YOUNG WOMEN'S VIEWS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Aim: Numerous studies have emphasized the connection between social media use and mental health of young people. Important in that regard is the understanding of the specific experiences of young women on social media. This study aims to explore the experiences and views of young women regarding social media use and its impact on their social life and mental health. Also, it seeks to examine young women understanding of mental issues and identify the role social work can play in addressing some of the negative impacts of social media use. The Social Comparison theory, Social Cognitive theory, and Cultivation theory are utilised to understand the relationship between social media use and mental health.

Methods: The study is designed primarily as a qualitative study. Two methods were deployed for data collection; two focus groups each comprising three participants, and four individual interviews. Participants were aged between 16 to 21 years old. Qualitative data derived from the participants were analysed using content analysis.

Result: Research findings indicate that young women were conversant with mental health and its symptoms. Respondents held that social media use impacted the social life of young users, including cyber-bullying, comparison with social media personalities, and pressure to conform to certain ideals. This places undue pressure on girls about their body image and appearance. Lack of confidence and portrayal of women as sex symbols explain the outcome. Findings show that young women experience the negative impacts of social media because they lack social support.

Conclusion: Young women are exposed to the negative effects of social media use. Social norms, societal expectations, peer pressure, and absent social support facilitate the negative impact of social media on the mental health of young women. To reduce such impact, social workers, parents and school personnel have especially important roles to play. Social workers can serve to enlighten young women about social media and how to navigate it without being negatively affected and help build confidence and provide support to victims in schools and at homes.

Keywords: mental health, young women, social media, social work, schools, parents.

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1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background

Children and young people have widely accepted and adopted the use of social media (Livingstone, Haddon, Gorzig, & O ´Lafsson, 2011); websites where a wide variety of social interactions occur based on contents created by users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Although the internet has become a widely used medium of communication (Valkenburg & Peter 2009), there is an ongoing debate about its impact on the wellbeing of adolescents. Some argue that online communication could have positive impacts on young people (Kraut, Kiesler,Boneva, Cumings, Helgeson & Craword 2002). Others suggest that excessive Internet use poses potential harmful effects for young users (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

1.2   Mental health and young people

Mental health is a condition of wellbeing in which the individual can cope with everyday stresses of life, realises his or her own abilities, and work productively and fruitfully, contributing to his or her community (World Health Organisation, 2007). Mental illness is, thus, any disorder in the mental state, which can influence the psychological and mental wellbeing of a person (World Health Organisation, 2004)

In a review of the literature of the behavioural consequences of child abuse in India, Sharma (2016) shows that there has been an increase in reporting of mental problems, including anxieties, emotional stresses, low self-esteem, depression, and abnormalities in social behaviours among young people. Young people encounter several issues and challenges on social media that can affect their social lives and mental health (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

In a Swedish study to understand the meaning of living conditions for adolescent girl's health, Larsson, Sundler & Ekebergh (2012) found that conditions of girls have an influence on their physical and mental health and their everyday lives. For instance, in a Finnish study to measure global and school-related happiness, Murberg & Bru (2004) found that school-related happiness had decreased and that girls are affected by high levels of demands at school and report stress related to concerns about school performance.

A protective and caring family environment and the sense of importance to the family, and open communication are related to life satisfaction, self-esteem and well-being of young

people (Joronen & Astedt-Kurki, 2005). Poor family relations and communication are connected with poor health, stress and somatic complaints (Nygren, Bergström, Janlert & Nygren, 2012).

1.3 Relevance for Social Work

The implication of the link between social media and mental health is that a large number of young people are unable to function effectively, establish or sustain healthy relationships, work productively or contribute to community wellbeing. It is however unclear from some of the reports on mental illness what percentage of mental illnesses is the result of social media use. If the use of social media contributes to mental illness among young people in the society as Sharma (2016), Sunitha & Gururaj (2014) suggest, there is need to focus on the linkage as a necessary first step to dealing with the problem. The pervasiveness of mental health problems and the fact that not all sufferers receive needed attention further necessitates the importance of the research focus in the context of social works (National Institutes of Mental Health, n.d).

In a report on the relationship between social media and young people's mental health, Frith (2017) argue that young internet users are exposed to a range of negative experiences that include cyber-bullying, sexual solicitation and pressure to conform to certain standards portrayed as ideal online. Depression, and withdrawal from social circles may result from such experiences. Among other things, social work seeks to understand the factors that enhance the wellbeing of young people, when social media is helpful or unhelpful, who receives help and who does not, and what makes young people vulnerable to mental health and how to deal with such vulnerability. If victims are to be helped to regain mental health and function well, social workers need to understand the nexus between social media use and mental instability.

1.4 Aim and Research Questions

This project aims to throw some light on the relationship between social media use and mental wellbeing. In particular, the study is motivated by the need, to explore the experiences of young women regarding their social life and mental health in relation to the use of social media. To attain the research aim, the study is driven by the following research questions:

1. How has the social activities and social interactions of young women been affected by use of social media?

2. What are the influences of social media on the mental health of young women?

1.5   Core Concepts

1.5.1   *Social media*

In this thesis social media is defined as applications that allow users to communicate interact with each other, create, edit and share forms of textual, visual and audio content (Selwyn 2012). Popular social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Instant messaging services, including WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Snapchat, are also regarded here as part of social media.

1.5.2   *Young women*

Young women refer to female college students between ages 16 and 21.

1.6   Disposition

The rest of the thesis is organized as follows. Previous researches on the relationship between social media and mental health are examined in chapter two. A theoretical framework to guide the study is outlined in chapter three, followed by the method and materials used to carry out the study in chapter four. Chapter five consists of the result, data presentation. Chapter six covers analysis of the research results in relation to existing research and theory. Chapter seven consists of a discussion of the findings of the study and the conclusion.

2   PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1   Studies of social media and young people's mental health

In a survey on Americans' use of the Internet conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from November 14 to December 9, 2012, among a sample of 2,261 adults, age 18 and older, Duggan and Brenner (2013) found that young people are amongst the group to fully embrace social media. 83% of young people aged between 18–29 years use social networking sites.

In a study of the impact of social media on children and adolescent, O'Keeffe and Clark-Pearson (2011) argue that teenagers and young people have a limited capacity for self-regulation due to lack of practical exposure and experience and susceptibility to peer pressure, and as a result they are at some risk as they use and negotiate their way with social media. Latest research points out that there are numerous online expressions of offline behaviours, for instance, bullying, clique-forming and sexual trailing and sexting. In a study on existing online safety research, Farrukh, Sadwick, & Villasenor (2014) show that additional problems associated with excessive use of social media include internet addiction and concurrent sleep deprivation.

Ybarra & Mitchell (2004) examine cross-sectional data to identify trends in the relationship between report of depressive symptomatology and unwanted internet sexual solicitation. The study used a cross-sectional survey conducted between fall 1999 and spring 2000, or the Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS). YISS, a nationally representative telephone survey of young, regular internet users, and one caregiver in the household, focused on youth internet harassment, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and unwanted sexual solicitation.

Participants in the study of Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) were English speakers between the ages of 10 and 17 years. 52% of respondents were male, and 69% of adult respondents were female. Results show that 12% of male and 27% of female young regular social network sites (SNS) users reported at least 1 unwanted sexual solicitation in the previous year. Eleven percent of respondents who reported unwanted online sexual solicitation also reported major symptoms of depression compared to 3.7% of youths who were not solicited. Also, 17.7% of youths who indicated sexual solicitation online also reported minor depressive-like symptoms compared to 13.4% of youths indicating no solicitation event.

One quarter of youths in Ybarra and Mitchells (2004) study who reported online solicitations indicate they feel extremely upset, emotional distressed, or afraid as a result. Young people with symptoms of depression were more likely to have cognitively biased perceptions of events in a negative manner. Young people with depressive symptoms perceived as threatening or emotionally upsetting what others may view as neutral or little annoying. Whether due to cognitive distortion or not, almost 40% of young people who reported major

symptoms of depression also reported feeling very upset or afraid as a result of an unwanted sexual solicitation.

In a London study, which examines forms of cyberbullying within and outside school, Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, and Tippett (2008) observed a relationship between mental health and cyber-bullying, or aggressive, intentional act using electronic forms of interaction, including texting derogatory messages, sending threatening e-mails, and forwarding confidential e-mail or pictures. Similarly, at a panel of experts in technology and youth aggression convened in 2006 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, David-Ferdon and Hertz (2007) argued that one in five youths reported being a victim of cyber-bullying.

A study by Goebert, Else, Matsu, Chung-Do, and Chang (2011), examined the mental health impacts of cyber-bullying among students from two multi-ethnic high schools in Hawaii. Eight hundred and eighty-one students from two high schools in Hawai'i were surveyed. The authors applied logistic regression tests to determine if there were any significant differences in cyber-bullying and mental health by ethnicity, gender, and the interaction between ethnicity and gender. Each of the mental health outcomes related to cyber-bullying was subjected to logistic regression as an independent variable, controlling for gender, grade, and ethnicity.

Goebert, et al (2011) argue that given its anonymity and potential capacity to reach a large number of people, cyber-bullying may have more devastating consequences than other forms of violence. Studies show that cyber-bullying can result in emotional distress, depression, anxiety, and suicidal behaviour.

Goebert et al (2011) found that ethnicity, gender, grade, and cyber-bullying victimization were indicators of negative mental health consequences.

> Cyber-bullying victimization increased the likelihood of substance use, with binge drinking and marijuana use both approximately 2.5 times more likely to occur and increased the likelihood of depression by almost 2 times, and suicide attempts by 3.2 times (3.2 times for females and 4.5 times for males) (Goebert, Else, Matsu, Chung-Do, and Chang, 2011: 1283).

The result of their analysis shows that significant ethnic differences shaped impact of cyber-bullying. Moreover, girls reported more cyber-bullying victimization, anxiety symptoms, and suicide attempts than boys.

Goebert et al (2011) argued that cyber-bullying is a pervasive problem among high school's students. Cyber-bullying has potential to trigger serious mental health impacts on high school students, particularly in terms of suicide attempt and substance use. The experience of cyber-bullying 'tripled the likelihood of binge drinking, and more than doubled the likelihood of using marijuana and of attempting suicide', especially where there is little support to resolve cyber-bullying (Goebert et al 2011, pg. 1283).

In a related Norwegian study, Brandtzæg, Staksrud, Hagen and Wold (2009) sought to know whether children's experience of cyber-bullying differs according to technological platforms and socio-demographic variables. To investigate the frequency of potential cyber-bullying, and the use of various technological platforms, different questions related to use of e-mail, chatrooms, and mobile phones were designed. To probe variations of prevalence of cyber-bullying of children in relation to demographic variables and different technological platforms, the group analysed data from a survey conducted in 2008 on a geographically representative sample of 947 Norwegian children aged between nine and 18 years.

The study by Brandtzæg et al (2009) found that e-mail was the most common medium for cyber-bullying across all age groups, and mobile phone was the least common. Cyber-bullying was experienced most often by means of e-mail (22 per cent), followed by IM (15 per cent), while the use of mobile phones was the least at 8 per cent. In terms of gender, girls experienced bullying by e-mail 25 per cent and IM 18 percent compared with email19 per cent and IM13 per cent for boys. The study found that older children experienced more frequent bullying than younger children, and those who used internet infrequently are the least bullied.

In an American study, Wang, Nansel, and Lannotti (2011) compared levels of depression among bullies, victims, and bully-victims of traditional (physical, verbal, and relational) and cyber bullying. They also examined the association between depression and frequency of involvement in each form of bullying. A U.S. nationally representative sample of students in grades 6–10 (7,313) completed the bullying and depression items in the Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children 2005 Survey. The study found that depression was associated with each of the four forms of bullying (physical, verbal, relational, and cyber bullying). Victims of cyber bullying reported higher levels of depression than bullies or bully-victims. For physical, verbal, and relational bullies, those who were often involved as victims and bully victims reported a significantly higher level of depression than those who were only occasionally involved.

Apaolaza, Hartmann, Medina, Barrutia and Echerbarria (2013), examined the influences of teenagers' usage intensity of the Spanish social network sites (SNS) Tuenti on their psychological wellbeing. Tuenti is the most widely used social network among Spanish youth. The literature has pointed out positive relationship between SNS and mental ill-health. However, it has been argued that SNS use may decrease social isolation. SNS use may enhance individual's feelings of group belonging and reduce loneliness through membership experiences.

Apaolaza et al (2013) found that teenagers' usage intensity of Tuenti was positively related to the degree of socializing on the SNS, which implies an increase in social capital. Usage also seems to foster development of bridging capital by reducing barriers to forming large and heterogenous networks. The impersonal nature of SNS helps teenagers to learn how to deal with difficulties that can arise offline. Thus, the authors argue that socializing on Tuenti had a significantly positive influence on teenage perception of wellbeing. Apaolaza et al (2013) further argue that the relationship was not direct but mediated by the intervening variables of

self-esteem and loneliness. Socializing on Tuenti leads to an increase in self-esteem. Increased self-esteem, in turn, enhances subjective wellbeing. Socializing on Tuenti is important for teenagers because it helps them keep in contact with friends; such network has important influence on the teenagers' self-esteem and psychological wellbeing. According to Apaolaza et al (2013), participation in Tuenti lowered feelings of loneliness; and a decrease in loneliness was positively related to teenager's wellbeing, and perceived social support.

2.2   Summary

The existing literature underlines the negative impacts of social media use on young people. For example, cyberbullying could lead to mental health problems for some users, substance use, binge drinking, depression, and suicide attempts. The argument remains, however, contentious as some study shows to the contrary that social media use has positive benefits for users. The latter view shows that SNS use has become a veritable platform for the development, consolidation and growth of teenagers' social relations.

On the whole, the existing research engage with the positive or negative mental health impacts of social media use. Theoretical focus on the impact of social media biases attention to whether social media use is positive or negative. As a result, less attention has been paid to understanding how young people experience social media and its impact on their social and mental functioning. Openness to the varieties of impacts of social media use creates opportunity to observe what results in positive or negative outcomes where and why. Such insight would be invaluable to social work practitioners as it could facilitate comparative analysis, and enable systematic accumulation of lessons learned, which can either be applied or avoided in an attempt to promote the mental health of young users of social media.

Moreover, little of the existing research has given exclusive attention to experiences of young women who use social media, and how their usage of the latter has shaped their social life and mental health in relation to the use of social media. In a UK study that evaluates interventions against cyberbullying, Thompson, Robinson and Smith (2014) summarise that it is unclear in the literature what interventions can help prevent or reduce risks faced by SNS users. In a study of how internet programmes can serve to prevent suicide and self-harm, Jacob, Scourfield and Evans (2014) argue that how social workers can work with at-risk users has received scant attention.

3.   THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1   Approaches to Social Media and Mental Health

This chapter presents the Social Comparison theory, Social Cognitive theory, and Cultivation theory to understand the relationship between social media use and mental health. These social psychological theories emphasise that people tend to base a lot of their decisions and judgments on what they see in the people who surround them as well as what others have justified as socially acceptable. Social media users tend to compare themselves with others, including movie stars, models and body images considered ideal that are propagated by peers. Such comparisons play critical role in the formation of self-worth, body image and self-esteem (Festinger, 1954, Gerbner et al., 1994). For example, the possibility that others could look at and judge one's body can result in negative feelings and tendency to become like the ideal (Fitzsimmons, Harney, Brownstone, Higgins, Bardone-Cone, 2012). The three theories are briefly examined in what follows in order to gain better understanding of the link between social media use and mental health.

3.1.1   Social Comparison theory

According to Festinger (1954), an individual's sense of self-worth is based on social comparison. Thus, individuals evaluate their appearance and abilities by comparison with the appearance and abilities of other people. Individuals appraise themselves, actions and feelings about events by comparison with other people who are considered ideal or perfect.

Festinger advances some hypotheses (only two of which are treated here), which provide good analysis of his theory. Firstly, "there exist, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and abilities" (Festinger 1954, pg.1). An individual's opinions and abilities shape the way the individual behaves. A person can evaluate his or her opinion and abilities by comparing self with others with similar opinions or abilities. Secondly, "to the extent that objective and non-social means are not available, people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparing respectively with opinions and abilities of others" (Festinger, 1954, pg.2). People tend to compare opinions and abilities in reference to the actual situation. If that actual situation does not exist, there is no way the individual can compare or validate his/her opinions and abilities.

Festinger (1954) clarifies that, there are two types of comparisons; Upward and Downward comparisons. Upward comparison refers to the tendency to compare oneself with another who is better, and downward comparison suggests comparison of the self to someone who is considered worse than self.

3.1.2 Social Cognitive theory

The Social Cognitive theory (Bandura 1986) argues that people learn behaviours, values and norms by modelling others who are seen as embodiment of the socially acceptable. Social cognitive theory is a social learning theory based on the idea that people learn by observing others. These learned behaviours can be central to one's personality. Modelling is a major component of the Social Cognitive theory. Thus, learning from the effects of actions is a special case of observational learning. "In learning by direct experience, people construct conceptions of behaviour from observing the effects of their actions; in learning by modelling, they derive the conceptions from observing the structure of the behaviour being modelled" (Bandura, 1989, pg. 46).

The theory holds that the environment one grows up in and the individual person or cognition are important determinants of behaviour. People learn by observing others, and behaviour witnessed can change a person's way of thinking or cognition. Also, the environment one is raised in may influence later behaviours. Bandura's (2008) schematization of triadic reciprocal causation shows how the reproduction of an observed behaviour is influenced by the interaction of three determinants: 1. Personal (whether the individual has high or low self-efficacy toward the behaviour), 2. Behavioural (the response an individual receives after they perform a behaviour), and 3. Environmental (aspects of the environment or setting that influence the individual's ability to successfully complete a behaviour).

Social cognition has its roots in social psychology, which attempts "to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others" (Allport, 1985, pg. 3). According to Bandura (1989) "Human expectations, beliefs, emotional bents and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by social influences that convey information and activate emotional reactions through modelling, instruction and social persuasion" (pg.3).

3.1.3 Cultivation theory

Cultivation theory states that high frequency viewers of television are more susceptible to media messages and the belief that such messages are real and authentic (Gerbner & Gross 1976). Heavy viewers are exposed to more violence and therefore are affected by the belief that the world is a far worse and dangerous place then it actually is. The Cultivation theory argues that television and media cultivate the status quo rather than challenge it. Cultivation theory holds that cultivation of attitudes rests on attitudes already present in society and that the media take such attitudes and re-present them in repackaged bundle to their audiences.

The Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1994) holds that constant exposure to given themes on the media can lead users to internalize such perspectives to the extent of accepting media portrayals as true representation of reality. According to the theory, the more media a woman consumes, the more likely she is to understand those images as true representation of reality.

Obsession with social media, according to Cultivation theory, results in a situation where women believe that what they see on their social networks is true to reality.

The female ideals that they see will have an influence on their thoughts about their own lives and their own bodies, and therefore contribute to the development of their self-image.

3.2　Summary

The Social Comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), Cognitive theory (Bandura 1986), and Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1994) hold that women's feelings toward their own bodies are significantly shaped by events in the physical world and social media. Exposure to social media images has encouraged women to see their bodies as the most important part of their personality, and to adopt and maintain a certain ideal physique. In consequence, some women who perceive their bodies as dissimilar to what they see in the media become susceptible to a feeling of discontent and dissatisfaction with their body.

The Cultivation theory argues that a high consumption of the chosen medium causes women to create a distorted social reality, leading to belief that they must embody that reality. All together, these theories suggest that women with negative body image tend to be vulnerable to the internalization of the ideal body type portrayed in the media. Self-comparison eventually shapes their actions in the direction of becoming like the ideal.

4 METHOD AND MATERIAL

4.1 Research Design and Approach

This chapter details the research design, methods of data collection and best-suited analysis techniques adopted to draw the results and conclusions as per the research aims and objectives of the study. A detailed description of research participants, research assumptions, sample population, research instruments and justification for analysis technique will be presented below.

The study has adopted the descriptive research design with qualitative analysis to reach the desired aims and objectives. Qualitative research seeks to understand social phenomena through the perspectives of the individuals involved based on the assumption that reality is socially constructed, and its aim is to understand and interpret a given situation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The aim of the study is to explore the experiences of young women regarding their social life and mental health in relation to the use of social media. The questions motivating the research are 'How has the social activities and social interactions of young women been affected by use of social media?', And 'What are the influences of social media on the mental health of young women?'.

There were several theoretical issues, which the research has identified from the available literature in relation to perspectives and issues for social lives and mental health of young women affected by usage of social media services. To answer the research questions and achieve the research aim necessarily requires that we access the subjective views or opinions of the participants. Such is the case because the research is concerned about the views of young women on the impact of social media on their mental health. As a qualitative study, the study will depend on descriptive writing about the subjective experiences of research participants and attention to detail (Glesne, 2006) for exploration of views and perspectives of young women in regard the impact of social media.

4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1 Population for the study

In any research, population means the whole set of units that are selected through a scientific method to be observed (Lee, 2003). The present study focuses on young women in Sweden and Australia. A school was contacted in Sweden and the students were informed about the study and its objective. However, I was turned down at the last minutes. So, I had to look elsewhere for new sets of participants. That was how I was led to contact the church in

Sweden and participants in Australia. The population of the study was young women from age range of 16 to 21 years.

4.2.2   Sampling Technique and Participants

Purposive sampling technique was applied for the selection of participants. Purposive sampling is the selection of non-probability sample, which is selected on the basis of characteristics of population and for the achievement of objectives of the study. Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling (Kumar, 1996). There are seven different types of purposive sampling. The present study used homogeneous purposive sampling technique in which participants were selected for having shared characteristics, including being young women, students, and people who use social media. One participant in Australian school was contacted by the researcher in Australia who reached out to her friends to form a focus group of three young women. In Sweden, the Christian church was contacted and briefed about the study purpose. The Church informed the youth leader of the church who consequently contacted three young women who formed the focus group of three young women in Sweden.

Thus, one participant linked to the other participants and helped in making two focus groups comprised of three participants in each country. Four individual interviews were conducted with the young women; three were from Australia and one was from Sweden. First, individual interviews were conducted followed by focus group discussions. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and individual interviews with the Australian participants were conducted through Skype sessions. The use of Skype was necessitated by the fact that the researcher conducted the study from Sweden.

4.3   Research Methodology

4.3.1   Individual Interview

Interviewing is a most often used research tool and a strategy for the collection of data in order to extract participants' insights into social phenomenon (Dornyei, 2007). Interviews can take many forms, including structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, which use an interview guide listing a set of issues to be explored was employed to examine the experiences of young women about their social life and mental health in reference to usage of social networking platforms. It is a mix of structured and unstructured interviews where the questions are pre-planned, but the interviewee is given chance to elaborate and explain issues through the use of open-ended questions. Good interviews, according to Dornyei (2007, pg. 140), should (a) "flow naturally" and (b) "be rich in detail". Semi-structured interview helps minimise the researcher's interruptions, giving the interviewee as much time as necessary to explain and elaborate an issue. Semi-structured

interviews are appropriate to researchers who have an overview of their topic so that they can ask questions without using a structured format which can hinder the depth and richness of the responses. Participants from Australia and Sweden were interviewed individually, and each interview was about 75 minutes long.

The semi-structured interview guide (see appendix A) comprised of 12 questions addressing different issues regarding awareness about mental health, challenges faced by young women while using social networks, influences of social media on social lives of young women, and support of young women for the improvement of their mental health. Interviews with the participants were recorded and transcribed for the purpose of analysis.

4.3.2   Focus Group Discussion

According to Bryman (2008), the method of focus group discussion (FGD) can be defined as the process of interviewing with several people on a specific topic or issue. Focus group discussions can be used for the exploration of specific theme and getting the overall perspective of the majority. Focus groups of participants discuss a set of research questions or topics. This may entail the researcher acting as a moderator for the discussion. FGD involves a brainstorming focus group of usually six to twelve interviewees (Dörnyei, 2007, pg. 144). FGD can generate high quality data, which is helpful for the interviewer. Moreover, interviewees can argue, challenge, and debate an issue with each other. The process potentially can lead to the emergence of in-depth and rich data. It is useful in generating additional information that complements data from interviews (Dornyei 2007). Thus, Carey (1994) argues that focus groups are the best approach for sensitive topics.

Focus group discussions allow the researcher to analyse different views of different participants and examine how the participants react to the views of other participants and at the end an overall consensus can be achieved for the purpose of drawing the results (Bryman, 2008). Focus group interviews have gained popularity and the approach is considered as result oriented and valued approach. One advantage of focus group research is interaction of participants with similar interests for informative conversations (Birks & Mills, 2015). The problem with focus group discussion is arrangement of participants at an agreed time and venue (Birks & Mills, 2010).

Skype was used to conduct the focus group discussion in Melbourne, Australia, and Vasteras in Sweden. The focus group interviews took approximately 60 minutes each and both were moderated by the author. There was a great deal of discussion and interaction among the participants. Participants felt relaxed and at ease with each other, which helped in making conversation naturally

The researcher contacted one participant in Australian school who reached out to her friends to form focus group with three girls. In Sweden, the Christian church was contacted and briefed about the study purpose. The Church gave the information to the youth leader of the church who consequently contacted the other participants to form the focus group of three

girls in Sweden. Thus, one participant linked to the other participants and helped in making two focus groups comprised of three participants in each country.

4.4   Validity and Reliability of Data

The validity of the research tool can be tested with different tests before its administration on the sample population. Validity is the extent to which a tool is supposed to measure and perform as it is designed to perform. Pilot testing can be conducted before actually conducting the research. This helps in evaluating all the tools or process of observing the samples and gathering the data to be tested (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). In order to test the validity of the research tools (Semi structured interview and Focus Interview protocol), a pilot test was conducted on two of the participants to examine the appropriateness of the tools. After analysing the results of the pilot test, the questions were amended for clarity as necessary. For example; changing the statement into simpler sentences.

The validity and reliability of data on which the study is based is strengthened by the multiple methods by which information was collected, including interviews and focus group discussions. However, the validity and reliability would have been enhanced by more interviews and discussion than was possible.

Although the sampled population included Australia and Sweden, the author does not pretend to make comparative analysis of both countries. The primary interest in the study is the experiences of young people with regards to social media use and mental health. The sample was based on convenience; when I could not get enough participants for the study in Sweden (country of study), I simply contacted a school in Australia (country of residence).

4.5   Data Analysis Technique

Qualitative approach has been adopted in present study. Qualitative data emerges from three types of data collection; in-depth open-ended interview, direct observation and interviews (Patton 2002). For the analysis of qualitative data, technique of content analysis was utilized to draw the results and findings according to the research objectives and research questions. Krippendorff (2004) shows that the articulation of a story in terms of the needs, motives, goals and instrumental activities engaged in constitutes a thematic unit. He emphasises that the choice of thematic units is always dictated by the purpose of analysis. Accordingly, for this study, themes were identified as per the objectives and research questions of the study. Identification of themes refers to the coding procedure, which is adopted to code and classify the responses to draw valid inferences and results. The themes were aligned with the interview guide and the responses gathered from the interviews and FGDs were classified and organised under the relevant themes. Thereafter, similar patterns and replicable texts were analysed through arguments and supportive quotations from the participants. Content

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analysis of qualitative data gave in-depth understanding and evaluation of the content, and also helped in extracting meanings from the responses of the participants.

4.6   Ethical Consideration

Consideration was also given to ethical issues that may arise from discussion with the participants about their experiences in the presence of peers and steps were taken to minimize any negative impact. Focus group interviews were tailored so that participants did not have to disclose their personal experiences on certain issues. At the beginning of each focus group, the importance of confidentiality was emphasized. The sensitive and personal questions that could not be addressed during the focus group interviews were discussed in detail during the individual interviews with the other participants.

All participants were also provided information on services they could access for counselling if it was required after the interviews (e.g. In Australia, they could contact their local general practitioner who could refer them to a psychologist which is an entitlement. In Sweden, participants could also have access to youth centres that provided counselling services for young women.

Furthermore, the researcher abides by the following established ethical considerations (Halej, 2017); A) Social responsibility, B) informed consent of participants for the interviews and focus group discussions, C) integrity and transparency, D) Anonymity, and confidentiality.

Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the project at any time. All the participants were briefed about the purpose, aims, and objectives of the study before administration of any research tool. Participants were requested to respond without any pressure and bias to ensure the authenticity and validity of findings of the study.

5   RESULTS

5.1   Data Presentation

This chapter presents the findings and results of the study. Data gathered through the interviews and focus group discussions are analyzed to answer the primary research questions. For the purpose of coding, responses from the three participants of an FGD are coded as one unit i.e. responses of three participants from Australia FGD are coded A05 and responses from three participants from Sweden FGD are coded as A06. Participants of the interview and FGD are coded for the analysis as follows

Participants	Code
Participants One	A01
Participants Two	A02
Participants Three	A03
Participants Four	A04
Participants of FGD (Australia)	A05
Participants of FGD (Sweden)	A06

Content analysis refers to research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes. A number of recurring themes were gleaned from data gathered for the study, including what mental health means to young women, symptoms associated with mental health, girl's views about use of social media, the challenges young women encounter when they use social media, difference; relationships versus social media, and the impact of social media on the social life of young women. These themes relate with girls' experiences of and impact of social media, and the study's first research question, namely; how has the social activities and social interactions of young women been affected using social media? By focusing on the themes; meanings, symptoms, views, challenges, and impact, we are able to generate information to answer the research question.

Other themes found in the data include issues of how to deal with pressures, who young women can talk to, what support is available for girls to improve mental health, equality between girls and boys, parental support, and school support. The latter set of themes directs attention to information that would help tease out the relationship between social activities and interactions of young women, and use of social media over time, which is the core of the second research question; what are the influences of social media on the mental health of young women?

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5.1.1 Mental Health: Understanding in Young women

Participants of the individual interview as well as FGD were presented with the questions relating to their understanding and perceptions about mental health and any issues relating to mental health. Themes under this section were the meaning of mental health and symptoms of any mental health issues as per the knowledge and the understanding of participants. Tabular presentation of themes under this section is as follow:

Section Description	Themes Under Section
Mental Health: Understanding in Young women.	• Mental Health Meaning • Symptoms of Mental Health Issues

5.1.1.1 Mental Health Meaning

Participants were asked about their understanding and meaning of mental health. Their responses indicated that the emotional well-being of a person is normally considered as good mental health. According to participant A05, *"Mental health is emotional well-being". It is "the state of well-being and the way we think and feel"* (A05). Some of the participants associated mental health with the management of emotions and feelings while coping with different issues of everyday life. Thus, mental health refers to *"How healthy your brain is and your mental state! Whether or not you are able to cope with issues that arise in everyday life"* (A04). Some participants displayed well-developed understanding of mental health, defining the concept as, *"how we interpret our emotions and express our feelings. It is how we deal with sadness, depression and anxiety"* (A03).

However, other participants were not clearly aware of the meaning of mental health. As a result, they displayed limited knowledge as per their understanding and experiences of mental health. According to A02, *"I don't really know what mental health is, but it's like if you are dealing with any psychological problem like depression".* Overall, responses from participants show that depression and anxiety were readily recognised by the participants as an issue of mental health, which indicated that these two mental problems are the ones most recognised by the young women. This is reflected in the response of participant A03 above.

5.1.1.2 Symptoms of Mental Health Issues

Young women were asked about their knowledge of such symptoms. Analysis of the responses indicated that participants identified loneliness, withdrawal from social activities, and sleeping and eating disorder with the symptoms of mental health. Others suggest that loneliness, troubled, tired and quiet disposition are characteristic of mental health problem. For instance, participant A01 asserts that "*Symptoms of mental health are when you start to withdraw in life, sleep more or sleeping less, feeling anxious, not giving much importance to your life and struggling everyday life activities*".

The most important aspect emphasized in the responses was that those with mental health issues do not participate in social activities, and struggle to perform their everyday life activities. That includes not getting out of bed, refusal to eat, and cutting off relationships. Participant A03 summed it up as follows: *"If someone is having a challenge with their mental health, then I think they will not want to participate in social activities or activities in general. In short they just not really want to join in with everyday life".* Relatedly, participants emphasise self-image as a symptom of mental health. For instance, FGD A06 argues that *"Along with depression and anxiety, self-image is also a big issue among young women which can make them happy from outside but unhappy and unsatisfied from inside".*

From the responses above, participants clearly articulated the changes in behaviour and attitude as symptoms of mental health issue. In order to identify any mental health issue, it is important that the person has knowledge and understanding about any symptoms and unusual circumstances, which appear due to a problem.

5.1.2   Social Media: Challenges and Effect on Social Life of Young women

In this section, the experiences of young women are evaluated for the use of social media, challenges faced by the young women in use of social networking sites and effect of such challenges on their social lives. Five themes were classified in this section, which are presented in the table below.

Section Description	Themes Under Section
Social Media: Challenges and Effect on Social Life of Young women	- Experiences of Girls on use of Social Media - Challenges to Young women on Social Media - Difference: Relationship versus Social Media - Equality Issues - Social Media Effect on Social Lives

Detailed description of each theme and analysis of responses under themes is provided below.

5.1.2.1 Experiences of Girls on use of Social Media

The participants were asked to provide their experiences, ideas, and views on young women' use of social media. Respondents were of the view that use of social media by girls is affecting their behaviours and attitudes towards their social life and society as a whole. Users of social media try to fit themselves with the trends and they try to pretend to be someone who they are not in their actual life.

Lots of girls of my age are posting photographs and videos of going out for parties, drinking and stuff like that. They try to act like they are older than their actual age to just make them fit with everyone else. They pressurize themselves to be what people want to like or appreciate, by posting their pictures on Snapchat, Facebook or Instagram which are some of the social networking sites (A03).

Participants suggest that girls try to compare their lives with the lives of other people and majority of people are not portraying their ugly or bad sides of their personalities. So, social media gives a distorted view of life and people try to compare their lives with this incomplete portrayal of life. For instance:

People will not necessarily post their bad or rough stuff; therefore, we only see the best photographs of them and rate things about their lives and by comparing our actual lives with their social media posted lives, we think everyone else's life is better than ours (A01).

Moreover, participant from FGD claim that the life that people portray on social media is not real and you do not see what's going on behind the scenes and we start comparing our whole life which includes both bad stuff and good stuff with the best portrayal of other's lives and start feeling bad about ourselves. Participants equally highlighted negative experiences of cyber-bullying. According to them, cyber-bullying has a long-lasting effect on the social and emotional lives of those affected which is more dangerous than the spoken words, they argue that If you type words and post nasty things then they get shared and they remain on social networking sites for a long time.

Participants equally remarked on the positive aspect of social media use. Social media can provide experiences to its users, which cannot be easily gained in their actual lives. The participants were of the view that young women could derive positive experiences on social media, which are normally not accessible to them in their immediate environment.

5.1.2.2 Challenges to Young women on Social Media

Participants were asked their experiences about the challenges which young women encounter in social networking. Responses indicated that all of the participants identified the issue of comparison and portrayal of non-realistic life on social media. They argue that such comparison places pressure on young women about their body image and appearances, social activities, and popularity in the attempt to keep up with social trends. As per the analysis, the unrealistic expectations are raised due to social media usage. These unrealistic expectations are related to personal features, physical appearance, dress sense, and interactions with your friends. To some participants, when you are young like 13 or 14: *"You seek the approval of others very much, so you try to get a lot of like for your uploaded pictures and video, so that you can convey to the world and your social circle that I am liked and well validated by others" (A01).*

Responses revealed that participants were of the opinion that the things which were done in real life previously are now just transferred to the digital form which has put a lot of pressure on the young women. Posting of pictures and videos for the sake of likes and comments has forced young women to show their skin, stuff like drinking, smoking, and such other stuff which are considered bad in the society.

One of the reasons highlighted by the participants for such acts on the social media was the lack of self-confidence and the portrayal of women as sex symbol in advertisements and print media. Participants from the FGD (A06) highlighted the issue of comparison as an alarming challenge faced by the young women while using social media networking sites.

5.1.2.3 Face-to-face and Virtual Relationships

The study attempted to assess the differences between face-to-face interactions and interactions on social media. Participants were asked to differentiate between face-to-face relationship and virtual relationship via social media. Views and opinions of the participants indicated that there is a big difference between both types of relationships. Participants argued that people on social networking sites are sometimes totally different in personality from their actual lives. People and especially young women prefer online chatting with girls as well as with boys rather than meeting these people in real life. There are different reasons highlighted by the participants for this huge difference such as shyness, social differences, and confidence level. For instance, a participant of FGD (Australia), asserts that: *"People have confidence to say anything online than they would at face-to-face meetings because sometimes we are scared of their reactions or their confrontations"* (A05).

Young women prefer online relationships over building one on one relationship. One of the participants highlighted the lack of boundaries in online relations because anything can be typed, and it can be interpreted in many different ways while in face-to-face conversations feelings and body language can help in determination of intentions. The issue of online wrong interpretation can create problems and can make situations offensive.

> Typed things can be read in different ways and can be taken in wrong meanings but if I am talking face to face, one can tell how I am feeling and judge my emotions. This can be really problematic in some situations (A04).

Majority of the participants preferred face-to-face relationship over the social media relationship because they feel more confident and realistic in face to face real relationship rather than pretending and faking a happy and social life of fake person.

5.1.2.4 Social Media Effect on Social Lives

Young women were analysed to evaluate the effect of social media on their social life through their responses. Responses indicated that social media use has both positive and negative aspects. While the majority of respondents stressed upon the negative effects of excessive use

of social media on young women, a respondent highlighted the positive aspects of social media usage.

> I think that teenagers using social media can be both positive and negative; the positive is that you are happily connected but it also provides an avenue for you to see a world that is beyond your immediate situation. So, for me, it was really important as you are able to see a lot of girls that are really beautiful with really dark skin because there is something that you really don't see in a predominantly White rural Australia community where I live (A03).

Some respondents emphasised that communication with anyone, anywhere and at any time is a lot easier through social networking sites. You can communicate with your long-distance friends even without meeting them in person.

The participants were of the view that they have to multitask while using the social media and sometimes it can cause psychological problems with real relationships because lack of attention due to mobile usage for social media activities is sometimes really annoying and hurtful. According to a participant;

> I think it also pose a problem with connectivity because you are always talking to people, we are always in touch with what our friends, so that can be a sort of damaging for relationship as well, because you are not able to spend time with someone in their presence, you know when you are with someone but your mind is somewhere else because you are on social media. So, you are not able to cultivate real and a deep relationship. I think it changed in the sense that because like if I think about it I wouldn't have been able to maintain as many friendships if it weren't for social media. We could think of it as a positive but there is also a negative to that because you can only really foster so many deep and rooted relationship between people and if you are doing something on a kind of superficial level and you don't really feel connected to people, in a way that would be long lasting (A01).

Everyone tries to be connected all the time on their social networking sites and people physically present at a place are sometimes not mentally present. Some participants were of the view that excessive use of social media distorts perception of reality, which could lead to loneliness.

5.1.3 Support to Improve Young Girl's Mental Health: Dealing with Pressures, Communication and Support System

Participants held that mental health of young women could be improved and enhanced through timely communication and support by their parents and by the school. The themes of interview guide relating to this specific section are given below

Section Description	Themes Under Section
Support to Improve Young Girl's Mental Health: Dealing with Pressures, Communication and Support System	• Dealing with Pressures • Whom to Talk • Support for Girls to Improve their Mental Health • Parent's Support • School Support

5.1.3.1 Dealing Pressures

Participants stated that dealing with pressure and challenges is much harder at younger stage of their lives because at that age young women get more influenced easily by the comments and views of others as they cared about the views of people a lot. For this reason, one such strategy pointed out by the participants was careless behaviour towards the thoughts of other people about. Commonly, young women deal with pressures by deleting their social media accounts and by being unmindful of what people say.

Self-destructive and self-harming behaviours were also witnessed in some of the participants in their state of psychological pressures and challenges. Participants stated that at that stage they really hated themselves because they were not like other people around them. Participants also identified withdrawal from social activities as a symptom of mental health. In such case communication with a trust worthy person was helpful to handle the pressures and bringing back the life to its routine.

> When I was facing some mental health issues, I talked to my elder sister who also faced tough time in her past. She made me understood that I should not be worried about others, what other people are going to say or think about me because they care more about themselves than you and your feelings. This communication had helped me a lot (A03).

Participants were of the opinion that it was harder to handle the pressures alone but if friends or family members are present to help and support the young women through their tough time, then it becomes a lot easier for the girls to cope with the pressure.

5.1.3.2 Who to Counsel

Few of the participants express the view that they would like to talk to their family member especially any of their siblings in case of any mental health issues. Participants also shared their personal experiences about getting help from professionals at their school or in their practical life. Self-awareness education such as courses related to psychology and mental health development can also be helpful in this regard. In school scenarios, young women appreciated the fact that they could share their problems with counsellors. For example, one

participant *asserts: "I remember when my grandfather killed himself; I had some mental health issues with me. I had to see a counsellor and it was really helpful for my anxiety attacks"* (A04).

It was also revealed that young women tend to make psychological connections and affiliations with their professional counsellors at schools and in case of any replacement or substitution, young women don't easily trust the new counsellors which can affect their progress and mental health in a negative manner.

5.1.3.3 Support Girls to Improve their Mental Health

Participants were of the view that, society has some extra ordinary expectation from the young women such as girls should be attractive, sexy, and perfect in every aspect. This behaviour of society is totally non-supportive and is playing a catalyst role in increasing the mental health issues of young women. Participants were of the view that confidence level and strong personality of young women can be helpful in handling the pressures of society and this confidence level can be boosted through different means, including the supportive role of parents in developing confidence in young women.

5.1.3.4 Parental Support

Responses by the participants highlighted the need of bridging the gap between young women and parents through emotional attachments and trust to support the girls in their tough time of mental health issues. According to the dominant views of responses, family provisions can be really helpful for the fight against mental health problems. If a young girl is facing family issues at home, then she feels more insecure and vulnerable to social pressures.

Participants were of the view that parents should educate their young children especially girls about the change in their physical appearance with the passage of time. According to participant A01,

> I had the issue of physical appearance because I was not able to relate mine with my mothers' and this is why I felt I was unattractive and ugly, but she could have said to me that "you are beautiful". This little encouragement could have helped me a lot at that time.

Participants held that simple encouragement and appreciation from parents could help young women overcome problems of physical appearance or feelings that one was ugly or unattractive.

One of the participants highlighted the issue of dismissive behaviour by parents especially by fathers. Sometimes parents overlook the appearance of their young women, they pay less attention to their behavioural changes. Fathers more especially overlook the issues of their girl-child appearance because *"Sometimes parents, particularly fathers, overlook the appearance of their young women because they don't know what it liked to be a girl"* (A04).

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Participants highlighted the need of supportive behaviour from parents towards their daughters more than their male children. According to participant A06, *"I think parents should have a close relationship with their daughter because the daughter will feel safe to share their feelings and issues if parents have close relation with their daughter".*

5.1.3.5 School Support

It was indicated in the responses that even the appreciation of girls in general can be very helpful for their personality development and for sorting things out for the future of young women. Participants were of the opinion that there was a need to keep reminding young women that it doesn't matter what other people or social media says or thinks about them.

> As a young girl, if we are not being appreciated today then we are going to feel underappreciated for the rest of our lives. There is a need to keep reminding young women that it doesn't matter what other people or social media says or thinks about them; They are beautiful, smart, and can do anything what they want to do (Participant A03).

Few of the participants stressed the need for school groups in which they could talk about their issues and it will be a lot easier to share the feelings with the people of same age group. Participants gave the idea that counsellors at school should be more interactive rather than passive listeners. According to A02, *"Sometimes when you have a problem, talking about it helps but you talk about it because you need some help and advice with it which I really didn't got from my counsellor at school".*

An idea of pastoral care was also given by one of the respondents, which was very helpful in dealing with the mental health issues. Similarly, the mentors and role models from the school who had some sort of mental health issues at early stages of their life can also serve as a practical example to be followed by the young women. Advice and personal experiences shared by such person will have more emotional connection with the girls having mental health issues. In the words of A04 and a participant from A06, *"Counsellors at public schools and chaplain in religious majority are really very beneficial to those who are confident enough to seek help in this regard".*

Such role models can be an inspiration for young women, which are a very healthy sign for the development and improvement of physical health as well as mental health of young women.

According to participant A04,

> "Subjects like human development should be made compulsory like science and mathematics because not a lot of people will choose this subject, but this subject is really an eye opening and crucial for personality development subject. In this subject, I was taught about different nutritional benefits, importance of exercise, and body declination in case of sickness, diabetics, eating disorders and mental health problems so I really recommend this subject for other young women".

One participant highlighted the need of subjects like human development and psychology at the age of 13 to 16 for young women.

6 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS IN RELATION TO RESEARCH AND THEORY

This chapter focuses the analysis of the results of the study in relation to research and theory. The first section examines what young women consider symptoms of mental health against existing theory on the subject. Section two examines the experiences of young women, including cyber bullying and perception, vis a vis social media in the light of research and theory. The last section analyses the impact of social media on social life, how young women deal with the pressures and what social support young women need to improve their mental health.

6.1 Symptoms of Mental Health Issues

Young women were asked about their knowledge of such symptoms. They identified poor self-image, loneliness, tiredness and quiet disposition, cutting off relationship, withdrawal from social activities, and sleeping and eating disorder as characteristic of mental health problems. The symptoms dove-tail with indicators of mental health problems already identified in the literature. For example, Goebert, et al. (2011) identified eating disorder, emotional distress, depression, anxiety, and suicidal behavior as symptom of mental health problem. The responses indicate that respondents are familiar with and can identify mental health problems when they see one.

6.2 Experiences of Young Women on use of Social Media

Respondents hold that social media has significant impact on girls' behaviours and attitudes toward social life and society. Users of SNS often pretend to be who they are not in an effort to appear trendy. The Social Comparison theory (Festinger 1954) shows that an individual's sense of self-worth is based on social comparison. Female users of SNS engage in self-comparison with pictures of ideal girls posted online. Girls forget that majority of people online portray only their positive aspects but hide the ugly or bad side of their personalities. Such comparison results in social physique anxiety, or dissatisfaction with one's body, and

pressure women to indulge in disordered eating "in an attempt to embody society's ideal of beauty, the thin ideal" (Fitzsimmons, Harney, Brownstone, Bardone-Cone, 2012, pg. 796).

There is also an element of imitation involved in the process of trying to be like the ideal personality. Users of SNS learn about certain values and norms from media platforms, and as a result try to model those who embody such values, and in the process deny their real selves (Bandura 1986)

6.2.1   Cyber-bullying

Respondents argue that cyber-bullying has a devastating and long-lasting effect on the social and emotional life of victims. The finding is supported by Goebert, Else, Matsu, Chung-Do, and Chang (2011) who argue that cyber-bullying is a pervasive problem among high school's students, and that it has potential to trigger serious mental health impacts on high school students, particularly in terms of suicide attempt and substance use. According to Goebert, Else, Matsu, Chung-Do, and Chang (2011, pg. 1285), the experience of cyber- bullying "tripled the likelihood of binge drinking, and more than doubled the likelihood of using marijuana and of attempting suicide", especially where there is little support to resolve cyber-bullying.

However, respondents equally remarked on the positive aspect of social media use, including experiences, which cannot be easily acquired in real life. This finding is in line with Apaolaza, Hartmann, Medina, Barrutia and Echerbarria (2013), who argued that SNS use may decrease social isolation, enhance individual's feelings of group belonging, reduce loneliness, and helps teenagers to learn how to deal with difficulties that can arise offline.

Respondents hold that the things, which were done in real life previously have been transferred to the digital form which has put a lot of pressure on the young women. Posting of pictures and videos for the sake of likes and comments has forced young women to show aspects of their body. Such tendency sits well with the Social Comparison theory (Festinger 1954) argument about social comparison. Social network sites provide ideal body images (photos), which enables comparisons and judgment about self-worth. Such comparisons usually lead to negative outcomes, such as body dissatisfaction and negative sense of self-esteem (Fitzsimmons, Harney, Brownstone, Higgins, Bardone-Cone, 2012). One of the reasons highlighted by the participants for such acts on social media was the lack of self-confidence and the portrayal of women as sex symbol in advertisements and print media.

The Social Comparison and Cultivation theories enable us to understand the relationship between female social media use, and negative body image and body dissatisfaction. The Social Comparison Theory (Festinger 1954) shows that the individual's sense of self-worth is based on social comparison. Young SNS users evaluate their appearance by comparison with some ideal others. The Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al 1994) indicates that constant exposure to SNS leads users to internalise the images they see as real, which will in turn shape their belief about their own lives and bodies.

6.2.2   Social Media and Perception

The study explores the differences between face-to-face interactions and interactions on social media. Participants were asked to differentiate between the real worlds and social media world in terms of social relationships. Views and opinions of the participants indicated that there is a huge difference between both worlds. People on social networking sites are sometimes totally different in personality from their actual lives. People and especially young women prefer online chatting with girls as well as with boys rather than meeting them in real life. There are different reasons highlighted by the participants for this huge difference such as shyness, social differences, and confidence level.

The finding that participants understood the difference between social media and face-to-face interaction suggests that participants can separate social reality from media representation. This finding differs from the Cultivation Theory's (Gerbner et al. 1994) position that constant exposure to given themes on the media can lead users to internalize such perspectives to the extent of accepting media portrayals as true representation of reality. It suggests that the respondents are able to separate reality from the virtual world in their engagement with the latter.

6.3   Social Media Effect on Social Life

Respondents were of the view that the use of social media by girls is affecting their behaviors and attitudes towards their social life and society as a whole. For example, participants argued, users of social media try to pretend to be someone who they are not in their actual life. The attempt by young women to compare their lives with the lives of other people has been shown to lead to social physique anxiety and pressure to conform to societal ideal of beauty (Fitzsimmons, Harney, Brownstone, Bardone-Cone, (2012). Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, and Tippett (2008) draw a relationship between mental health and cyber-bullying. Bullying, clique-forming, sexual trailing, sexting, and internet addiction and concurrent sleep deprivation impacts women's social life (Farrukh, Sadwick, & Villasenor, 2014). Goebert, Else, Matsu, Chung-Do, & Chang (2011, pg. 1283) emphasise that cyber-bullying victimization is an indicator of negative mental health consequences, increasing the likelihood of binge drinking, marijuana use, and suicidality.

Respondents highlighted the positive aspect of social media usage, including communication with anyone, anywhere and at any time. You can communicate with your long-distance friends even without meeting them in person. This is in line with Apaolaza, et al. (2013) who emphasise the positive aspects of social media use.

However, respondents argued that often they have to multitask while using the social media and sometimes it can cause psychological problems with real relationships because of lack of attention due to mobile usage of social media. Such inattention is sometimes really annoying and hurtful. Some participants were of the view that excessive use of social media distorts

perception of reality, which could lead to loneliness. Moreover, the presence of multiple social media platforms affects young people's capacity to function properly in real life. Such a view is, however, at variance with Apaolaza, et al. (2013) who argue that teenagers' usage intensity of the Spanish SNS Tuenti on their psychological wellbeing was positive rather than negative.

6.3.2 Dealing with Pressures

The use of social media, which portray a perfect life in different social networking platforms can be a big challenge for the young women. These challenges and pressures sometimes affect the mental health of the young women. For example, Ybarra & Mitchell (2004) argues that eleven percent of respondents who reported unwanted online sexual solicitation also reported major symptoms of depression, and 17.7% of youths who indicated sexual solicitation online also reported minor depressive-like symptoms. One quarter of youths who reported online solicitations indicate they feel extremely upset, emotional distressed, or afraid as a result. Strategies deployed to deal with such pressures and challenges included going offline and deleting social networking accounts to shed the influence and pressure from the minds.

Respondents stated that dealing with pressure and challenges is much harder at younger stage of their lives because at that age young women get more influenced easily by the comments and views of others as they cared about the views of people a lot. Commonly, young women deal with pressures by deleting their social media accounts and by being unmindful of what people say. Thompson, Robinson, and Smith (2014) argue that there is little research on effective interventions to address online activities such as cyber-bullying.

Respondents also pointed at self-destructive and self-harming behaviours as possible reactions to pressures as have been found in previous research by Goebert, Else, Matsu, Chung-Do, and Chang (2011). Withdrawal from social activities was another strategy through which girls sought to deal with social pressure. In cases where symptoms of mental health problems were evident, communication with a trust worthy person was helpful to handling the pressures and restoring normalcy. Respondents were of the view that it was harder to handle the pressures alone but if friends or family members are present to help and support the young women through their tough time, then it becomes a lot easier for the girls to cope with the pressure. The view aligns with Bandura's (1989) emphasis on the role of social influences on emotional reactions of young internet users.

6.3.3 Support Young Women to Improve their Mental Health

Responses of the participants revealed that young women are getting greatly affected in relation to the society and their social lives. Although young people are facing these problems, analysis of responses indicated that young women are more affected by this

situation due to the fact that they feel they do not have any trustworthy person to share their problems. This not only results in a gap between young women and their society, but also results in frustration, which ultimately affects the mental health of young women.

The analysis has revealed young women are shy to describe their problems to their parents and most of them are of the view that in case they get a chance and courage to discuss their problems, they do it with their siblings or trusted friends who are either of same age or have same life experience.

7   DISCUSSION

7.1   Introduction

This project focuses on the experiences of young women in regard how social media impact their mental health. It aimed to throw some light on the relationship between social media use and mental wellbeing. The study was motivated by the need, to explore the experiences of young women regarding their social life and mental health in relation to the use of social media. And to attain the research aim, the study was driven by the following research questions;

1. How has the social activities and social interactions of young women been affected by use of social media?

2. What are the influences of social media on the mental health of young women?

Against that background, this chapter discusses the research. In light of the findings, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations formulated regarding future research in the field of social work and mental health.

7.2   Interpretation of Results and Discussion

7.2.1   Experiences of Young women regarding Social Life, Mental Health and Social Media Use

Review of the research literature in the field of mental health suggests that young females are more prone to develop issues related to their psychological well-being and mental health at the period of transition to adulthood. Findings of qualitative analysis have revealed that young women of 16 to 21 years of age highlighted the importance of mental health for a happy, healthy and connected social life. An important symptom identified by respondents was the withdrawal of affected person from daily social activities and social bonding.

Young women are prone to the negative impacts of social media use through certain mechanisms including predisposition to comparison and modelling of the self after some ideal icons (Gerbner et al., 1994). Body perception and dissatisfaction may encourage young women into seeking a sense of self-worth through comparison with ideal body types online (Fitzsimmons, Harney, Brownstone, Higgins, Bardone-Cone, 2012).

As discussed earlier, on social media people mostly share positive and perfect aspect of their lives, and young women are easily influenced by such portrayal. Young girls perceive that the virtual portrayal of someone's perfect life should be followed therefore they tend to adopt the

same life for themselves especially in respect of body image and appearances. This identity crisis sometimes affects the mental health of young women as well as their social lives.

Research findings show that many young women pretend to be who they are not. They aspire to be like the ideal they see on SNS, and in the process hide their true selves. Findings of present study also highlighted the importance of emotional attention by parents to young women along with support from the schools. Such support will not only help young women in development of better mental health but might also result in better performance of young women in the society as a whole as well. School support might also polish the hidden talents and boost the positive impact on mental health of young women.

7.2.2   *Impact of Social Media on the Social Life and Mental Health of Young women*

Findings show that respondents have a long-lasting effect, socially and emotionally from cyber-bullying. It gives rise to emotional distress, anxiety, and depression. Young women might be more affected by this situation due to the fact that they do not have any trustworthy person with whom to share their problems. Lonely and without any social support, they are left to bear the effect of cyber-bullying alone. The role of society and people directly related to young women, like parents, siblings and teachers, should be analysed and deployed to minimize the negative effects of social media.

7.3   Reflection on Method

There were several limitations to this study. Firstly, the study was based on a few interviews in Sweden and Australia even though it was not a comparative study. One would have preferred a larger sample of respondents in a particular location and more in-depth study. Unforeseen circumstances, at the last moment, made that impossible. As a result, one had to resort to convenience sampling and few interviews.

The study relied partly on interviews conducted through skype. The method did not allow for the kind rapport that could develop from face-to-face contact. As a result, respondents often sounded like in a hurry to end the interview, and at the same time, the interviewer was pressured to keep the interview as short as possible. The disadvantage was that one could not raise probing questions that would have helped to access detailed responses and information. There was the added problem of connection, unclear voice sound and disconnection. Such affected the flow and clarity of responses and tested the patience of respondents.

The study combined focus group discussions and personal interviews to generate needed data. The idea was to triangulate and see whether the data volunteered individually would be similar to or different from data collected from a group of interviewees. There was little discrepancy between data from both sources, which lends some support to the validity and reliability of the data.

Moreover, the study was cross-sectional and so it was not possible to determine cause and effect. The study argued that girls experience negative impacts such as depression and anxiety from the use of social media. Such effects may well be the result of variables other than social media. Thus, the cross-sectional design of the study does not permit us to make statement about cause and effect relationship. Instead, we are able to argue that there is correlational relationship between the mental health issues and social media.

Future attempt at better understanding of the impact of social media on the mental health of young women shall benefit from addressing the above shortcomings. Specifically, such study will have to be based on a causal design, and on interviews conducted physically rather than through skype. More detailed information would have emerged from more interviews and FGD involving more participants instead of 3 participants used in the study.

7.4   Conclusion

The social activities and interactions of young women have changed as a result of social media use. Users of SNS often pretend to be who they are not in an effort to appear trendy. Female users of SNS engage in self-comparison with pictures of ideal girls posted online. Such comparisons result in anxiety and pressure to be like the ideal, and ultimately dissatisfaction with one's body. Thus, social media has significant impact on young women's behaviours and attitudes toward social life and society. The findings address the research question of how the social activities and interactions of young women have been affected by use of social media.

The study shows that social media has negative impact on mental health of young women. Challenges and pressures from media usage sometimes affect the mental health of users, including self-destructive and self-harming behaviours. Social norms and society as a whole play a role in triggering the negative impact of social media on the mental health of young women. Social media influences the mental health of young women by means of poor self-image, loneliness, tiredness and quiet disposition, withdrawal from social activities, burden of meeting societal expectations, and sleeping and eating disorder. Such effects impact the mental health of young women negatively. Thus, the study addresses the second research question about the influences of social media on the mental health young women.

Many young women are unable to discuss their problems with their parents. Worse still, many schools do not engage social workers to help students overcome problems associated with SNS usage. The mental health of young women can be improved and enhanced through timely communication and support by their parents, professionals and by schools. It is easier to handle the pressures of SNS use if friends or family members are present to help and support young women through their tough times.

While the study shows that experiences of young women regarding their social life and mental health in relation to the use of social media are challenging, there is limited study on

effective interventions to handle the risks associated with social media. Moreover, it is not clear how healthcare professionals can work with young users to address the risks they face online. These are two lines of enquiry deserving of further study.

The study focused only on young women, making it difficult to extrapolate to the male sex. In effect, gender consideration is absent in the study. It would be of research interest to explore whether there are gender differences regarding the impact of social media, and the means through which such impacts are made.

Unless the risks that young women face online is adequately understood, along with the mechanisms mediating the impact of social media use, it would be difficult devising effective means to address them. Such knowledge is critical if families, schools and social workers are to effectively tackle the mental health problems associated with social media use by young women.

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APPENDIX A - INTERVIEW GUIDE

What does mental health mean to you?

What are the symptoms of mental health?

What are your perspectives on girls using social media?

What sort of challenges are young women facing today on social media?

Is it two different worlds, socializing, spending time on social media and spending time building relationships in person?

Do you think using social media affects your social life?

How do you deal with the challenges, pressures you face?

Who would you turn too first if you need to talk to someone?

How do you think it is important to support girls with to improve their mental health?

As young women living in this society what are your experiences of equality?

How do you think parents can support young women?

How can schools support young women to improve their mental health?

APPENDIX B - LETTER OF CONSENT

My name is Botimi Russell and I am a master student in social work at Malardalen University, Sweden. The purpose of my master thesis is to explore the impact of Facebook on the mental health and social life of young women aged 16-21years. Young women will be invited to talk about their experience of engaging in the virtual world of Facebook and its impact on their lives in the real world.

To conduct the research, a focus group or (individual interview) will take place. Participation in the focus groups are voluntary for the students. If a participant has chosen to participate and then changes her mind, we will terminate the participation of that participant. The interview will be between 55-80 minutes long and it will be recorded. All information you provide during the research will be confidential. Your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willing to participate, and that you may withdraw the consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about the research, please feel free to contact me by Email: brl15001@student.mdh.se, phone: 0729048837 or my supervisor: Gunnel Östlund Phone: 016153604, Email: gunnel.ostlund@mdh.se

Student

I consent to my participation in a focus group/individual interview:

_____   _____

Name   Signature   Date