

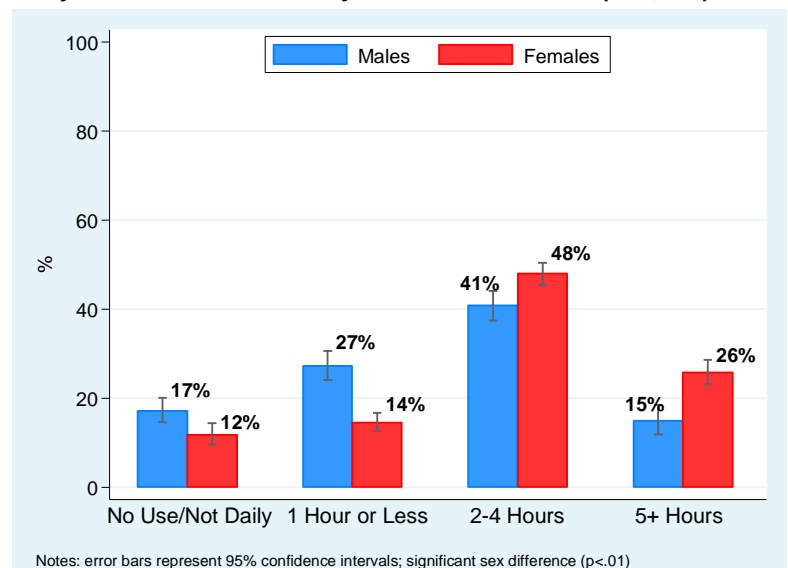
# Social Media Use and Mental Health Among Students in Ontario

This *eBulletin* presents mental health indicators according to hours spent daily either browsing or posting on social media among students in Ontario. Findings are also presented by sex. Data are from the 2017 cycle of the *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS)*. The OSDUHS is a cross-sectional, anonymous survey of students in grades 7–12 in Ontario’s publicly funded schools, with the purpose of monitoring drug use, mental health, physical health, gambling, and other risk behaviours. Conducted every two years since 1977, the OSDUHS is the longest ongoing school survey in Canada and one of the longest running in the world.

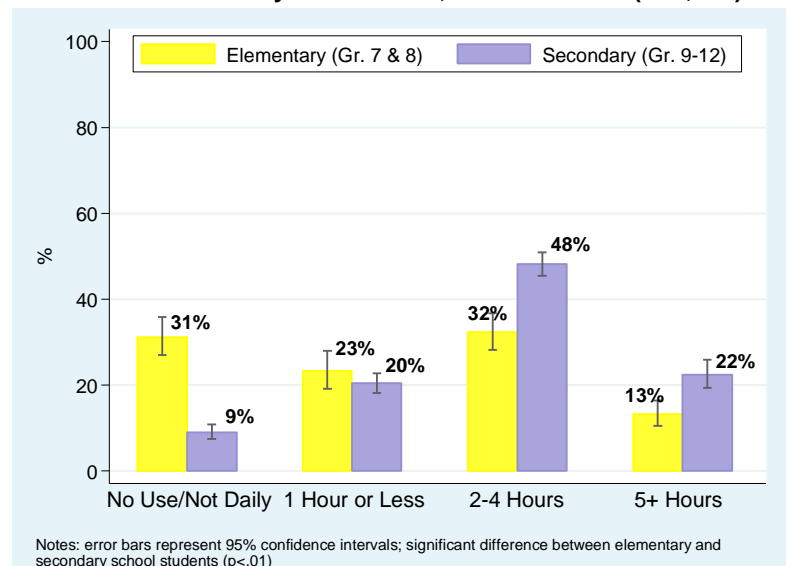
## Daily Social Media Use

About 15% of Ontario students in grades 7–12 report not using/visiting social media sites at all or not on a daily basis, 21% report that they usually used social media for less than one hour or about an hour daily, 44% usually use between two to four hours daily, and 20% usually use five hours or more daily. As presented in Figure 1, females are significantly more likely to use social media for more hours per day compared with males (e.g. 26% of females used for at least 5 hours daily compared with 15% of males). There is also a significant difference by grade level. As presented in Figure 2, high school students are significantly more likely to use social media for more hours per day compared with elementary school students (e.g., 22% of high school students use for at least five hours daily compared with 13% of students in grades 7 and 8).

**Figure 1**  
Percentage of Ontario Students in Grades 7–12 Reporting Daily Use of Social Media by Sex, 2017 OSDUHS (n=6,364)



**Figure 2**  
Percentage of Ontario Students in Grades 7–12 Reporting Daily Use of Social Media by Grade Level, 2017 OSDUHS (n=6,364)

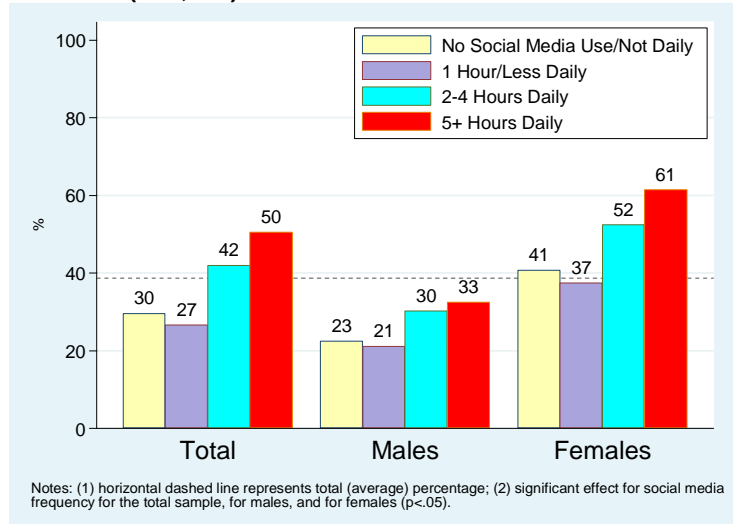


## Mental Health and Social Media Use

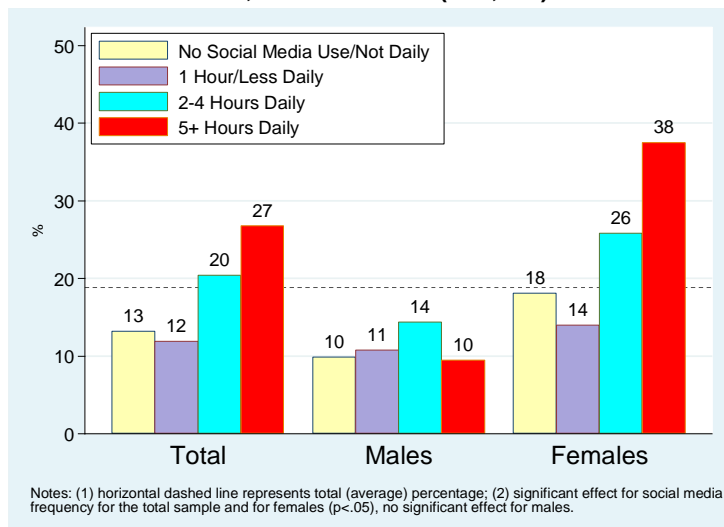
There are significant associations between hours spent on social media and mental health indicators measured in the OSDUHS. Among the total sample of students, those who report spending two or more hours per day on social media – and especially those spending five or more hours per day – are significantly more likely to rate their mental health as “poor” or fair” (Figure 3), to indicate moderate-to-serious psychological distress (Figure 4), and to report suicidal ideation (Figure 5) compared with students who spend less time on social media or none at all. When examining the associations between increasing social media use and poorer mental health by sex, significant associations are evident for females. Males show a significant association only for moderate-to-serious psychological distress, but not for poor/fair self-rated mental health or suicidal ideation. Significant associations between increasing social media use and poorer mental health are evident among elementary students and secondary students (data not graphed).

It is important to note here that, given the cross-sectional nature of the data, causality and temporality cannot be determined.

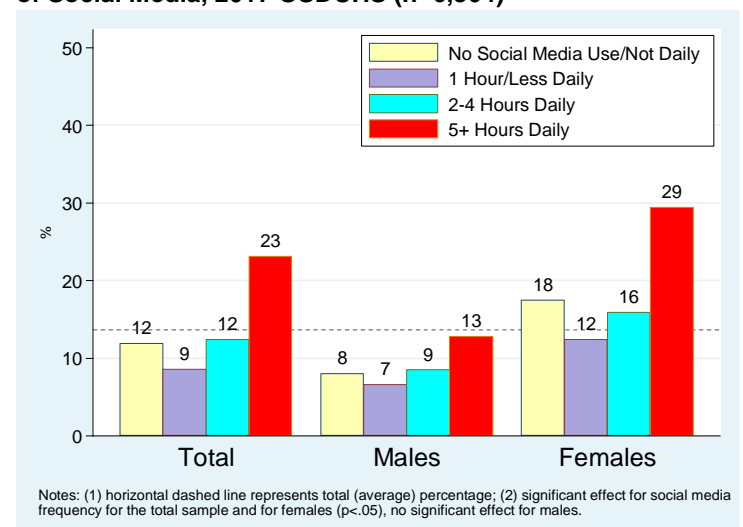
**Figure 4**  
**Percentage of Ontario Students in Grades 7–12 Indicating Moderate-to-Serious Psychological Distress in the Past Month According to Daily Use of Social Media, 2017 OSDUHS (n=6,364)**



**Figure 3**  
**Percentage of Ontario Students in Grades 7–12 Rating Their Mental Health as “Poor” or “Fair” According to Daily Use of Social Media, 2017 OSDUHS (n=6,364)**



**Figure 5**  
**Percentage of Ontario Students in Grades 7–12 Reporting Suicidal Ideation in the Past Year According to Daily Use of Social Media, 2017 OSDUHS (n=6,364)**



## Methods

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) is an Ontario-wide survey of elementary/middle school students in grades 7 and 8 and secondary school students in grades 9 through 12. This repeated cross-sectional survey has been conducted every two years since 1977. The 2017 survey, which used a stratified (region by school level) two-stage (school, class) cluster design, was based on 11,435 students in grades 7 through 12 in 764 classes, in 214 schools, from 52 public and Catholic school boards. Self-completed questionnaires, which promote anonymity, were group administered by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University in classrooms between November 2016 and June 2017. Sixty-one percent (61%) of selected schools, 94% of selected classes, and 61% of eligible students in participating classes completed the survey. Students in French-language schools completed French questionnaires. The social media and mental health measures were asked of a random half sample of students and therefore the analyses presented here were based on 6,364 students in grades 7-12. All estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests accommodated the complex survey design. Significant differences according to daily social media use among the total sample held even after adjusting for sex and grade.

## Measures & Terminology

- **Daily social media use** was measured with the question "About how many hours a day do you usually spend on social media sites or apps, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, Ask.fm, either posting or browsing?" Response options ranged from "Don't use the Internet" to "7 or more hours a day."
- **Poor or fair self-rated mental health** was measured with the question "How would you rate your mental or emotional health?" Response options were "Excellent," "Very good," "Good," "Fair," or "Poor."
- **Psychological distress** (symptoms of depression and anxiety during the past four weeks) was measured with the *Kessler 6-Item Psychological Distress Scale* (K6). A moderate-to-serious level of distress was defined as a score of eight or higher of a maximum 24.
- **Suicidal ideation** was measured with the question "In the last 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?" Response options were "Yes" or "No."
- **95% CI (confidence interval)** shows the probable accuracy of the estimate – that is, with repeated sampling, 95 of 100 sample CIs would contain the "true" population value. Design-based confidence intervals account for characteristics of the sample design (i.e., stratification, clustering, weighting).
- **Statistically significant difference** refers to a difference between (or among) estimates that is statistically different at the  $p < .05$  level, or lower, after adjusting for the sampling design. A finding of statistical significance implies that any differences are not likely due to chance alone; it is not necessarily a finding of public health importance.

## Source

Boak, A., Hamilton, H. A., Adlaf, E. M., Henderson, J. L., & Mann, R. E. (2018). *The mental health and well-being of Ontario students, 1991–2017: Detailed findings from the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS)* (CAMH Research Document Series No. 47). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. [Available online at [www.camh.ca/osduhs](http://www.camh.ca/osduhs)]

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