



Social Media Exposure and Mental Health during COVID-19 Outbreak

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INTRODUCTION

Frequent social media exposure in a pandemic may lead to depression and anxiety in the population.

AIM

To investigate the relationship of social media exposure with the prevalence of depression and anxiety among the general public in Lahore, Pakistan during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Table 1: Participants characteristics and social media exposure.

Demographics	Social Media Exposure				p-value
	Total N (%)	Less N (%)	Sometimes N (%)	Frequently N (%)	
Overall	516 (100)	22 (4.2)	47 (9.1)	447 (86.6)	
Gender					0.003*
Male	203 (39.3)	13 (2.5)	27 (5.2)	163 (31.6)	
Female	313 (60.7)	9 (1.7)	20 (3.9)	284 (55.0)	
Marital Status					0.001*
Single	427 (82.8)	16 (3.1)	37 (7.2)	374 (72.5)	
Married	77 (14.9)	4 (0.8)	10 (1.9)	63 (12.2)	
Separated/Divorced	4 (0.8)	2 (0.4)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.4)	
Prefer not to say	8 (1.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (1.6)	
Area					0.048*
Urban	471 (91.3)	17 (3.3)	42 (8.1)	412 (79.8)	
Rural	45 (8.7)	5 (1.0)	5 (1.0)	35 (6.8)	
Education					0.000**
Illiterate	1 (0.2)	1 (0.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	
Upto Grade 5	2 (0.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.4)	
Upto Matric	12 (2.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.2)	11 (2.1)	
Graduation	214 (41.5)	15 (2.9)	18 (3.5)	181 (35.1)	
Professional degree	287 (55.6)	6 (1.2)	28 (5.4)	253 (49.0)	
Occupation					0.004*
Student	276 (53.5)	11 (2.1)	26 (5.0)	239 (46.3)	
House wife	17 (5.3)	1 (0.2)	4 (0.8)	12 (2.3)	
Unemployed	36 (7.0)	3 (0.6)	4 (0.8)	29 (5.6)	
Unskilled worker	10 (1.9)	1 (0.2)	0 (0.0)	9 (1.7)	
Skilled workers	74 (14.3)	6 (1.2)	11 (2.1)	57 (11.0)	
Healthcare workers	103 (20.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.4)	101 (19.6)	

METHODS

A web-based cross-sectional study was conducted via Google forms in June – July, 2020 among Pakistani citizens aged ≥ 18 years. Purposive convenient sampling was done. The questionnaire constituted socio-demographic data, information regarding social media exposure and scales to assess depression and anxiety. Social media exposure was measured by a questionnaire based on previous literature while depression and anxiety were measured by WHO-Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) scale respectively. Chi-square test was used to examine differences in depression and anxiety between groups and their associations with their social media use.



The psychological effects of social media exposure are not only limited to its excessive use but also on the authenticity of the information provided.

Table 2: Prevalence of Depression, Anxiety and the combination of Depression & Anxiety with social media exposure

	Social Media Exposure				p-Value
	Total N (%)	Less N (%)	Sometimes N (%)	Frequently N (%)	
Depression (WHO-5 score <13)					
Present	239 (46.3)	7 (1.4)	10 (1.9)	222 (43.0)	0.000**
Absent	277 (53.7)	15 (2.9)	37 (7.2)	225 (43.6)	
Anxiety (GAD-7 score >7)					
Present	235 (45.5)	10 (1.9)	17 (3.3)	208 (40.3)	0.398
Absent	281 (54.5)	12 (2.3)	30 (5.8)	239 (46.3)	
Combination of Depression & Anxiety					
Present	153 (29.7)	7 (1.4)	4 (0.8)	142 (27.5)	0.004*
Absent	363 (70.3)	15 (2.9)	43 (8.3)	305 (59.1)	

We found a significant association of social media use with depression and the combination of depression and anxiety and social media exposure but not anxiety in our sample during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULTS

516 participants completed the questionnaire. 86.6% of the participants had frequent exposure to social media. Facebook (66.9%) and WhatsApp (43.4%) were the most used platforms to obtain COVID-19 related news. The prevalence of depression, anxiety, and combined depression and anxiety in the sample was 46.3%, 45.5% and 29.7% respectively. Chi-square revealed a statistically significant association between depression and social media exposure ($p < 0.001$) and the combination of depression and anxiety and social media exposure ($p < 0.05$), but not with anxiety in our sample. 56.0% participants believed that publishing more COVID-19 related news leads to fear and panic.



CONCLUSIONS

People with frequent social media exposure during COVID-19 experienced detrimental effects on mental health, thus the awareness about limiting social media exposure during the pandemic and psychological support is required to safeguard their well-being.

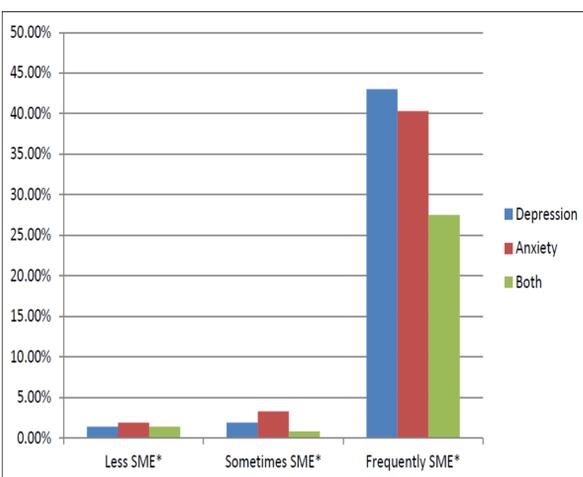
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None to report.

Figure 1: Prevalence of Depression, Anxiety, and combination of Depression & Anxiety in different categories of Social Media Exposure



*SME= Social Media Exposure