

Abstract 1:

Social media usage patterns and the perception of its effects on academic performance and mental health of medical students at the University of Jaffna

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Background and objective: Social media usage is at its all-time highest. Social media usage affects the academic performance and mental health of students in both positive and negative ways. This study aimed to determine the social media usage patterns and assess perceived effects on academic performance and mental health among medical students of University of Jaffna.

Methods: This descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna. Stratified random sampling was used to get proportionate representation from 42nd, 43rd and 44th batches. Data were collected with a direct self-administered questionnaire. Frequencies, percentages and chi-square tests were used in the analysis with SPSS (v26).

Results: In total, 320 students participated (response rate 75.1%). Mean age was 24.3 years (SD = 1.45). Most participants were females (63.7%) and reported daily screen time between 1 and 4 hours (61.3%). Almost all participants (97.5%) used smartphones to access social media, mainly YouTube (93.5%) followed by Facebook (68.4%) and Instagram (53.4%). In the sample, 41.6% believed that social media has a positive impact on academic performance. They reported positive experience with social media for visual learning (77.2%), resources sharing (75.6%), collaborative learning (68.4%) and quick doubt resolution (68.2%). Many students believe that social media usage reduces focus (78.2%), decreases productivity (70.3%) and increases procrastination (59.1%). Majority (72.5%) of the students expressed that social media affects their mental health, while 47.8% of the students believed that social media enhances connections and 41.0% felt performance pressure. Greater screen time was significantly associated with anxiety score ($p < 0.001$) and irritability score ($p = 0.018$).

Conclusions and recommendations: Though a large proportion of the students' perception on the effects of social media on academic performance was positive, mental health of the students may be negatively affected by increased screen time on social media. Monitoring of screen time and taking frequent breaks from social media may alleviate the effects on mental health.

Keywords: Social media, Mental health, Medical students, Jaffna