

Teens happier with less screen time

Study: Heavy use of phones, social media harmful

The Washington Post

In recent months, Silicon Valley executives have been speaking out about the purposely addictive designs of smartphones and social media, which make them hard to put down for anyone, but particularly teenagers. Now, a new report puts numbers to the warnings, tying a sudden and large drop in adolescents' happiness with the proliferation of smartphones, and finding that the more hours a day teens spend in front of screens, the less satisfied they are.

The report, "Decreases in Psychological Well-Being Among American Adolescents After 2012 and Links to Screen Time During the Rise of Smartphone



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The study shows that teenagers who get between one to five hours of screen time are happier than those who used screens 20 hours or more.

Technology," was published Monday in the journal *Emotion*, using a large national survey of 8th-, 10th- and 12th-graders conducted annually by The University of Michigan.

After rising since the early 1990s, adolescent self-esteem, life satisfaction and happiness

plunged after 2012, the year smartphone ownership reached the 50 percent mark in the United States, the report said. It also found that adolescents' psychological well-being decreased the more hours a week they spent on screens, including the internet, social media, texting,

gaming and video chats. The findings jibe with earlier studies linking frequent screen use and teenage depression and anxiety.

The ubiquity of the devices has mushroomed in the past six years: the percentage of teens who had smartphones jumped from 37 percent in 2012 to 73 percent in 2015 to 89 percent at the end of 2016, according to data from the Pew Research Center and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The study graphed correlations between happiness and screen activities and non-screen activities such as sports, in-person interaction, religious services, print media and homework. For all the non-screen activities, the correlation was positive; for the screen activities it was uniformly negative.

The report's findings were not all dire: teenagers who get a small amount of exposure to screen time, between one and

5 hours a week, are happier than those who get none at all. The least happy ones were those who used screens for 20 or more hours a week.

The greater unhappiness among those with no screen exposure could be due to several factors, said Jean Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University and the study's lead author. "It could be that they are left out of the social scene of high school, that it's very difficult to carry on friendships in high school these days without texting at all or being on social media."

It is also possible that those kids are outliers, she said — teens with special needs or in special education, or those whose screens have been taken away from them by parents.

The happiest teens, according to the study, are those who are above average in face-to-face social interaction time and below average in social media use.



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