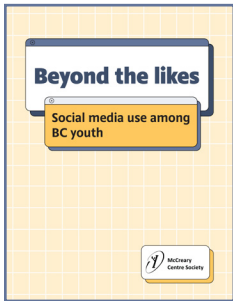


Social media use linked to social connections but poorer mental health for BC teenagers



On March 4th McCreary Centre Society (McCreary) will release their latest report from the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey, *Beyond the likes: Social media use among BC youth*. The report focuses on social media use among 12–19-year-olds in BC and is McCreary's first post COVID-19 pandemic report to do so.

The report found that the majority of Grade 7 to 12 students across the province had used social media on their most recent school day, as well as after their expected bedtime.

There were some gender differences in social media use, with females the most likely to be on social media (including at night), and non-binary youth the most likely to report their social media use had become problematic. However, for youth of all gender identities, using social media was associated with poorer health and well-being, including poorer mental health, reduced sleep, disordered eating, suicidal ideation, and poorer life satisfaction.

The report's co-author and Executive Director of McCreary, Dr. Annie Smith, reflected on the findings: *"We really set out to look at social media use in a balanced way and to consider the benefits as well as the challenges that might be associated with young people using social media. We definitely saw that social media use was associated with enhanced social connections, including an increased likelihood that youth would have online friends they had never met in person, and have friends they could share their ups and downs with. Online friends can be an amazing source of support for young people who are isolated, particularly if they don't have any in-person friends, so I think the findings shows the important role that social media can play. However, we did not find other positive links between social media use and health and well-being, and overall found that youth who were not on social media were reporting better mental, emotional, and physical health."*

Smith continued: *"We have seen from other studies internationally how youth's social media use can reflect and contribute to their offline experiences, and this was also the case here in BC. One example of that would be that we saw a link between social media use and in-person victimization experiences, as well as a link to cyberbullying."*

In addition to highlighting some of the challenges that can be associated with social media use for young people in BC, the report showed how offline connections and opportunities can reduce the likelihood that young people will experience problems with their social media use. These include having caregivers who monitor their youth's time online; experiencing supportive and understanding relationships with family; feeling connected to school; spending time in nature; and taking part in physical activities and other extracurriculars that youth find enjoyable and meaningful.



McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research, evaluation, and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, our vision is that all youth are supported to be healthy and connected.

For interviews, contact:

Dr. Annie Smith
Executive Director
Tel: 604-291-1996 ext. 225
Cell: 604-728-9494
Email: annie@mcs.bc.ca

Where to find us:

3552 Hastings Street East
Vancouver, BC, V5K 2A7



mccreary@mcs.bc.ca



mcs.bc.ca

To read the full report, please visit: mcs.bc.ca/pdf/beyond_the_likes.pdf.

Webinar presentations of the findings are scheduled for:

- 👉 Wednesday, March 4th from 9am–10am PST (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87634911752>)
- 👉 Wednesday, March 4th from 2pm–3pm PST (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87500230555>)
- 👉 Thursday, March 5th from 2pm–3pm PST (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85287342794>)
- 👉 Friday, March 6th from 9am–10am PST (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81038595931>)
- 👉 Tuesday, March 10th 10am–11am PST (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81553904841>)

Backgrounder

The 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) was completed by over 38,000 youth aged 12–19 in 59 of BC's 60 school districts, and included questions about social media use.

Some key findings from the report:

- In 2023, 79% of females reported they had scrolled through social media on their most recent school day, compared to 73% of non-binary youth and 69% of males. Females were also the most likely to use social media after their expected bedtime (74% vs. 67% of non-binary youth vs. 61% of males).
- Youth who were on social media at night were more likely than their peers to report poorer health and well-being. For example, they were less likely to have slept for at least 8 hours the previous night (34% vs. 58% who were not on social media after they went to bed), and were more likely to have experienced extreme stress in the past month (15% vs. 9%). They were also more likely to have been cyberbullied (18% vs. 10%) and to have perpetrated cyberbullying (10% vs. 4%) in the past year.
- In-person victimization was more common among youth who were on social media at night. For example, 29% had experienced physical sexual harassment in the past year, compared to 16% who were not on social media at night; and 9% had perpetrated in-person bullying in the past year (vs. 6%).
- Social media use was also associated with youth being more likely to report low body satisfaction and an eating disorder. For example, 24% of males who used social media at night reported the lowest levels of body satisfaction, compared to 17% of males who did not go on social media after bedtime.
- A potential benefit of using social media was enhanced social connections. For example, youth who accessed social media the previous school day were more likely than those who did not use social media that day to have at least one close in-person friend (94% vs. 92%) and online friend they had never met in person (37% vs. 32%).
- In the past year, 18% of youth reported their social media use had become problematic enough to need help (27% of non-binary youth vs. 22% of females vs. 14% of males). For youth of all gender identities, the factor most strongly associated with problematic social media use was reporting that their online gaming was also at a point where they needed help.
- There were some gender-specific factors associated with problematic social media use. For example, for males (but not females or non-binary youth) there was a strong link between regularly exercising at a gym or rec centre and needing help. For females, problematic alcohol use was strongly tied to problematic social media use, in a way not seen for males and non-binary youth.
- There were also some gender-specific protective factors that reduced the likelihood of problematic social media use. For youth of all genders, spending enough time with friends was important. However, the quantity of friends was particularly important for males, whereas for females it was having friends they could share their ups and downs with that was important.

