Mental Health

Social Media Use and Adolescent Mental Health

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Adolescent mental health has declined substantially in the last decade (Sadler et. al, 2018), stretching health services and making the area a medical research priority (MRC, 2019, Wellcome Trust, 2020). Concurrently, widespread digital innovation has radically altered child and adolescent behaviour (91% of 12–15-year-olds now own a smartphone; Ofcom, 2021). This has spurred pervasive concern that digitalisation and social media use might be decreasing adolescent mental health and well-being (Chief Medical Officer, 2019). There are various potential avenues for a PhD project to explore this area, for example:

1) Development (potential CBU co-supervisor: Duncan Astle): This project would examine how developmental processes in adolescence, and potentially childhood, intersect with social media use.

2) Cognition (potential CBU co-supervisors depend on mechanisms and methods of interest): This project will focus on investigating the cognitive mechanisms linking social media use to mental health (either in clinical or community samples of adolescents). It might, for example, take a particular element of social media use or design, match it with cognitive theories/paradigms and then use survey data, experiments and/or computational modelling studies to examine whether this change impacts mental health.

3) Computational Modelling (potential CBU co-supervisor: Camilla Nord): This project examines how to model social media use computationally (see Lindström et al. 2021), understanding the drivers of use and individual differences in how the platforms are used.