

Background

In the U.S., increased levels of adolescent loneliness have run parallel to increased social media use

- Adolescents' levels of loneliness doubled from 2012 to 2018, while in-person interactions with peers diminished by 42%
- Loneliness further increased after the COVID-19 pandemic
- Now, about half of adolescents report feeling lonely



- In 2022, adolescents reported being constantly online twice as often compared to 2014-15
- 95 % of U.S. teens use YouTube, 67% TikTok, 62% Instagram, and 59% Snapchat



Background

Loneliness is a stress factor for our brain/body

Adolescent loneliness is a risk factor for:

- Mental health problems
- Psychiatric symptoms
- Poor health

- Previous studies showed that, in adolescents, poor social relationships showed comparable effects to physical inactivity on inflammation risk, a by-product of high cortisol levels.

- Poor relationship patterns initiate stress response cascades that persist later in life

- Protective effects of good social connections against stress are larger in adolescence: “adolescent social connections differentiate health risks in young adults, long before symptoms or overt signs of disease emerge”



Background

Why studying loneliness and social media use in adolescence?

- During adolescence, the most relevant social context for well-being shifts from family to peer relationships
- The adolescent brain reacts differently to social interactions with peers than children and adults, and it is highly susceptible to the experience of stress.
- Adolescent loneliness (as a source of stress) and mental well-being (a fundamental element of resilience) critically depend on the quality of social connections with strong ties, like peers and friends
- How peer relationships have been transformed by the social media context is a vitally important matter that needs further understanding

