

INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS: A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR AN ONLINE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE.

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Introduction and objective

Many teens are reluctant to seek help for health-related problems, mainly because they distrust confidentiality and anonymity in healthcare services (Rideout, 2001; Suzuki & Calzo, 2004), they feel embarrassed, afraid or uncomfortable discussing sensitive health issues with others (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2001), or think they can solve it by themselves (Dubow, 1990). For these reasons, is not surprising that studies such as Borzekowski and Rickert (2001) and Jiménez-Pernett, Oly de Labry-Lima, Bermúdez-Tamayo, García-Gutiérrez, & Salcedo-Sánchez (2010) have found that nearly 50% of teenagers are seeking health information on Internet, and Rideout (2001) have pointed out that this rate was about 70%.

The aim of this study was to explore Internet and Social media use for health purposes in adolescents between 12 and 18 years, their perception of need for help, and their opinion about an online mental health service addressed to meet their needs.

This work is the first step of a larger project whose main objective is to design an online group addressed to adolescents to find health-related information and advice and share opinions and concerns with their peers.

Participants and procedure

158 students (55.7% female; mean age=15.09, SD=1.68; range: 12-18 years old) attending a secondary school of Barcelona (Spain). All students were eligible to participate.

Verbal student assent and passive parental consent were obtained. In May 2011, students completed an anonymous survey of 39 questions during a class period. It took for about 20 minutes to complete the survey.

The survey

Based on previous surveys about internet and social media use in adolescents, we designed a survey with 39 questions grouped into four areas:

Demographics

Internet use: frequency, objectives, internet use for health purposes.

Social Networking: questions about participation in social networks, frequency of use, objectives and satisfaction.

Health and perception of need for help: questions about their health, the presence of problems and worries, the perceived need for help, help-seeking behavior, Internet as a source to meet their health-related needs.

An online health service? Opinion, benefits and downsides:

- 35.4% fairly or very much interested in participating
- 24.7% would observe others' activity (lurker)
- 15.8% would actively participate
- 46.8% would tell friends about its usefulness

Benefits most valued were:

- Finding useful information (68.5%) and advice (47.3%)
- To see other people have problems like me (45%)
- Anonymity: 44.3%
- Confidentiality: 44.3%
- Being free: 47%

Downsides:

- Prefer face to face help: 34.8%
- Distrust others knowing my problems: 36.9%
- Prefer not to reveal my identity: 27.7%
- I don't have time: 23.4%

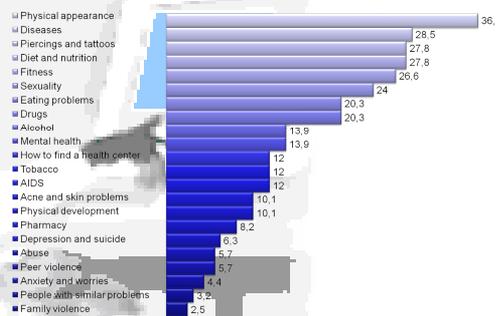
CONCLUSIONS

- 3 of 4 teens use Internet for seeking health-related information, especially concerning physical appearance, diseases, fitness, diet and sexuality.
- Although 84% perceived they had a good or very good health, many of them has sought help for anxiety and worries, or school, romantic, friends or family problems.
- Internet has become one of the primary resources of health-related information for adolescents. Results suggest gender and age differences on internet use, help-seeking behavior and needs for help.
- An online healthcare service would be interesting and useful for adolescents, especially for boys, who seem to use mainly online resources (chats and forums) to ask for help.
- Any online healthcare service should take into account benefits and downsides pointed out by teens.

Internet use for health purposes

- 100% of adolescents use Internet
- 91.1% of adolescents are Social network users (mainly facebook, 48.6% participate in more than 1 SNS)
- 75% of respondents had used Internet for health purposes

Percentage of adolescents who have used Internet to find information about:



Looking for differences...

Girls

- 64.2% use Internet to find information
- Look up more than boys for: Physical appearance and beauty, Piercings and tattoos, Eating problems, Diseases

Boys

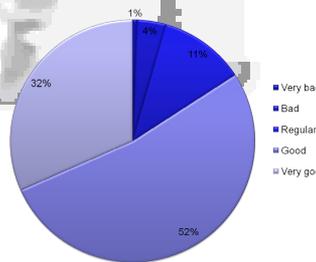
- 35.8% use Internet to find information
- Look up more than girls for: Tobacco, Physical development

Age

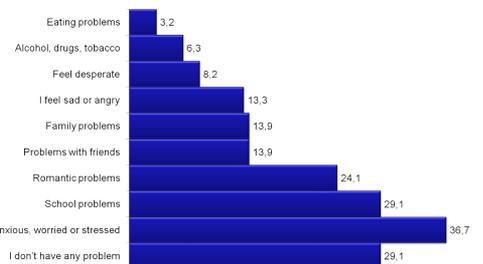
- Olders look for information more than youngsters in all the categories, except for drugs.

Health and perception of need for help

In general, how do you perceive your health?

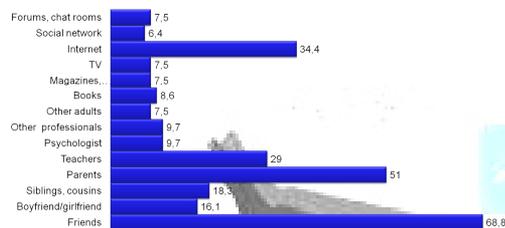


Currently, do you have any problem that worries you very much?



82.3% of respondents experiencing difficulties had sought help.

Who has asked for help?



Looking for differences...

- No differences between boys and girls in percentage of them that seek help.
- Girls ask friends, siblings, cousins and parents for help more than boys.
- Girls ask for help more than boys for sadness and anxiety.
- Boys ask for help more than girls in forums and chats.
- The help-seeking behavior increases with age.
- Olders (17 years) and youngsters (12 years) ask more for help to parents than the others.

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NEXT STEPS

- Expand the survey to others schools in Barcelona.
- Conduct focus groups and semi structured interviews with adolescents to deep in about their needs and concerns.
- Design an online group in order to allow teens to look for information and share knowledge.