

# Exploring the longitudinal impact of social media on adolescent mental health: Findings from the UK Longitudinal Household Study

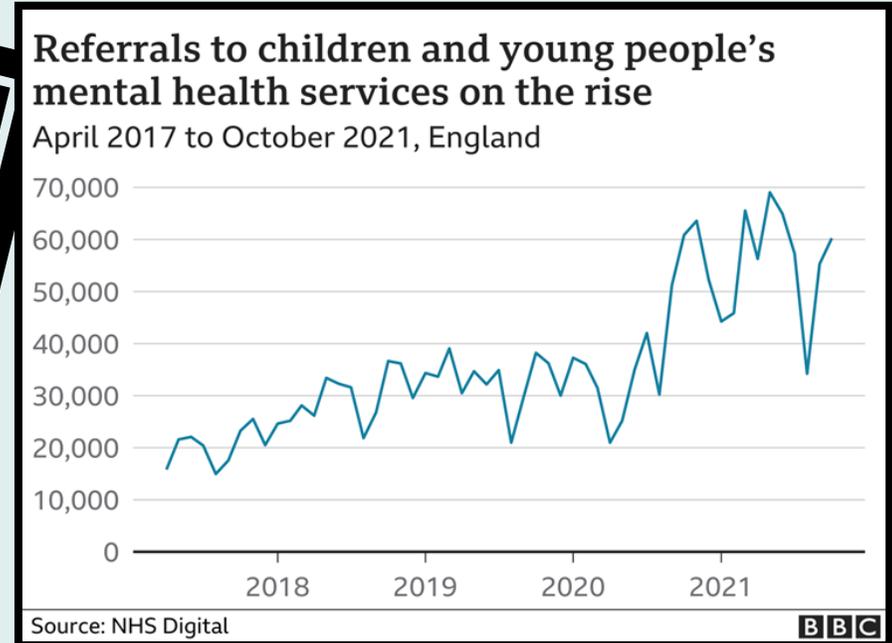
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# Context



# Background

- Social media use has been linked with common mental health disorders in young people
- Limited longitudinal evidence to establish causal link (Keles et al., 2020; Marino et al., 2018)
- Concern about the role social media might play in making mental health problems worse
- Need to understand this relationship to inform interventions.



# Aims



1. **Understand the longitudinal relationship between social media use and mental health**
2. **The mediating role of important factors related to mental health**
  - **Self-esteem**
  - **Social connectedness**

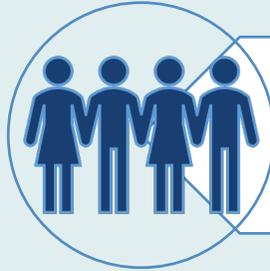
# Research Questions



1. What is the relationship between social media use at age 12-13 and mental health two years later?

2. Do feelings of social connectedness and self-esteem mediate the relationship?

# Methods



3,228 10-15 year olds from Understanding Society youth questionnaire (waves 1-10).

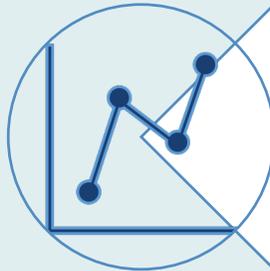


Outcome: Mental health 14-15 – SDQ Total Difficulties

Exposure: Number of hours spent on social media 12-13

Mediators: Self-esteem 13-14,  
Social connectedness 13-14

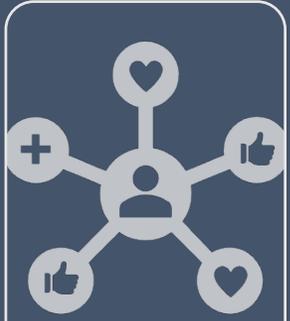
Covariates: Age, sex, ethnicity, year they took part in the survey, mother and household data



Multilevel linear regression – does social media use at age 12-13 predict mental health at age 14-15

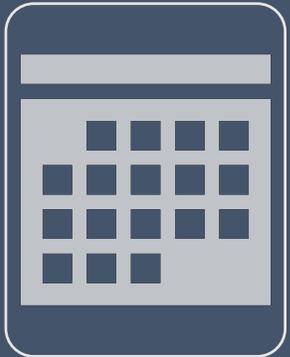
Path analysis - structural equation modelling investigated the mediation pathways

# Results - regression



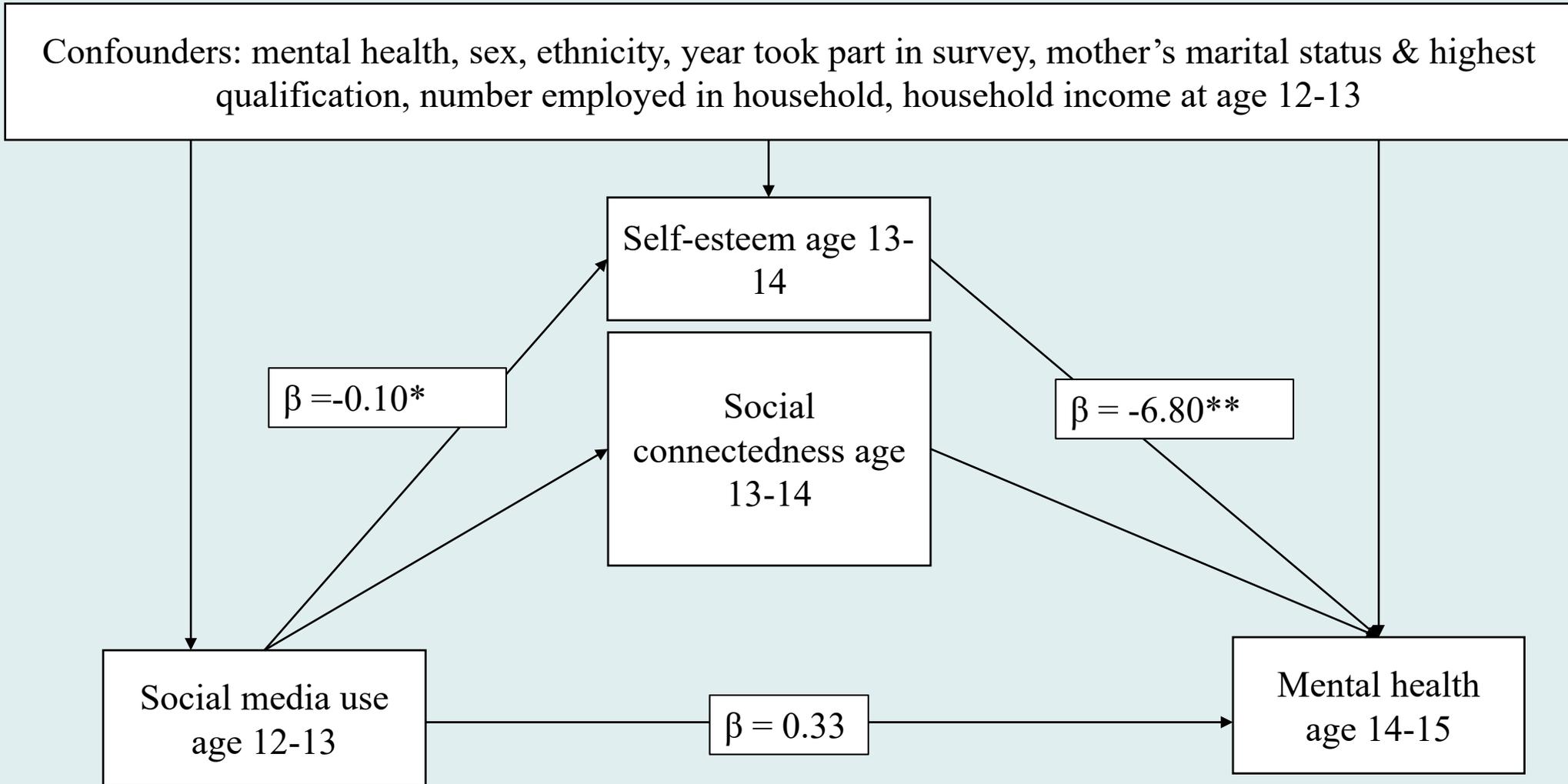
Spending 7 or more hours on social media vs none, mental health problems increased by 3.87 ( $p=.02$ , 95% CI, 0.71-7.03)

Attenuated after adjusting for covariates



Poorer mental health at 12-13 and taking part in the survey later were stronger predictors of mental health at 14-15

# Results – mediation



# Limitations

## Measures

- Self-reported
- Validity

## Sample size

- Relatively small

## Generalizability

- Specific age and time points

# Conclusions

- Little evidence to suggest a causal relationship between social media use and mental health
- Reducing time spent on social media alone may not improve mental health
- Consider the role of self-esteem



Thank you for  
listening  
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