

Healthcare providers' perspectives on adolescent technology use during the COVID-19 pandemic



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Introduction

- Adolescent screen time increased by 52% during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Parents and adolescents seek support about technology use from healthcare providers and psychologists
- Little is known about healthcare providers' recommendations about technology use during this time

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to understand how healthcare providers discussed technology use with adolescent patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

This study was approved by the University of Wisconsin–Madison IRB.

Setting and Subjects

- Adolescent healthcare providers (i.e., pediatricians, psychiatrists, etc.) were recruited via email and snowball sampling
- After informed consent, participants were interviewed via Zoom

Semi-Structured Interview

Participants were asked to share their experiences addressing technology use with adolescent patients during the COVID-19 pandemic

Analysis

- Qualitative thematic analysis was conducted by four researchers with an inductive approach to codebook development
- Transcripts were coded and themes were created utilizing the constant comparative method

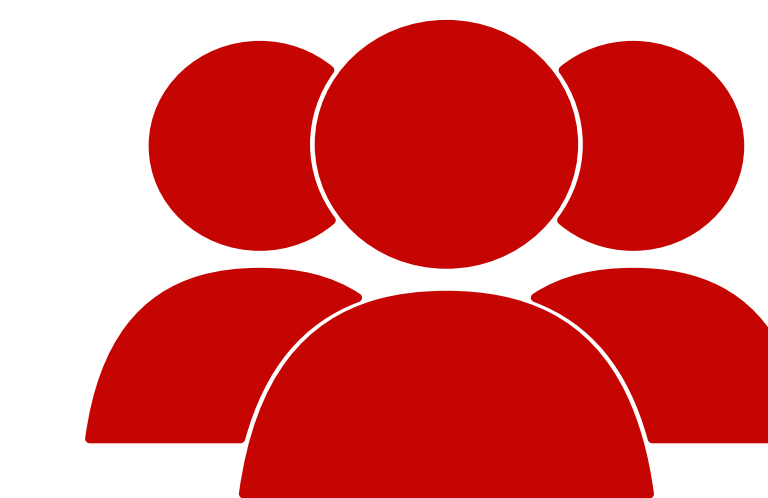
Descriptive Data

- N = 19 participants were interviewed
- Average number of years practicing = 14.1 (SD = 8.4)

	n	%
Gender		
Female	12	63.2
Male	5	26.3
Non-binary	1	5.3
Race		
White	12	63.2
Asian	2	10.5
Black	2	10.5
More than one race	2	10.5
Prefer not to answer	1	5.3
Practice Setting		
Urban	13	68.4
Suburban	5	26.3
Rural	3	15.8

Results

- Most providers mentioned that they saw **increased reliance on social media and technology** among their adolescent patients
- Two themes emerged to describe providers' observations of their adolescent patients' technology use during the pandemic:
 1. Providers felt **like time spent online was a weaker indicator of problematic internet use**
 2. Adolescents were using social media as means to socialize with one another



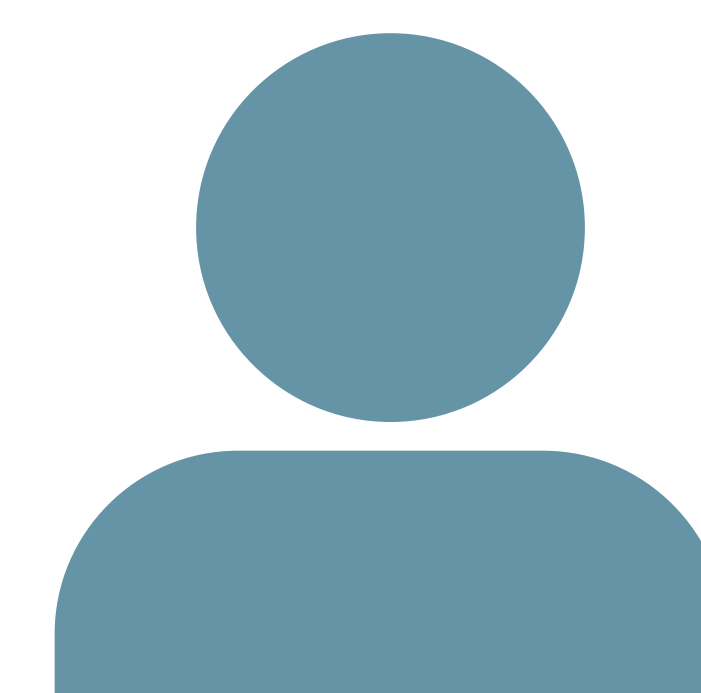
"students are on their devices much more, particularly during COVID"

"a hundred percent of our middle schoolers and high schoolers are online more so than any other activity right now, you know."



"I haven't recommended being as restrictive if it seems like it's been a positive interaction for the child to keep their connections going."

"So I think during the pandemic especially, I've been encouraging parents to be a little bit more liberal with screen time if they're using it for kind of interactions. So I try to make a difference or differentiate between, week, kind of aimless scrolling versus using a device for connection. So something like playing video games with a group of friends I consider to be a different activity than just kind of scrolling Twitter."



"I know that a lot of patients were, um, keeping in touch with their friends via Snapchat, like, while they were in quarantine and, you know, not able to hang out in person. Um, so, I think it's more that I've become more aware of it and less about that they're doing anything differently"

"So much of the socialization is happening via the internet and mobile apps... so I have been a lot more lax about my recommendations in this time."

Conclusions

Main Findings

- Healthcare providers observed an increase in reliance on technology use among adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Providers are recognizing a more nuanced relationship between adolescents and their use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, moving beyond time-related assessment and recommendation for technology use
- Much of the increased social media and technology use was for social connection during quarantine and social distancing

Limitations

- The majority of providers' interviewed practiced in a n urban setting, so findings may not be representative to all adolescent healthcare providers

Implications

- Healthcare providers and psychologists should be aware of the shift of recommendations about adolescents' social media and technology use moving away from measuring screen time
- Providers who work with adolescents should be aware of how their relationship to technology might have changed due to the pandemic and if there are residual effects or habits that are still impacting them

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