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The influence of social media on adolescent mental health and substance abuse patterns

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Abstract

Adolescents' widespread use of social media has become a serious public health issue, especially considering its effects on substance abuse and mental health. The aim of this review is to examine the complex relationship between the use of social media, mental health issues, and the rise in substance abuse among teenagers. An overview of social media engagement trends is given at the start, emphasising that teenagers are among the most frequent users and that platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are essential to their social lives. According to recent studies, high social media use has been linked to a rise in mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The prevalent behaviours of social comparison, cyberbullying, and validation-seeking in online interactions exacerbate mental health challenges. The review also explored the patterns of substance abuse among adolescents, with particular attention to the use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal narcotics. Peer pressure, family dynamics, early substance exposure, and other factors have been identified as contributing factors to substance misuse. A critical analysis is conducted on the function that social media plays in normalising substance use, since media portrayals of substance use can glamourise these behaviours and make them seem socially acceptable to impressionable teens. The ways in which peer pressure and heightened stress are two of the methods through which social media impact substance abuse are examined, offering a thorough grasp of the difficulties that young people today face. The urgent need for multifaceted interventions that address social media use and mental health education is emphasised in the review's conclusion. Along with programs to promote digital literacy and ethical social media usage, recommendations are made for parents, schools, and policymakers to reduce the risks associated with social media use. The results highlight the need for additional investigation into the complex interactions among social media, mental health, and substance addiction and support cooperative endeavours aimed at safeguarding and enabling young people in the digital age.

Keywords: Adolescent Mental Health; Peer Pressure; Preventative Strategies Social Media; Substance Abuse

1. Introduction

Social networking is an essential component of adolescence in the modern world. Teenagers are among the most frequent users of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, which have completely changed

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everyday routines and social interactions. According to a 2023 survey, 95% of American teenagers report using social media, with 35% expressing near-constant use of sites such as Instagram and TikTok [1]. Teenagers may now interact with peers, influencers, and content at an alarming rate thanks to the widespread adoption of smartphones and easy access to the Internet. Although social media can provide advantages such as better connections and more opportunities for self-expression, worries over its effects on mental health have grown in recent years. An alarming rise in mental health issues has been associated with an increase in adolescent social media use. Studies show that teenagers who use social media excessively have higher levels of anxiety, sadness, and suicidal thoughts [2]. In comparison to their classmates who used social media less regularly, teenagers who spent more than three hours a day on the platform were much more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression, according to a longitudinal study conducted between 2019 and 2021 [3]. Also, concerns about the connection between substance abuse and social media use has been reported. Teenagers who are exposed to peer behaviours or drug-related content on social media are more likely to experiment with alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs [4]. According to a 2021 study, adolescents who used social media more often also had a higher rate of substance abuse as a coping mechanism for mental disorders [5]. This review aimed to thoroughly investigate the intricate relationship between substance abuse, mental health issues, and adolescent social media use. This review will examine how mental health issues can worsen through social media and how these issues then lead to the onset or exacerbation of adolescent substance use. This review attempts to provide a better understanding of the mechanisms in play by finding and analysing these interconnections, and ultimately, it provides evidence-based recommendations for intervention. It is critical to comprehend how these variables interact because adolescence is a critical developmental period when substance use and mental health issues can have long-lasting consequences. Addressing the role of social media in these problems is a critical public health priority given its prevalence and increasing influence on adolescent lives. To lessen the detrimental effects of social media on young people's mental health and drug misuse behaviours, this review will highlight the necessity of focused interventions, such as digital literacy programs, mental health support, and public health campaigns.

2. Social Media Usage among Adolescents

2.1. Statistics and Patterns of Social Media Usage in Adolescents

In recent years, social media has become a crucial aspect of adolescent life. According to previous research, 95% of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 have access to, or own smartphones, and more than 90% of them frequently use social media. According to a 2023 survey, teenagers use social media for three to four hours on average every day, with some using it for up to seven hours [6, 7]. Teenagers now primarily use social media platforms for communication, identity exploration, and socialisation rather than just as light entertainment. The most noteworthy increase has been seen in the amount of time spent on social media each day, with a clear trend towards "multi-platform" use. According to a 2022 survey, 70% of teenagers use three or more social media platforms simultaneously, maintaining a continual connection to their online presence [8]. Teenage social behaviour has become heavily influenced by social media engagement, which has developed to include content creation, community involvement, and real-time interactions.

2.2. Popular Platforms and Their Unique Impacts

Adolescents today are drawn to several widely used social media platforms, such as Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok, because they each include interactive features and distinctive content styles. With 72% of adolescents using the platform, Instagram is especially liked among adolescents due to its image-centric design. The emphasis on sharing images has been connected to self-esteem, social comparison, and body image. The curated and filtered images shared on Instagram can encourage unrealistic beauty standards, leading to greater rates of body dissatisfaction and social anxiety among frequent users, particularly young females [9]. TikTok, on the other hand, appeals to adolescents because of its short entertaining video format, which supports creative expression and virality. TikTok's unique algorithm tailors content according to individual user preferences, promoting continuous scrolling and sustained engagement. This has been described as creating an "addictive" user experience that significantly increases screen time. Moreover, TikTok trends and challenges can have both positive and negative effects on adolescents, with some trends encouraging creativity and others promoting risky behaviours or social pressure [10]. Snapchat is another popular platform, particularly for private messaging among adolescents. Its ephemeral nature, in which messages and images disappear after being viewed, encourages a sense of immediacy and intimacy. However, this feature can also lead to impulsive behaviour, with some adolescents engaging in risky communication (e.g. sexting and bullying), believing that the content is temporary and without lasting consequences. Additionally, Snapchat's streak feature (maintaining continuous daily communication) has been shown to increase pressure among teens to maintain engagement, adding a layer of social obligation to their online behaviour [11].

2.3. Factors Contributing to High Social Media Usage

Several contributing factors explain the high levels of social media usage among adolescents, including accessibility, peer influence, and advancements in technology.

- **Accessibility and Abundance of Smartphones:** Adolescents' universal access to smartphones and the Internet, are some of the biggest factors influencing the use of social media by teenagers. According to Pew Research Centre, a study conducted in 2022 showed that 95% of teenagers own or have access to smartphones [30]. Adolescents can use social media anytime and from any location because of this high degree of accessibility. Owing to smartphones' continual and portable connectivity, social media may now be seamlessly integrated into daily life, unlike prior generations who only used technology in specific contexts or activity [12].
- **Peer Influence and Social Validation:** Another significant factor that influences social media use is peer influence. There is a heightened awareness for social acceptability and peer interactions during the developmental stage of adolescence. Social media sites give teenagers a direct means of requesting likes, comments, and shares from their peers to obtain approval. Social media interactions generate a feedback loop that encourages continuous participation. Thus, young people leverage the dynamics of social media to compare themselves with other people, which often results in heightened pressure from society to uphold a particular image or degree of popularity. Self-expression and identity discovery are made possible by social media platforms but are frequently accompanied by worries about one's social status and peer acceptability [6].
- **Technological Advancements and Algorithmic Engagement:** Social media platforms are technologically advanced to optimise user interactions. Adolescents are encouraged to stay engaged for longer periods of time using personalised feeds generated by algorithms that anticipate their preferences based on past interactions. Push alerts, endless scrolling, and algorithm-driven content recommendations are just a few of the features meant to captivate consumers and eventually cause compulsive use. Due to their developing brains, adolescents are especially prone to reward-driven behaviours, which can result in excessive screen usage and addictive behaviour in certain situations [13].
- **Social media as a tool for Identity Formation:** Social media also plays a crucial role in adolescent identity formation. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok allow adolescents to curate their online personas, explore different social identities, and receive feedback from their peers. This identity exploration process can be both empowering and damaging. While some adolescents find support and community online, others experience pressure to conform to unrealistic standards of beauty, success, or popularity, which can contribute to mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression [9].
- **The Role of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):** The "Fear of Missing Out" is a psychological condition that is peculiar to social media use. During adolescence, there is a tendency to feel excluded or inadequate to participate in certain events or trends, if one's friends have become socially validated in those events or trends [30]. Hence, teenagers prioritise staying in touch and not missing out on anything that is trending in their social circles and drives their heightened online presence as well as social media engagements. Adolescents' daily routines are more ingrained with social media platforms because of this sense of urgency, which also leads to compulsive checking [10].

3. Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health

3.1. Rise in Mental Health Problems Linked to Social Media Usage

The growing use of social media amongst adolescents correlates with an increase in the prevalence of mental health issues. Several studies have demonstrated a direct link between social media use and the development of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Due to the psychosocial implications of this developmental stage, which includes heightened sensitivity to peer relationships and social feedback, adolescents are quite sensitive to information. When compared to their peers who seldom use the social media space, teenagers who spend more than three hours a day on social media are far more likely to express symptoms of depression and anxiety [11]. Adolescents' comparison of their own lives to the frequently maintained, idealised lives they witness on social media is one of the causes of this link. Regular exposure to these heavily edited depictions of pleasure, success, and attractiveness can exacerbate mental health issues by fostering negative self-perception and feelings of inadequacy [14].

3.2. The Role of Cyberbullying, Social Comparison, and Validation-Seeking Behaviours

With significant ramifications for mental health, cyberbullying has become a widespread problem in adolescent social media use. In contrast to traditional bullying, cyberbullying can be unrelenting, without any time constraints and

exacerbated by the anonymity offered by the online environment. According to [10], victims of cyberbullying frequently experience a variety of emotional and psychological effects such as elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research has indicated that adolescents subjected to cyberbullying are more likely to contemplate and attempt suicide than their non-bullied peers [10]. Another important component that affects mental health outcomes of adolescents is social comparison. Teens frequently engage in validation-seeking behaviours, using likes, comments, and followers count as indicators of their own value, because of the pressure to project a "perfect" online persona. Teenagers who constantly check their accounts to see how their materials are performed may become compulsive social media users because of these indicators. Teenagers may perceive a lack of social media connection as personal rejection, which is why such behaviours are associated with higher anxiety and lower self-esteem [7].

3.3. Self-Harm, Suicidality, and Emotional Well-Being

There is growing evidence linking social media to more serious consequences, such as suicidality and self-harm. Social media platforms frequently post material that normalises or suicide, self-harm, and other negative behaviours, which can set off triggers in vulnerable adolescents. Teenagers sometimes use social media as a forum to discuss their issues with self-harm, fostering a community that might unwittingly support these behaviours by offering attention or approval [15]. According to a 2023 meta-analysis, adolescents who reported interacting with information about self-harm on social media were more likely to have a history of self-harming behaviour or suicide attempts. Additionally, platforms such as Reddit or specific forums that encourage anonymity can worsen feelings of depression, hopelessness, and loneliness, which can have a detrimental impact on one's emotional health. Adolescents may also suffer from "emotional contagion", a phenomenon in which exposure to depressing emotional content on the Internet lowers their mood and makes them more vulnerable to suicidal thoughts or depression [8].

4. Adolescent Substance Abuse Patterns

4.1. Overview of Substance Use among Adolescents

Adolescent substance use is still a major global public health concern because many adolescents try with drugs at a young age, which can lead to more serious health problems as adults. Alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, prescription drugs, and vaping products are among the main substances of misuse. Every substance carries a unique set of hazards, frequently worsening pre-existing mental or physical health conditions in teenagers

- **Alcohol Use:** One of the drugs that adolescents abuse the most is alcohol. According to previous studies, peer pressure and social gatherings are major factors in underage drinking, since teenagers frequently feel pressured to emulate the actions of their peers. Frequent and heavy usage during adolescence can have negative long-term repercussions, even if alcohol is first consumed for its sociable and effects. In addition to an increased chance of participating in other dangerous behaviours, such as unprotected sex or driving while intoxicated, early alcohol consumption has been associated with an increased risk of developing alcohol use disorders in adulthood. Moreover, alcohol consumption might hinder cognitive growth during a crucial stage of brain development, resulting in problems with memory, concentration, and judgement [8].
- **Tobacco and Vaping Products:** Traditional cigarette smoking among adolescents has given way to the growing use of vaping products, such as e-cigarettes, as a source of nicotine. Although overall smoking rates have decreased, vaping has become increasingly popular, especially among young people who find flavoured products and the idea that it is less dangerous than traditional smoking appealing. However, according to research, vaping nicotine can be just as addictive as smoking cigarettes, and prolonged usage can result in respiratory issues, nicotine dependence, and even the decision to switch to cigarette smoking. Due to the normalisation of substance use behaviours, studies have also shown that youths who vape are more likely to try other substances, including alcohol and marijuana [10].
- **Marijuana Use:** Marijuana is one of the most utilised illegal narcotics among adolescents. The use of marijuana has become more widely available and accepted by society in view of recent advocacy for its legalisation and decriminalisation in many nations. Despite evidence to the contrary, this normalisation has helped adolescents believe that marijuana is generally safe. Chronic marijuana use by adolescents, is associated with poor cognitive consequences, such as diminished memory, short attention span, and poorer academic performance. Furthermore, frequent marijuana use has been linked to the emergence of mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, and psychosis, especially in individuals with a genetic predisposition. Regular marijuana users in their teens are also more likely to experience dependency problems in the future [15].
- **Prescription Drug Misuse:** A concerning development among adolescents is the abuse of prescription drugs, particularly opioids and stimulants. The opioid epidemic has been exacerbated by the misuse of opioids, which frequently involves prescription medications, such as oxycodone or hydrocodone. Many adolescents get these

narcotics from family members or illegal Internet sources. Opioids have well-established addictive potential; even short-term abuse can result in physical dependence and, in severe situations, overdose. The abuse of stimulants, such as Adderall or Ritalin, which are frequently prescribed for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), is also common. Unaware of the risk of addiction or serious cardiovascular adverse effects, adolescents may abuse these drugs to improve their academic performance or maintain alertness for extended periods of time. Adolescents who abuse opioids or stimulants are at risk of developing addiction, cognitive decline, and higher death rates in the long run [11].

- Vaping and Nicotine Use: Due to aggressive marketing, peer pressure, and the availability of flavoured nicotine products, e-cigarettes have become quite popular among adolescents, exposing a new generation to nicotine use. Although vaping was initially thought to be a safer option than traditional smoking, new research indicates that it may have comparable addictive qualities and long-term health effects. Nicotine exposure in adolescents affects brain development, especially in areas linked to learning, attention, and emotional control. Further raising health hazards, e-cigarette usage have also been linked to respiratory problems and a higher chance of switching to traditional cigarette smoking [13].

4.2. Contributing Factors to Substance Abuse

Adolescent substance addiction is caused by a variety of factors that have a substantial impact on the likelihood of starting and maintaining substance use. Among these, early substance exposure, family dynamics, and peer pressure are important influences that influence teenage behaviour and decision-making.

- Peer Pressure: One of the most important factors influencing teenage behaviour, particularly in relation to substance use, is peer influence. The strong desire for social approval and validation within their social circles is a hallmark of adolescents' developmental periods. Consequently, they become more vulnerable to peer pressure, which can take many different forms, such as overt encouragement to use drugs or more subtly conveyed social cues that suggest substance use is desirable or acceptable. According to research, teenagers who have friends or peers who use drugs or alcohol are much more likely to do the same themselves [15]. Elkins et al. (2020), posited that adolescents with classmates who use drugs are more likely to start taking drugs themselves and increase their use over time [15]. Teenagers find it more difficult to resist peer pressure in settings where substance use is normalised or glorified, thus increasing their probability of indulgence. Social media platforms, in which substance use is frequently presented as appealing or certified, can worsen the effects of peer pressure. Adolescents may be encouraged to engage in substance use by certain social contents accessed on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which promote behaviours that make substance use seem like a natural part of social life [16].
- Family Dynamics: Adolescent substance use behaviours are also greatly influenced by family relationships. Adolescents who grow up in homes with high rates of substance addiction or without parental monitoring are more likely to start using the drugs themselves. Studies have consistently demonstrated a clear correlation between higher rates of teen drug/alcohol experimentation and family situations marked by conflict, neglect, or parental substance use [17]. According to Patrick et al. [18], teenagers from stable and supportive family structures are far less prone to drug abuse than those from dysfunctional families [19]. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that protective factors that lower the chance of adolescents' substance use include positive parental participation and open communication about the risks of substance usage. Children are less likely to experiment with drugs if their parents have clear expectations and conversations regarding the negative effects of drug and alcohol usage. Adolescents raised in nurturing home settings also develop the emotional fortitude necessary to fend off peer pressure and use constructive coping mechanisms. Research has indicated that adolescents with a high level of parental supervision and support are less likely to take drugs [20].
- Early Exposure to Substances: Another important risk factor for teenage substance use is early substance exposure. Peer interactions, neighbourhood settings, and family settings are just a few of the ways that this exposure might occur. Adolescents are more likely to experience substance use disorders in the future if they observe adults abusing drugs or alcohol or if they are provided substances directly. Adolescents may become curious and experiment when substances such as alcohol or prescription drugs are present in the home [21]. Furthermore, brain development, which continues throughout puberty, can be significantly affected by early substance use. Adolescent brains are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of alcohol and drugs. Early substance abuse can disrupt normal brain development, changing a person's capacity to control their emotions and thoughts. At maturity, this disruption may make one more susceptible to addiction and other mental health problems [22]. For example, compared to adolescents who start using it later in life, those who start using it before the age of 15 are more likely to develop substance use disorders [22].

4.3. The Role of Social Influences and Media in Normalizing Substance Use Behavior

Adolescent substance usage behaviours are significantly shaped by social pressures and media representations. Social media, television, movies, and other media outlets usually portray substance use as glamorous or desirable, leaving out the negative effects of these behaviours. Substance abuse may become more accepted because of this representation, particularly among adolescents who are still establishing their identities. Teenagers who are frequently exposed to media depictions of alcohol or drug use are more likely to use these substances [18]. The problem is worsened by the impact of social media influencers and celebrities who use drugs or advocate for them, portraying these practices as stylish and acceptable [19]. The emergence of social media has increased the influence of peer pressure and cultural norms on adolescent substance use. Posts, pictures, and videos showing friends or influencers abusing drugs at parties or other social gatherings are common among adolescents. Teenagers may experience a "fear of missing out" (FOMO) phenomenon because of this exposure, feeling pressured to adopt like behaviours to blend in with their friends [20]. Adolescent substance experimentation may be encouraged by trends that advertise drug use on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok through hashtags and viral challenges [21]. Furthermore, media advertising has a big influence on how adolescents see substance usage. Adolescents are nonetheless exposed to a significant number of alcohol and tobacco commercials, evendespite laws designed to restrict the marketing of dangerous substances to minors. These advertisements frequently portray substance use as a fun and social activity, which encourages young people to try these substances despite their potential for addiction [22]. For many teenagers, experimentation is not only accepted as normal but also seen as a rite of passage due to the normalisation of substance use through a variety of media outlets.

5. Link between Social Media and Substance Abuse

5.1. Correlation between High Social Media Engagement and Increased Risk of Substance Abuse

According to research, an elevated level of social media use is associated with a higher risk of substance abuse in adolescents. Teenagers who spend more time on social media are more likely to participate in dangerous activities, such as using illegal substances and drinking. Adolescents who reported using social media frequently were more likely to experiment with drugs than their classmates who used social media less frequently, according to a study [16]. This link might be explained by the way social media settings affect attitudes and actions related to substance use. The propensity of social media to magnify peer impact is a significant contributing factor to this link. Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure, and witnessing friends or other influential people taking drugs can recognise and accept these behaviours. According to a long-term study, teenagers who observe their peers' use of drugs are more likely to follow suit, indicating that heavy social media use may be a reliable indicator of substance use [23]. Furthermore, according to the 2021 Youth Risk Behaviour System, more than 36% of high school students had consumed alcohol, a statistic that is greatly impacted by how drinking behaviours are portrayed on social media [24].

5.2. Mechanisms of Influence: Social Media-Induced Stress, Peer Pressure, and Exposure to Substance Use.

There are several ways in which social media affects substance abuse. One important contributing cause is social media-induced stress, which can result in unhealthy coping strategies, such as substance abuse. Adolescents are frequently under tremendous pressure to project an idealised self-image onto social media, which can cause anxiety and depression. Substance abuse, as a coping mechanism, may become more likely due to these mental health issues. Adolescents who felt a lot of stress from using social media were far more likely to report using drugs, according to a study [25]. Peer pressure is another important influencing factor. Teenagers can easily witness and be influenced by the actions of their friends thanks to social media platforms, which frequently help them connect with their peers. Adolescents are more likely to experiment with drugs, according to research, if they believe their classmates are doing the same things online [26]. Adolescents are more likely to abuse substances when drug use is visible on social media because it can foster an environment where they feel pressured to engage in these behaviours to fit in. Additionally, exposure to substance use content is common on various social media platforms. Posts, videos, and pictures that portray substance use in a favourable or glamorous light are frequently seen by numerous adolescents. Owing to this exposure, substance use may seem normal or even acceptable in the environment. According to a content analysis of well-known social media platforms, substance use was commonly portrayed in ways that downplayed dangers and repercussions, which may have contributed to a rise in substance use among impressionable adolescents [27].

5.3. How Social Media Glamourizes or Encourages Substance Abuse

Social media sites have the unique tendency to glorify substance use by making it seem like a normal component of social interactions. Celebrities and influencers frequently post images of drinking, partying, and using drugs, portraying these activities as thrilling and enjoyable. Adolescents may be greatly impacted by this kind of staff and may want to

live similar lives. Adolescents who follow influencers who advocate substance use are more likely to participate in those behaviours themselves, according to research [25]. Additionally, by giving the impression that substance use is a component of social living and an acceptable behaviour among peers, social media platforms thus potentiates the indulgence in substance use. This normalisation may also be facilitated by viral challenges and trends that promote drug and alcohol use. For instance, there have been many challenges on platforms such as TikTok that frequently promote substance use without any awareness of the dangers involved [26]. Adolescent behaviour may also be influenced by the way substance use is portrayed as a source of social capital. High levels of interaction (likes, shares, and comments) on social media posts that show substance use serve to foster the perception that these behaviours are desired and socially acceptable. Teenagers may feel that to receive the same approval and attention from their peers, they must engage in substance use because of this validation [9].

6. Preventative and Intervention Strategies

6.1. Recommendations for Parents, Schools, and Policymakers to Mitigate Risks

It is crucial that parents, schools, and policymakers work together to create supportive settings to successfully reduce the risks associated with adolescent social media use. It is important for parents to have candid conversations with their children about social media use and set rules that encourage safe online conduct. To promote social skills and emotional health, this involves limiting screen time and promoting in-person contact. By encouraging resilience and healthy coping mechanisms, parental participation has been shown to dramatically lower the risk of substance addiction and mental health problems in adolescents [16]. Additionally, schools are essential for preventative initiatives. Putting in place social-emotional learning (SEL) programs can provide children with the tools they need to successfully handle social media challenges. Teaching children about the possible negative effects of social media, such as the influence of cyberbullying, social comparison, and the normalisation of substance use, should be the main goal of these programs [18]. Schools can also provide tools and workshops to teach parents how to keep an eye on their children's social media use and spot warning signals of substance abuse or mental health issues. Enacting laws that hold social media companies responsible for the content they promote and the possible harm they may cause are top priorities for policymakers. This involves promoting stronger laws governing advertising directed towards minors, especially for drugs such as alcohol and tobacco. While subsidising initiatives that offer mental health support and substance addiction prevention in schools and communities, policies should also encourage the creation of materials meant to teach youth about responsible social media use [20].

6.2. Digital Literacy and Responsible Social Media Use Campaigns

Teenagers need to be digitally literate to navigate the intricate details of social media securely. By teaching students how to critically assess online content and identify hazardous behaviours such as cyberbullying and inaccurate depictions of substance use, educational institutions should include digital literacy in their curricula. By developing critical thinking abilities, this method can help teenagers, separate facts from fiction [27]. To effectively reach teenagers, campaigns encouraging responsible social media use should use a variety of platforms. These advertisements highlight the value of thoughtful social media use by using relatable and interesting information that appeals to young users. Adolescents are more likely to react favorably to messages from people they respect and identify with; therefore, using celebrity influencers for these advertisements, piques their interest for proper discernment [19]. It is also critical to create a space where people can freely discuss their experiences on social media. Schools and community groups can establish spaces in which adolescents can talk about social media-related issues and share their experiences. By reducing the stigma associated with substance abuse and mental health conditions, this cooperative approach can motivate adolescents to seek help when necessary [23].

6.3. Public Health Strategies to Reduce the Impact of Social Media on Mental Health and Substance Abuse

The complex effects of social media on adolescent substance addiction and mental health must be addressed through public health initiatives. One strategy is to raise awareness among teens and their caregivers about the possible risks associated with social media use. Families can be better prepared to intervene when they are aware of the warning signals of substance abuse and mental health issues owing to educational programs [28]. Incorporating mental health resources into social media sites can also provide adolescents with instant access to help. Platforms might include chat services, mental health hotlines, or instructional resources on managing stress and substance abuse. Social media firms can significantly lessen the negative impact of their platforms on mental health by fostering helpful online communities [29]. Lastly, developing partnerships between educators, mental health specialists, and public health officials is crucial for developing all-encompassing preventative and intervention plans. These collaborations may result in the creation of evidence-based initiatives catered to the unique requirements of adolescents. To guarantee ongoing development and adaptability to the changing digital environment, it is also essential to assess the efficacy of these programs [29].

7. Conclusion

This review underscores the intricate and multifaceted relationship between adolescent substance abuse, mental health conditions, and the pervasive influence of social media. The increasing prevalence of online interactions, particularly among adolescents, has been shown to promote risky behaviours, including substance use, while simultaneously potentiate addiction. Thus, adolescents with high social media engagement face heightened vulnerabilities to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, which is often associated with increased substance abuse. The situation is further complicated by early exposure to addictive substances and the quality of family dynamics, which can either mitigate or exacerbate these risks. The findings from this review emphasize the critical need for integrated, multimodal interventions that address both mental health education and the responsible use of social media. Educational programs that promote digital literacy and mental health awareness, particularly those that empower adolescents to critically evaluate the content they consume, are essential in curbing the menace. Moreover, these interventions should be tailored to different demographics, considering socio-economic status, cultural background, and access to mental health services, to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness across diverse populations.

Further research is imperative to unravel the nuanced links between social media use, mental health, and substance abuse. Such research should explore longitudinal outcomes and investigate how these factors interact across various social and cultural contexts. Understanding these dynamics will not only help in developing more effective prevention strategies but will also provide insight into how policy changes can shape healthier online environments for adolescents. Collaboration between parents, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals is paramount to fostering resilience in adolescents, encouraging healthy behaviours, and mitigating the negative impact of social media. By working together, these stakeholders can create a supportive ecosystem that promotes positive mental health, responsible digital engagement, and a reduction in substance abuse, ultimately contributing to the well-being and development of the next generation.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest noted while conducting the study and in the preparation of this manuscript.

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