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Mental Health in Adolescence and the Problematic Use of Internet - Where Are We Going?

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ABSTRACT

Mental health disorders increased in adolescents in recent years, with internet addiction being an important risk factor for the development of these conditions. It would be important to have a real method of age verification when adolescents have access to internet in order to select contents appropriate for their age.

Keywords: Mental health, Depression, Anxiety, Adolescence, Internet addiction

1. Editorial

The prevalence of mental health disorders is increasing in adolescents¹. It is known that cognitive and emotional changes occur during adolescence², with nearly 20% of the teenagers suffering from any mental or behavioral disorders in this period³.

Individual vulnerabilities (e.g. perfectionism traits and low self-esteem), as well as family issues (e.g. bad relationship between family members, poor economic conditions and adverse childhood experiences) are important risk factors for mental disorders in adolescents².

COVID-19 pandemic was also responsible for the increase of depressive and anxiety symptoms in adolescents^{1,4}. Confinement, physical distancing, school closures and the use of mask contributed to sadness, psychological stress and poor mental health outcomes in adolescents, making them less able to use coping strategies to overcome social difficulties⁵.

Long-COVID, a condition defined by physical or psychological symptoms 4 to 8 weeks after Severe Acute

Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infection, might be also responsible for some of the mental issues among adolescents, such as concentration and sleep problems⁶.

Internet addiction increased among adolescents over the years⁷ and is related to the development of psychiatric conditions such as anxiety and depression, as well as behavioral, body image and eating disorders. Internet addiction has been also shown to be related to sleep disturbances⁷. It negatively impacts social relationships, being a risk for impulsivity, aggressive behavior, loneliness and low self-esteem⁷.

In order to prevent the occurrence of mental health issues, adolescents are encouraged to practice sport and participate in outdoor activities⁷.

2. Conclusion

It would be important to have a real method of age verification, through official means, using an online verifiable identity document, when adolescents enter the internet, so that they only have access to content appropriate for their age. If

this measure became universal, adolescents would probably not feel discriminated and they would have better psychological development in the future.

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