

Who's more at risk from social media - girls or boys?

Family Zone Team

2-3 minutes

Every other day, it seems, there's a scary headline linking social media with mental health risks. So you probably won't be shocked to hear that yet another major study has found a strong link between heavy social media use and depression - this time, among 14-year-olds.

What may surprise you (or not, if you happen to be the parent of a teenage girl!) is that among that "heaviest users" group, girls outnumber boys two to one.

The more a person of either gender used social media, the greater the likelihood of depression. But here's the thing. Even when boys and girls spent exactly the same amount of time on social media, the depression risk for girls was significantly higher.

Using data from over 10,000 14-year-olds who took part in the [UK Millennium Cohort Study](#), researchers found 40% of girls admitted being on their social media accounts for more than three hours a day - compared to only 20% of boys.

Only four out of every 100 girls, compared to 10% of boys, reported abstaining entirely.

Across the board, more hours spent scrolling translated into greater risk of depression. But there was an unexpected skew in that risk once use-hours were held constant.

Among teens who were on social media more than five hours a day, girls' depression scores rose to 50% - while boys only increased to 35%.

Why? No definitive answer has yet emerged, but clearly boys and girls are interacting differently on social media, and consuming its contents in different ways.



Are girls more likely compare their own images with the ones they see online - to the detriment of their wellbeing?

Some experts have suggested that girls make more comparisons between themselves and the images they view in a way that boys don't. And that "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall" habit is notoriously bad for mental health.

Common factors for both boys and girls who are heavy scrollers include lack of sleep and cyberbullying.