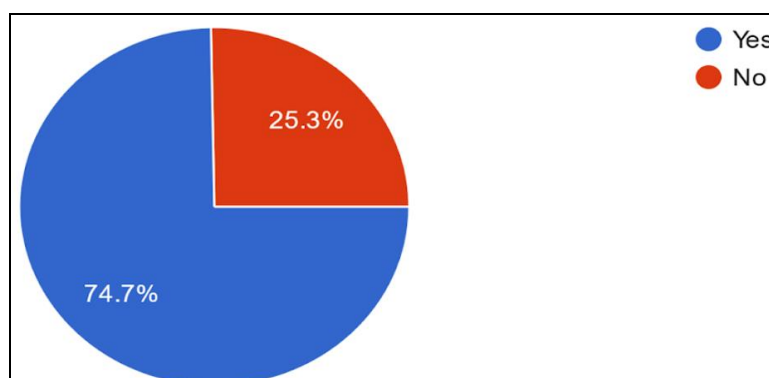


Fig 3: Shows Use of mobile phone before bed time

74.7% respondents used mobile phones before bed time. The findings highlight that mobile phone usage before bedtime is a common habit for most respondents. This behaviour may be linked to entertainment, communication, or relaxation needs but could also have implications for

sleep quality and overall health. Encouraging awareness about the potential effects of screen time before bed may help individuals make more informed choices about their nightly routines.

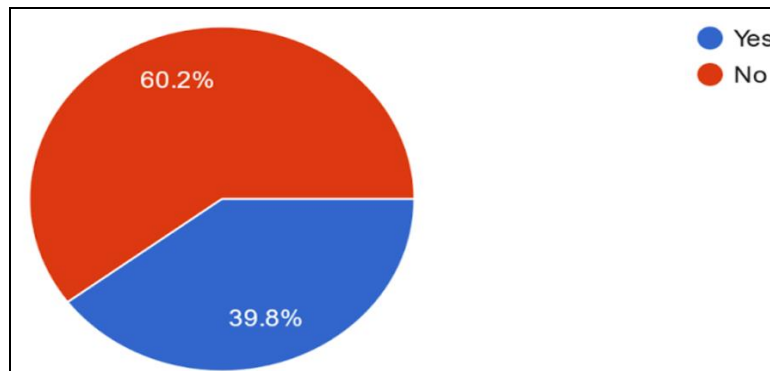


Fig 4: Shows Sleep disturbance caused by mobile phone use

39.8% respondents experienced sleep disturbances due to mobile phone usage. While mobile phone use does not appear to universally disrupt sleep, it is a concern for a considerable number of users. This highlights the need for greater awareness about the potential impact of excessive

screen time, particularly before bedtime. Encouraging practices like setting screen time limits and adopting healthier night time routines could help individuals minimize sleep disturbances caused by mobile phone usage.

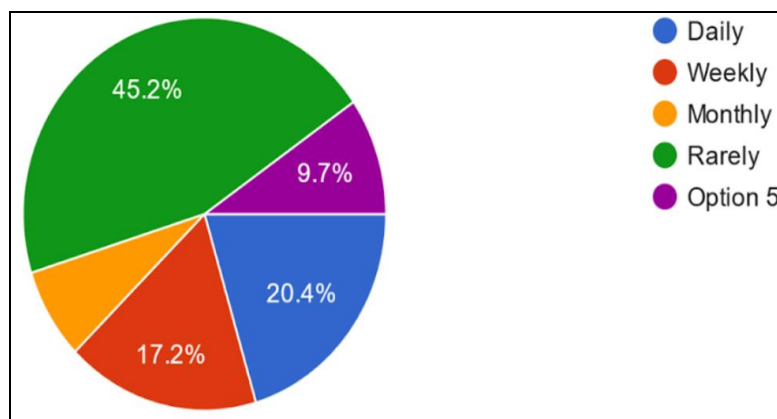


Fig 5: Shows feeling of anxiety by the respondents

The majority of respondents feel stressed or anxious rarely, suggesting effective coping mechanisms or less exposure to stressors for this group. A notable number experience stress or anxiety weekly or daily, underlining the importance of mental health support and stress management strategies. A smaller group feels stressed or anxious monthly, which could represent individuals with less frequent but still impactful stressors. Ambiguity in the "Option 5" responses suggests potential gaps in understanding or articulation of stress patterns. This summary emphasizes the variability in stress experiences, with the majority managing stress infrequently but a significant minority encountering it regularly. While the majority of respondents experience stress or anxiety infrequently, a notable proportion face these feelings on a regular basis, either weekly or daily. This highlights the importance of addressing mental well-being and promoting strategies to reduce stress and anxiety. Targeted interventions, such as mindfulness, relaxation techniques, or professional support, could benefit those who experience stress or anxiety more frequently. Based on the responses, a significant portion of individuals (32.8% respondents) have reported experiencing symptoms

of depression at some point. While many respondents have not faced depressive symptoms, those who have indicate that it may be a recurring challenge. This suggests the importance of mental health awareness, early intervention, and accessible support systems. Promoting mental health initiatives that encourage open discussions, provide resources, and offer professional guidance can help reduce the burden of depression and improve well-being for those affected

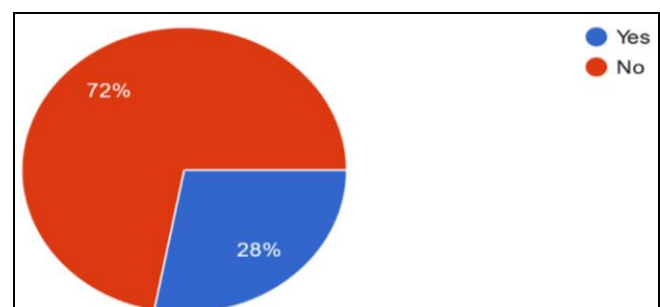


Fig 6: Shows pressure to present perfect image on social media

28% respondents experienced pressure to present a perfect image on social media. The results suggest that while a significant number of individuals do feel pressure to present a perfect image on social media, many do not experience this pressure. For those who do, it may stem from societal expectations, self-image concerns, or the curated nature of content on these platforms. This highlights the ongoing influence of social media on personal identity and the importance of encouraging authenticity and self-acceptance online. Balancing real-life experiences with online portrayals is key for reducing this pressure and fostering a healthier relationship with social media.

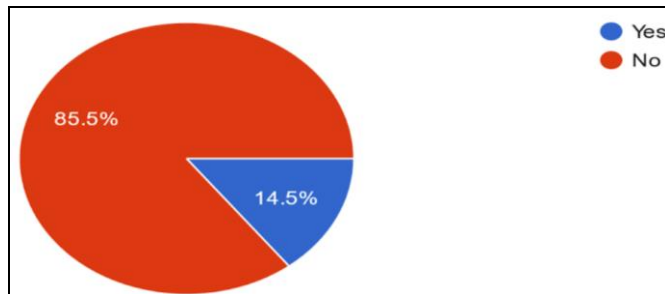


Fig 7: shows the percentage of youth being victim of cyber bullying

14.5% respondents have been a victim of cyber bullying. The data shows that while the majority of respondents have not been victims of cyber bullying, a concerning number have reported experiencing it. This highlights the ongoing challenges and risks associated with online interactions, especially for vulnerable individuals. Addressing the prevalence of cyber bullying and promoting safe online spaces should remain a priority to protect users, particularly in environments where anonymity can sometimes encourage harmful behaviors. Support systems and digital literacy programs can help mitigate such issues by empowering individuals to handle and report instances of cyber bullying.

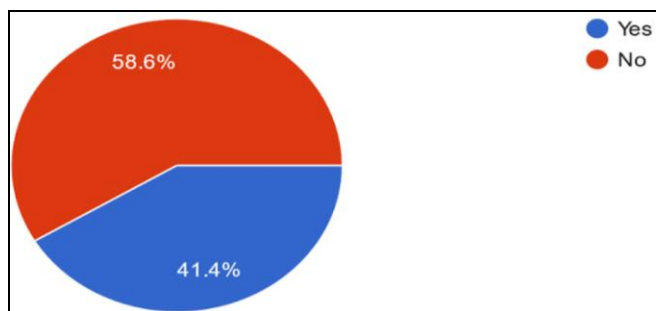


Fig 8: showing percentage of respondents feeling anxious for inability to access mobile Phone

41.4% respondents feel anxious when they are unable to access their mobile phone. The responses indicate a significant divide in how people feel about being unable to access their mobile phones. A number of individuals reported feeling anxious when they are unable to use their phones, reflecting a sense of dependence or attachment to these devices. On the other hand, many respondents indicated that they do not feel anxious without access to their phones, suggesting that not everyone is equally reliant on their mobile devices for daily functioning or emotional well-being. This difference highlights varying levels of attachment to mobile phones, with some individuals feeling

more dependent on them for communication, information, and social interaction. This trend may reflect broader patterns of digital dependence, especially in a hyper-connected world. Addressing this dependence and promoting balanced mobile phone use could be beneficial for mental well-being

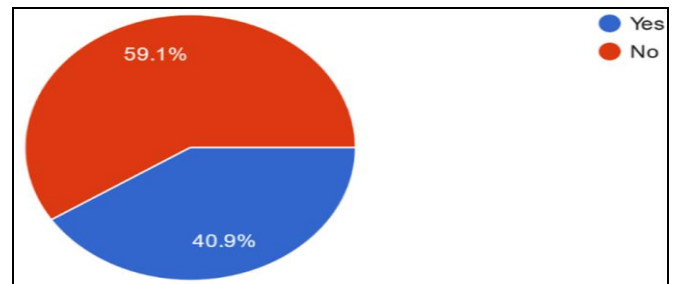


Fig 9: Showing habits of youth to spend more time on mobile than intended.

The responses indicate a mix of habits when it comes to time spent on mobile phones. In the survey, 40.9% respondents spend more time on their mobile phone than they intended to. Many individuals admit to spending more time on their mobile phones than they intended, pointing to a potential pattern of overuse or distraction. However, there are also a significant number of respondents who do not report exceeding their intended phone usage. This suggests that while mobile phones are an integral part of daily life, there are varying levels of control over screen time. For some, excessive phone use might be a challenge, while others may find it easier to manage their usage, possibly reflecting differences in self-regulation or lifestyle. Strategies to reduce screen time could be beneficial for those who feel their mobile phone use is excessive, and promoting mindfulness regarding usage can help people maintain a healthier balance.

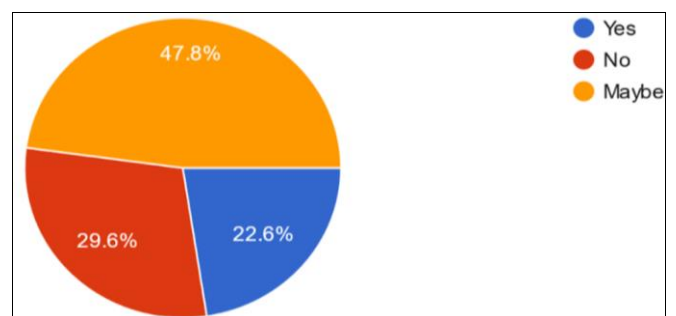


Fig 10: Shows efforts by youth to reduce the mobile phone use.

The responses show that many individuals have attempted to reduce their mobile phone use, with a significant portion of them having either failed or struggled in the process. 22.6% respondents tried to cut down their mobile phone use but failed. The "Maybe" responses highlight an uncertainty or wavering in their ability to succeed, suggesting that some people may have tried to cut down but haven't been consistent or effective in doing so. On the other hand, a smaller portion of individuals report that they haven't attempted to reduce their phone usage or have succeeded. This indicates that mobile phone overuse is a common issue, and many may find it difficult to limit their usage, likely due to the addictive nature of smart phones and their integration into daily life. There may be a need for more targeted

strategies, such as setting specific goals, using apps to track usage, or encouraging healthier digital habits, for those

looking to improve their relationship with mobile technology

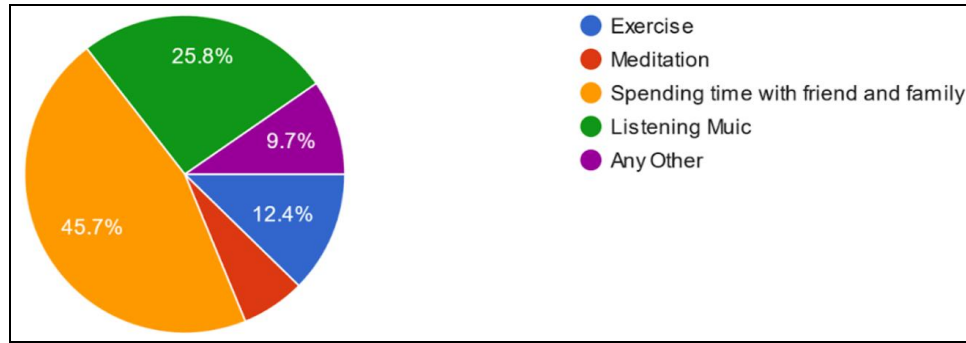


Fig 11: Shows Stress managing strategies used by youth.

In response to the question asked about managing stress strategies, the responses reveal that several strategies are commonly used to manage stress and anxiety, with a few key methods standing out as the most popular: Spending Time with Friends and Family is by far the most frequently chosen method. Many individuals rely on the support and connection they receive from spending time with their loved ones as a primary way to cope with stress. Listening to Music is another common strategy as music seems to play an important role in emotional regulation and stress relief for many people. This suggests that music serves as a calming or distracting tool that helps individuals manage their stress levels. Exercise and physical activity appears to be another key coping mechanism. Regular exercise, which is known to release endorphins and improve mood, is a widely used method for stress management. A smaller, but still significant portion of individuals engage in meditation. This indicates an awareness of the benefits of mindfulness and relaxation techniques in managing mental health. A variety of other strategies are mentioned, though less frequently. These may involve personalized coping techniques that individuals have found effective, though they are not as universally recognized as the aforementioned methods.

The most commonly used strategies for managing stress and anxiety include socializing with loved ones, listening to music, and exercising, which are all easily accessible and promote both emotional and physical well-being. Meditation also appears to be an effective tool for some. Overall, the responses reflect the importance of both social support and personal well-being practices in managing mental health.

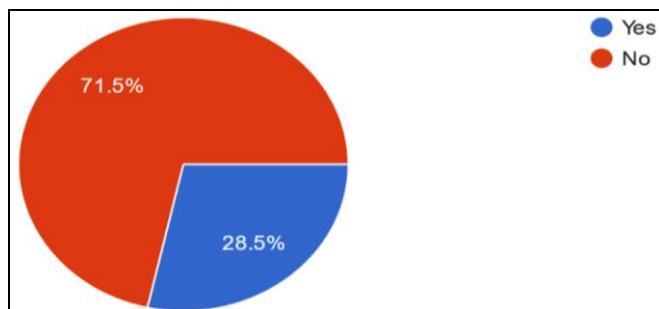


Fig 12: shows professional help taken by youth for mental health

A portion of respondents have sought professional help for mental health concerns, indicating that seeking professional assistance is a recognized step for some when facing mental

health issues. This group reflects a willingness to engage with professional services to address mental health concerns, such as therapy or counseling. A larger proportion of respondents have not sought professional help for mental health concerns. This may indicate either self-reliance in dealing with mental health issues or a lack of access to professional services, stigma surrounding mental health, or the belief that their concerns are manageable without professional intervention.

Many individuals who have not sought professional help may rely on self-management strategies for mental health concerns, such as exercise, meditation, spending time with friends/family, or using coping mechanisms like mobile phone use or music. In some cases, there could be a reluctance to seek professional help due to cultural or social stigma around mental health treatment.

The number of individuals who have not sought help could also reflect challenges in accessibility to mental health services, either due to financial barriers, lack of awareness of available services, or geographical limitations. A portion of those who answered "No" may prefer informal support systems like friends, family, or self-help techniques, rather than engaging with professionals.

Those who have sought help seem to indicate that professional help is a viable option for addressing mental health challenges. However, it may still represent a minority of respondents, suggesting that there could be room for greater awareness and encouragement around seeking professional mental health care.

There is a need to increase awareness around mental health and the benefits of professional support, to break down barriers such as stigma and improve access to mental health services.

Impact of Mobile Phone Use on Youth Mental Health

The questionnaire responses have provided a comprehensive view of the effects of mobile phone usage on the mental health of young individuals. The data highlights several critical trends and themes that warrant attention and further exploration. Below is an overview of the primary findings:

- 1. Time Spent on Mobile Phones:** A substantial number of respondents reported using their phones for 4-6 hours daily, with a significant portion exceeding this range. Common activities include social media engagement, gaming, video streaming, and messaging apps.
- 2. Psychological Impacts:** Many participants cited experiences of stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation tied to prolonged use. Sleep disturbances due to

nighttime phone use were frequently mentioned. A smaller segment highlighted the role of mobile phones in fostering emotional support, maintaining friendships, and accessing mental health resources.

3. **Patterns and Triggers:** Frequent notifications and the pressure to remain available were commonly identified as triggers for stress. Overuse was often linked to boredom, loneliness, or escapism from daily challenges.
4. **Demographic Variations:** Younger participants (ages 15-18) appeared more susceptible to the negative effects, particularly regarding self-esteem issues influenced by social media. Female respondents reported higher levels of emotional and mental strain related to phone use compared to their male counterparts.
5. **Suggestions and Observations:** Respondents recommended digital detox periods, setting boundaries for screen time, and promoting awareness campaigns on mindful phone usage. Many advocated for parental or institutional guidelines to encourage balanced mobile phone habits among youth.

This analysis underscores the dual-edged nature of mobile phone usage among young people, reflecting both its benefits and potential risks to mental health. These findings will serve as a basis for developing actionable strategies to mitigate adverse effects while enhancing the positive aspects of technology in youths' lives.

Conclusion

To mitigate the negative effects of mobile phone use on mental health, a combination of setting boundaries, promoting alternative activities, fostering awareness, and ensuring responsible content consumption is essential. Strategies like digital detox, mindfulness practices, and focusing on real-world interactions can significantly improve mental well-being

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