Summary of Results: The Effect of Social Media Use on Sleep Quality and Well-Being

Firstly, we would like to thank everyone who took part in the study. You are likely receiving this message because you said that you were interested in hearing about the results of the study or hearing from us again. If you have any questions, then please get in touch. Our contact information is at the bottom of this newsletter.
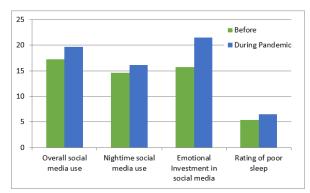
Background

The study was conducted to investigate sleep in adults. A study in adolescents demonstrated that people who used more social media had poorer sleep quality. Among adolescents, social media use at night-time and emotional investment in social media had a stronger impact on sleep than overall use. Social media use among adults and older adults has increased considerably in recent years. We were interested in understanding the way that social media might affect sleep across adulthood. Due to COVID-19, we decided to look at the difference between sleep and social media use before and during the pandemic. Therefore, we asked people how they typically used social media, slept and their mood before the pandemic and during the pandemic.

Results

Changes through the Pandemic: The findings showed that during the pandemic, social media use overall, at night-time and emotional investment in social media, all increased compared to before the pandemic. Sleep quality also worsened.

People reported more symptoms of depression during the pandemic (compared to before) but there was no change in how anxious people felt.

Graph showing change in social media use & sleep before & during the pandemic

Older versus Younger People: Before and during the pandemic, older people used social media less compared to younger people, both overall use and at night-time. Older people also reported poorer sleep quality than young adults.

What was associated with poor sleep? During the pandemic, the strongest predictors of poor sleep were night-time social media use and low mood. Therefore, the more people used their social media before bed, the worse their sleep. How much people used social media overall throughout the day or how emotionally invested they were in social media, wasn't important.

Social media use at night is likely to be especially important. Electronic devices emit a frequency of light called "blue light". Blue light can delay the release of melatonin (a hormone which helps you feel sleepy), and this can disrupt sleep.

Importance

Obviously, people experienced lots of changes during the pandemic in turns of work and home life. It's important to understand what these changes are, and if they are positive or negative. It's understandable that we have also changed the way and amount we use social media; for many people, it has been a way to still socialise with family and friends. But it is also important to be aware of how electronic devices can impact us, for example by disrupting our sleep if used near bedtime.

Having good sleep is important for both physical and mental health. Even if you are not sleeping, resting with your eyes closed helps to recuperate our bodies and brains. Everyone can benefit from better sleep and good sleep habits (referred to as sleep hygiene). Sleep hygiene can play an

important role in achieving better sleep by improving your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep for longer.

 What next?

When we first asked people to take part in this study, it was quite near the beginning of lockdown in the UK. Most people completed the study between April and June, when there was a strict lockdown and everyone was in a period of adjustment. Things have changed since then but they are not back to normal. We want to see how things have changed over the past few months.

We will be asking people who took part in the original study, to answer some more questions. We will ask you again about your sleep and how you use social media, but we will also ask about how you socialise and generally how things are for you. It is entirely up to you whether you take part.

If you are interested in taking part, please follow this link to the new study https://bit.ly/3nGQLnP and type in your memorable information from last time (we don't expect you to remember, we have included it in the email).

We will also be asking a new group of people to take part in a similar study, but focusing on people over 50 years old. Hopefully, we'll have some more information for you soon.

This research was for Natasha Vaughan's MSc Project. I'm pleased to say that Natasha successfully completed her studies, and was awarded a Distinction for both her MSc Research Project and her MSc overall. Many thanks for your help with this study so far. I hope you and your loved ones are all staying safe and well.

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Tips and Information

Habits which have shown to improve sleep:

- Go to bed at roughly the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine, limit your exposure to bright light and turn off electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime – if you do need to use electronic devices, ensure the night mode settings are on (see the longer YouTube video below for details of how to do this).
- Avoid large meals, caffeine and alcohol before bedtime.
- Try to get some exercise during the day as this can help you fall asleep more easily at night.

Information regarding sleep, its importance and how to improve sleep hygiene:

- https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/
- https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/index.html
- http://sleepeducation.org/essentials-in-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits
- https://www.sleepassociation.org/about-sleep/sleep-hygiene-tips/

Videos about sleep and how to improve sleep:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ8uc85cEu4 (A shorter video)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fk-_SwHhLLc (A longer video)