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LGBT+ Teens, Social Media Use & Depressive Symptoms

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BACKGROUND

- Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr play a particularly important role in the queer adolescent self-construction process.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
- LGBT+ (an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and other non-heterosexual, non-cisgender sexual and gender identities) youth access social media more frequently than their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts:
  - to learn about their identities,2, 9, 10, 11
  - to create supplemental support networks online,1, 4, 6, 9
  - to explore new forms of self-expression,3, 2, 4, 9
- This increased use of SNSs exposes them to additional forms of discrimination, such as cyberbullying
- This can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression or lowered self-esteem.2, 7, 8, 12, 13

METHODS

- The researchers utilized a snowball sampling method
- The measurement tool was an anonymous, 27-question online SNAP survey consisting of two existing quantitative measures:
  - The Social Network Sites (SNSs) Usage Questionnaire
  - The Pediatric Depressive Symptoms Survey
- Surveys were distributed via the researchers’ personal social media accounts & emails to local support agencies
- The researchers received a total of 56 completed questionnaires
- Based on an initial assessment of the data & exclusion criteria, n = 34
- The researchers utilized SPSS 24 to conduct Pearson’s Correlation Analyses

RESULTS

- The majority of respondents identified as 16 year old white, bisexual females
- There were a total of six moderate, significant correlations between the following variables:
  - “How frequently do you use SNSs?” & “In the past seven days, it was hard for me to have fun” (r = .361, p = .039)
  - “How frequently do you update your profile image?” & “In the past seven days, I felt alone” (r = -.535, p = .001)
  - “How frequently do you visit your friends’ homepage?” & “In the past seven days, I felt unhappy” (r = .452, p = .009)
  - “How frequently do you update your friends’ homepage?” & “In the past seven days, I felt like I couldn’t do anything right” (r = .386, p = .029)
  - “How frequently do you update your status?” & “In the past seven days, I felt unhappy” (r = -.371, p = .033)
  - “How frequently do you update your status?” & “In the past seven days, I felt alone” (r = -.368, p = .035)

DISCUSSION

- The research study findings, although tentative due to small sample size, support current literature stating that there is a significant link between social networking site use and the prevalence of depressive symptoms in LGBT+ youth.
- Replication with a larger sample is needed to confirm these findings
- The researchers recommend the use of a mixed-method approach to gain access to qualitative data on the subject

REFERENCES