

# “There is a very strong positive correlation between the hours spent on digital technology and higher stress and depression.”

One in two teenagers feels they are “missing out” on the seemingly perfect lives that others portray through social media, the survey by Australian Psychology Society found.

Teens also feel they are having less “rewarding” experiences than their friends.

Other key findings included teens worrying about friends having fun without them and feeling anxious if they did not know what their friends were doing.

This year was the first time the study explored the impact of social media on behaviour and wellbeing.

Flinders University senior social work lecturer Dr Mubarak Rahamathulla said FOMO was opening the door to more concerning feelings, like anxiety and depression.

“FOMO is a real thing — my research and research all over the world is repeatedly indicating that it is a fact,” he said.

“There is a very strong positive correlation between the hours spent on digital technology and higher stress and depression.”

Dr Rahamathulla said it was up to parents and policymakers to make sure teenagers were getting enough information about what is and is not “real” in cyber space, as well as methods to cope with the social and emotional pressures of social media.

“[Teenagers] are getting confused between cyber world and real world,” he said.

“I think we need, and we have a moral responsibility as a society, to help them to understand how the roles of these two different worlds are working.”

## HALF OF ALL TEENS ON SOCIAL MEDIA BEFORE BED

The survey found that social media dominated the lives of many teenagers, with over half (53 per cent) of Australian teens reporting that they used social networking sites for 15 minutes before bed every night.

Sydney student Jessica Sahay, 17, spends over an hour browsing through Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat before she goes to sleep.

She has tried to reduce her usage after feeling worn out from constantly being connected.

“During exams, I tried to reduce the time I spent on social media because it felt quite distracting when you saw what other people were doing,” she said.

Consumer psychologist Adam Ferrier said the way Jessica felt was not a new phenomenon.

“We’ve always been scared of missing out on the occasional party or seeing friends doing other stuff which you’re involved in, but with social media, that feeling has increased in intensity dramatically,” Dr Ferrier said.

“So there’s always something happening which you’re not a part of.”

More than half of young respondents in the survey said they had felt worried, jealous and anxious after finding out they had been left out of a gathering through pictures or status updates on social media.

“If I’m not invited to a party or to the beach with my friends and I thought I was close with them and then you see a picture on Snapchat, Facebook or Instagram ... you think to yourself, ‘why am I not invited?’” Jessica said.

“You feel a bit jealous and the next time you see

them it gets a bit tense but that stuff happens all the time.”

The survey found that a fear of missing out does not stop once people enter adulthood, with the survey noting that those aged 18-35 reported the highest feelings of being left out amongst all adults.

Dr Ferrier said that people needed to be aware of the positive and negative impacts of social media.

“It makes it harder for people to feel happy and have gratitude for their own lives and that’s quite a debilitating and serious thing,” he said.

“We’ve got an omnipresent force here that’s making people feel less satisfied and less happy with their own lives.”

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