SMART CHOICES, HEALTHY LIVES: A RESEARCH INQUIRY INTO ADOLESCENT DIGITAL WELL-BEING AND COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS OF PARENTS & TEACHERS

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has brought about numerous benefits, but it has also raised concerns about its impact on adolescent well-being. This research paper explores stakeholder understanding about adolescent digital well-being and the collaborative efforts of parents and educators in promoting healthy choices. Collaborative efforts between parents and educators are crucial in creating a supportive environment that promotes healthy digital behaviors among adolescents as parents and educators play crucial roles in shaping adolescents' digital behaviors and well-being as indicated by the research of **(Rideout and Robb, 2019)** on parental and educator involvement in digital well-being. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gather data from adolescents, parents, and educators. The findings reveal that adolescents spend a significant amount of time on digital devices, which can have both positive and negative effects on their well-being. While digital technology provides opportunities for learning, socializing, and entertainment, excessive screen time is associated with negative outcomes such as poor sleep, decreased physical activity, and increased risk of mental health issues. The research also highlights the important role of parents and educators in helping adolescents make smart choices about their digital use. Collaborative efforts between parents and educators, such as setting limits on screen time, promoting digital literacy, and fostering open communication, are crucial in supporting adolescents' well-being. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for ongoing education and support for parents and educators to effectively navigate the challenges of the digital age. Overall, this research paper contributes to the growing body of literature on adolescent digital well-being and underscores the importance of collaborative efforts between parents and educators in promoting healthy choices and fostering a positive digital environment for adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescent Digital Well-being, Digital Technology, Parental Mediation, Mental Health

Educator Involvement, Collaborative Efforts, Responsible Digital Citizenship

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent digital well-being has become a critical area of study in today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, with the widespread use of smartphones, social media platforms, and online communication tools. Adolescents are constantly navigating a complex digital environment that can profoundly impact their overall well-being. This encompasses factors such as the time spent on digital devices, the quality of online interactions, the influence of social media on self-esteem and mental health, and the development of digital literacy skills to manage online risks.

Research into adolescent digital well-being aims to explore the intersection between technology use and well-being among young individuals. By examining how digital technology affects various aspects of adolescent life, such as social relationships, academic performance, and mental health, researchers can identify strategies to promote healthy digital habits and address potential risks. Collaborative efforts between parents and educators

are essential in supporting adolescent digital well-being by establishing screen time boundaries, fostering digital literacy skills, and encouraging open communication about online experiences.

The collaborative approach of parents and educators plays a crucial role in empowering adolescents to make informed choices and navigate the digital world responsibly. By working together to promote positive digital well-being, they can help adolescents develop the necessary skills to thrive in the digital age. This research inquiry aims to shed light on the complex interplay between digital technology and adolescent well-being, emphasizing the significance of collaborative efforts in promoting smart choices and healthy lives for young individuals in today's digital era.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In today's digital age, addressing digital well-being in adolescents is crucial due to the significant impact of technology on their lives. Understanding the risks associated with excessive technology use and fostering digital literacy skills are essential for supporting the overall health and development of young individuals.

The study aims to address growing concerns about adolescent digital well-being, emphasize the importance of collaborative efforts between parents and educators, develop evidence-based interventions, and take a holistic approach to adolescent development in the digital age.

The rationale for conducting this study is multifaceted and stems from the following key considerations: Growing Concerns about Adolescent Digital Well-being, Importance of Collaborative Efforts, Need for Evidence-based Interventions, and Holistic Approach to Adolescent Development. There is a growing body of research highlighting the potential negative impact of excessive screen time and digital technology use on adolescent mental health and well-being. Studies have shown associations between high levels of screen time and increased rates of depression, anxiety, and cyberbullying among young people. Understanding and addressing these concerns are essential for promoting healthy development and well-being. Parents and educators play crucial roles in shaping adolescents' digital habits and behaviors. Collaborative efforts between these stakeholders are essential in creating a supportive environment that fosters healthy digital practices among young people. While there is a growing awareness of the importance of adolescent digital well-being, there is a lack of comprehensive research on stakeholders understanding of adolescent well-being in a digital age, especially among parents and teachers to support young people in making smart choices for healthy lives in the digital age. Adolescent well-being is a multifaceted construct that requires a holistic approach considering physical, emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions. Hence, this present study undertakes to address stakeholder understanding of adolescent well-being and role of parents and teachers in provisioning of support and services for adolescent well-being in a digital age.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In recent years, there has been a growing body of research exploring the intersection of adolescent digital well-being and the collaborative efforts of parents and educators. Numerous studies have examined the impact of digital technology on various aspects of adolescent well-being. Research by **Twenge et al. (2018)** on the impact of digital technology on adolescent well-being found a significant association between increased screen time and higher levels of depressive symptoms and suicide-related outcomes among adolescents in the United States. Conversely, **Odgers and Jensen (2020)** argue that the relationship between digital technology use and well-being is complex, influenced by factors such as content consumption, social interactions, and individual differences; research by **Twenge et al. (2019)** on digital well-being and mental health has highlighted the link between screen time and adolescent mental health, showing that excessive use of digital devices is associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety among teenagers. Similarly, studies by **Orben and Przybylski (2019)** have emphasized the need for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between digital technology use and well-being, suggesting that the impact of technology on mental health varies depending on individual factors and context. A study by **Livingstone and Helsper (2008)** highlighted the importance of parental

mediation in managing children's online activities and promoting digital literacy skills. Similarly, **Vannucci et al. (2020)** emphasized the role of educators in fostering critical thinking and responsible digital citizenship among adolescents through school-based interventions. Studies by **Rideout and Robb (2019)** have highlighted the influence of parental involvement on adolescent digital well-being, showing that parents who actively monitor their children's online activities and set limits on screen time contribute to positive outcomes in young people's digital habits.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Sociocultural Perspectives on Adolescent Digital Engagement like: cultural Influence- examining how cultural values shape perceptions of technology; **peer dynamics -** understanding how social networks and peers influence digital behaviors; **educational impact-** exploring the role of schools in promoting digital literacy and responsible use; **technological equity -** addressing disparities in access to technology and digital resources influence adolescents' well-being. Also, the **Psychological Theories Informing Digital Well-being Research like- Cognitive-Behavioral Insights-** Exploring the interconnected nature of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; **Social Learning Influence-** Emphasizing observational learning in shaping digital behaviors; **Self-Efficacy Focus-** Enhancing adolescents' confidence in managing technology use; **Attachment Theory Application -** Understanding how attachment patterns influence online behaviors. Against this theoretical backdrop the present paper describes the widespread threats to adolescents well-being in a digital age.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Adolescent Digital Well-being: Adolescent digital well-being encompasses factors such as screen time, online behavior, digital literacy, and the impact of technology on mental and physical health. It is vital to define this concept to address the challenges and opportunities presented by digital technology in young individuals' lives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How can the digital risks of adolescents be mitigated to promote a safe and positive development of adolescents?

- What are the interventions that may be carried out at stakeholder level (parents, teachers etc.) either at an individual level or at a community level?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- to study the understanding of stakeholders about adolescent well-being in a digital age

- to study the challenges faced by stakeholders in managing digital well-being among adolescents

- to study the role of educators and parents in shaping adolescent well-being in a digital age

- to study the support and services available for adolescents for enhancing adolescent well-being in a digital age

- to address the gaps in adolescent well-being necessary to foster positive development among adolescents' in a digital age.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a mixed-mode research design with quantitative surveys and qualitative interview data to arrive at conclusions.

POPULATION

All stakeholders (teachers, parents of secondary level students in grades 11th and 12th of fully -funded senior - secondary government schools under Directorate of Education, Delhi.

SAMPLE

- 3 schools (01 school from South-east Delhi and 02 schools from Central district of Delhi formed the sample. The 3 schools were randomly selected.

- 10 teachers teaching in grades 9th -12th consisted the sample. The teachers were selected on the basis of purposive sampling as only those teachers were involved in the study who were familiar with usage of ICT.

- 08 parents comprised the sample selected on basis of purposive sampling as only those parents who had basic familiarity of ICT knowledge was included.

- 35 students (11 girls and 24 boys) from grades 11th and 12th irrespective of stream, from Arts, Commerce and Science comprised the sample. Students were selected on random basis.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES USED IN THE STUDY

- Interview schedule: An Interview schedule was developed by the researcher to collect data from teachers and parents.

- Focus-Group Interviews: A focus -group was also done with 3teachers and 2 parents from one of the sampled schools for a deeper insight and understanding. This was also done as part of triangulation and to enhance credibility of data.

- Questionnaire: A Questionnaire in the form of multiple choice (survey) and Information Blank was used to collect data from the students. Hence, the questionnaire consisted of closed and open- ended items.

Ethical Considerations: Informed consent taken in the form of verbal cues was considered. The respondents were assured of confidentiality and use of data for research purpose only.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Thematic analysis was undertaken after familiarization of data. Codes were provided after themes were extracted from the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stakeholders understanding about adolescent well-being in a digital age
In order to obtain the above objective, the responses of stakeholders (parents, teachers and students) were clubbed together to arrive at findings.

The responses from teachers like *"happy, healthy and usage of proper screen time"* and students' responses like *"number of hours of screen time, healthy habits of social media etc."* did reveal a cursory understanding about adolescent digital well- being. Parents **had not responded** to this and this reveals a striking finding that parents were unaware of the term "adolescent digital well-being". This calls for attention to sensitizing parents especially of the significance of adolescent well-being in a digital age.

Challenges faced by stakeholders in managing digital well-being among adolescents
In terms of challenges faced by stakeholders in managing digital well-being among adolescents Table 1 depicts the challenges faced by parents, teachers as well as students.

Table 1: Challenges faced by Stakeholders (teachers, parents and students)

Sl. No.	Challenges faced by Stakeholders (teachers, parents and students)	Responses N= 53	
		(no.)	(%)
1	Cyberbullying and Online Harassment	47	87
2	Excessive Screen Time and Digital Addiction	53	100
3	Privacy and Security Concerns	33	62
4	Impact of social media on Mental Health	46	87
5	Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills	19	36

It is evident from **Table 1** that stakeholders are faced with challenges in managing digital well-being among adolescents. 100 per cent respondents surveyed and interviewed reflected that "excessive screen time and digital addiction" is a prime challenge. Teachers and parents are unaware about how best to deal with such a concern. In the words of a parent,

"Humare bachche humse jyadaa internet jaante...ussi mein lage rahta… pack letehain…paise bhi bahut kharchhote…hum dete…school ki padhai ki wajah se…" *(our children are more aware of internet compared to us…. they remain addicted to it…. buy internet (data) packs…. financial wastage for us…. we purchase/ provide packs due to school related work)*

Teachers are of the opinion that "the internet is a revolution and the digital generation has to remain involved as for even simple financial transactions apps like Paytm are used".

Table 1 also reveals that "cyberbullying and Online Harassment" is a challenge among 87 per cent respondents (47 respondents). During the interview responses of teachers and parents and an analysis of open-ended responses of students it was revealed that cyberbullying and online harassment takes a mental toll on health and well-being of adolescents. Research by **Hinduja and Patchin (2018)** also corroborates this finding that prevalence of "cyberbullying and online safety impacts adolescent well-being.

Table 1 also reveals that "privacy and Security Concerns" is a challenge for 33 per cent respondents. Teachers were of the opinion that "*young children / adolescents are vulnerable to online risks and various online activities as they are mostly unaware of cyber risks*". The combined responses of teachers and parents also revealed that "adolescents are also embarrassed to report cyber cases if they are harassed and are in danger of being victimized".

43 per cent respondents revealed that they face a challenge related to social media impact upon mental health. The interview responses of parents and teachers as well as the open -ended responses from the Questionnaire revealed that social media had "*a poor, negative influence on adolescents as adolescents do not sleep at proper time and remain awake at night… they give the impression that they are doing academic work but …. apne dosto se baat Krte hain… time brbaad hota hai….* (*they chat with their friends waste time*). "*Addressing self-esteem and body image issues"* was a major theme adolescents' were challenged with as part of social media influence on them as opined by parents and teachers. The adolescent's responses revealed that "*sometimes they looked for positive role models if a sports person triumphed but they majorly took to social media to keep up with the latest among their friends and this had positive as well as negative influence on them"*.

In terms of "*digital literacy and critical thinking skills*" only 19 per cent of the respondents opined it as a challenge. This was the response from the teachers and students and parents did not respond to this. In a response to an item choice in the survey questionnaire the student responses revealed the "the importance of

navigating the online world responsibly". Research by **Livingstone and Third (2017)** has emphasized the importance of digital literacy education in equipping adolescents with the skills to navigate the digital world effectively. Their work underscores the need for collaboration between educators, parents, and policymakers in integrating digital literacy into school curricula and supporting students in developing critical thinking skills and media literacy.

The analysis of data revealed that by exploring these aspects, stakeholders can gain valuable insights into adolescent digital behaviors, challenges, and well-being, paving the way for collaborative efforts to promote a healthy digital environment for young individuals. Research by **Przybylski and Weinstein (2017)** suggested the implementation of evidence-based guidelines for screen time and digital use, tailored to the developmental needs of adolescents. Furthermore, **Rideout (2019)** emphasized the importance of media literacy education in helping adolescents critically evaluate and navigate digital content.

ROLE OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN SHAPING ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING IN A DIGITAL AGE

The paper attempted to study the role of stakeholders (parents and teachers) in shaping adolescent well-being in a digital age. The responses indicated parental awareness i.e. communication is key as most of the time parental influence can shape or model adolescent behaviour and thoughts. The up-bringing of students in different households and the different home environments they grow up in can act as catalyst if parents are on the vigil and mentor their children. Future research in this field should focus on longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of digital technology on adolescent well-being **(Twenge et al., 2018).** Moreover, collaborative efforts should be made to develop educational programs for parents and educators **(Livingstone & Helsper, 2008)** and implement school-based interventions **(Vannucci et al., 2020)** aimed at promoting responsible digital citizenship and mental health support services **(Lee et al., 2021).**

Table 2under the theme "healthy digital habits" reflects the role parents and teachers can play in shaping the adolescent well-being as revealed through the combined interview responses during analysis.

Table 2: Strategies for Parents and Teachers to role model Adolescent Digital well-being

S.No.	Theme	Healthy Digital Habits - Strategies	Responses (N = 18)	
			(No.)	%
1	Establishing Boundaries	Setting guidelines for screen time and online activities.	18	100
2	Encouraging Communication	Open dialogues on online safety and digital literacy.	12	67
3	Supervision and Monitoring	Active involvement in monitoring online interactions	18	100
4	Promoting Positive Behavior	Emphasizing respectful online conduct and responsible sharing	09	50
5	Collaboration with Educators	Working together to support digital literacy initiatives	15	83

Table 2 indicates the healthy digital habits that parents and teachers may use as strategies for promoting adolescent digital well-being. Research by Hinduja and Patchin (2018) underscores the importance of collaborative efforts between parents, educators, and policymakers in addressing cyberbullying and promoting online safety for young people. Additionally, studies by Kowalski et al. (2018) have highlighted the role of parental involvement in mitigating the negative effects of cyberbullying on adolescents. It is indicated through

Table 2 that collaboration is a key component that stakeholders (teachers and parents) need to focus upon for a positive development of adolescent well-being.

Support and services available for adolescents for enhancing adolescent well-being in a digital age
In terms of support and services available to adolescents for enhancing digital well-being in a digital age the interview responses from parents and teachers revealed the

"Necessity of setting up counselling units in every district with special call -centres to maintain privacy". Moreover, "such measures need to be widely publicized in school halls and notice boards".

However, "care and caution should also be exercised that such agencies should be monitored by government or reputed counselling agencies / centres or else there is the danger of adolescents being made a prey of such unauthorized centres. The student responses indicated that "yuvaa centres and roadside billboards do provide information for seeking support or help".

Parental responses also revealed that "schools are the best places for counselling and mentoring them as students look upto their teachers as their role models…. (Bachhe teacher ko maante hain…. school mein facility hone chahiye jaankari keliye) ……"

Addressing the gaps in adolescent well-being necessary to foster positive development among adolescents' in a digital age
The combined responses of all stakeholders indicated that parents, teachers and students should collaborate with each other and *"active involvement through building advocacy transparent and friendly, non-judgmental strategies gaps in understanding the adolescent well-being must be addressed"*. Collaborative efforts between parents, educators, and other stakeholders are essential for promoting adolescent digital well-being. A study by **Boyd and Hargittai (2013)** explored the challenges and opportunities of parental involvement in adolescents' online activities, emphasizing the need for open communication and mutual trust. Additionally, **Lee et al. (2021)** highlighted the importance of collaborative partnerships between schools and mental health professionals in addressing digital-related mental health issues among adolescents.

The responses of the stakeholders towards addressing the gaps indicated the following as revealed through **Table 3**.

Table 3: Strategies for Addressing the Gaps for fostering adolescent digital well-being

S. No.	Theme	Healthy Digital Habits - Strategies	Responses (N = 53)	
			(No.)	%
1	Active Involvement	Participating in digital activities with adolescents, transparent, non-judgmental manner	53	100
2	Restrictive Mediation	Setting clear rules and boundaries for device usage	32	60
3	Guidance and Support	Offering advice on critical thinking and privacy protection.	53	100
4	Encouraging Reflection	Promoting self-awareness in online interactions	27	50
5	Empowerment and Trust	Building autonomy and fostering responsible digital choices	53	100

Table 3 above indicates that active involvement, proper guidance and support and trust between and among all stakeholders is the way forward for addressing the gaps in adolescent digital well-being. By drawing on the insights from the research findings and review studies stakeholders can work together to create a supportive environment that prioritizes the holistic development of adolescents and equips them with the skills and resilience needed to thrive in an increasingly digital world. Further research and collaboration are essential to continue advancing our understanding of adolescent digital well-being and developing effective interventions to promote positive outcomes for young people.

CONCLUSION

Adolescent digital well-being is a critical area of research that has garnered increasing attention in recent years. As young people navigate the complexities of the digital world, understanding the impact of technology on their well-being and the collaborative efforts of parents and educators in promoting healthy digital habits is essential. By delving into the role of parents in nurturing adolescent digital well-being, stakeholders can uncover effective strategies and collaborative approaches to cultivate a healthy digital environment for young individuals. Empowering parents to guide their adolescents towards mindful technology use is crucial for fostering positive digital behaviors and overall well-being in today's digital landscape.

In brief, promoting holistic adolescent development in the digital age requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. By working together, teachers and parents can create a supportive and empowering environment that prioritizes the well-being of adolescents. Through education, communication, and proactive measures, stakeholders can help adolescents make smart choices, develop critical digital skills, and lead healthy lives in an increasingly digital world. Ultimately, the goal is to nurture the holistic development of adolescents, ensuring that they thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially in the digital age.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Societies must review the ways in which families engage in providing well-being of adolescents, especially in an unequal society where many parents from disadvantaged families are clueless about what their adolescent child is viewing or engaged in.

- Accessible, confidential and secured hands-on easy to use, adolescent friendly counselling centres to provide the necessary support to adolescents to log-in their redressal and grievances must be provided at schools and special counselling centres.

- Sensitizing parents, teachers and students too about the need for maintaining digital wellbeing for a holistic development of personality.

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