

SAMUEL M. PADOMING  
Feature Writing  
PUNDA GUITAN NHS  
GOVERNOR GENERAL SMITH



## Trapped Connection: Social Media Threatens Young Minds

What was built to connect the world may now be tightening its grip on the young. Behind the glowing screens, endless scrolling, and virtual friendships lies a growing threat to children and adolescents as social media exposes them to harms that reach beyond the digital world and into their mental health, safety, and well-being.

Governments are now being urged to reconsider how much social media children should be allowed to consume as a special chapter in the 2026 World Happiness Report examined a disturbing question: Is social media reasonably safe for children and adolescents? According to authors Jonathan Haidt and Zachary Rausch of New York University's Stern School of Business, the answer is no.

The controversy lies in the widening evidence that these platforms are not merely sources of entertainment and connections. The researchers found overwhelming evidence of severe and widespread direct harms, including sextortion and cyberbullying, as well as compelling evidence of indirect harms such as depression and anxiety. The report also identified addiction and problematic use, sleep deprivation, sexual harassment, and other threats to adolescent well-being.

The evidence behind these findings cuts across different sources. Surveys of young people, parents, teachers, and clinicians were examined alongside corporate documents, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, social media reduction experiments, and natural experiments. Like cracks spreading across a once-smooth surface, the findings reveal that the risks are not confined to one platform, one behavior, or one group of young users.

More troubling, the report, presented information suggesting that some social media executives and employees were allegedly aware that their platforms were causing widespread harm to adolescents. Whistleblowers, law suits, leaked documents, and studies from inside major social media companies contributed to the evidence. What began as a promise of connection is therefore shadowed by a difficult question of accountability: how much responsibility should platforms bear for the harm occurring within their digital spaces?

Escaping the problem, however, is not as easy as deleting an application. Once nearly everyone is connected, leaving a platform can mean losing an important part of one's social circle. The report described this as a collective action trap, where an individual who quits may find herself worse off because her online connections remain there. For adolescents, whose friendships and social lives increasingly extend into the digital realm, disconnections can feel like less freedom and more like isolation.

The researchers also connected the rapid adoption of social media in the early 2010's with the sharp increase in mental illness observed in many Western Nations and beyond. They argued that the historical evidence points to social media as a substantial contributor to this troubling trend. The concern, therefore, is no longer simply about how long young people stare at their screens, but about what prolonged exposure may be doing to an entire generation.

Governments have begun to respond to the growing alarm. The researchers cited the Australian government's decision to raise the age requirement for opening or maintaining a social media account to 16. They also pointed to the international movement to remove smartphones from schools, noting that early evidence suggests such measures can produce educational benefits and may also bring mental health benefits. For Hnat and Rausch, countries effectively conducted a giant uncontrolled experiment on children during 2010's by giving them smartphones and social media accounts - and the available evidence suggests that experiment has caused harm.

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Social media may have promised a world without distance, yet for children and adolescents, constant connection can carry a cost too heavy to ignore. When a tool meant to bring young people closer becomes a source of cyberbullying, sextortion, sleep deprivation, anxiety, and other dangers, protecting childhood may require society to rethink what connection truly means. The screen may keep them connected to the world, but it should never become a trap that keeps them from a healthier one. #



## Trapped in the Scroll : How Social Media Shapes the Youth

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In a world where a swipe and a click connect us instantly, young people are finding themselves caught in a digital web that promises connection but often delivers harm. Recent studies reveal that social media, once hailed as a tool for empowerment, is now a growing threat to the mental health and well being of children and adolescents.

According to the 2022 World Happiness Report, researchers Jonathan Haidt and Zachary Rausch confirm that social media use is indeed harming young people. Their findings highlight overwhelming evidence of direct harms such as addiction, alongside troubling indirect (harmful) harms like depression and anxiety.

These harms are not isolated incidents. Surveys, longitudinal studies, and experiments consistently show that excessive social media use correlates with declining mental health among adolescents. The trend is especially alarming since it coincides with the rapid rise of social media in the early 2010s.

Addiction is one of the most visible effects. Many teens admit they cannot go a day without checking their feeds. This constant need for a validation through likes and comments creates a cycle that is difficult to break, trapping them in endless scrolling.

Beyond addiction, indirect harm such as sleep deprivation, cyberbullying, sextortion, and (harassment) harassment have become widespread. These issues affect not only individual users but also entire peer groups, creating what experts call a "collective action trap".

In this trap, adolescents feel pressured to stay online because leaving means losing social connections. The irony is that the very platforms designed to connect people are isolating them emotionally and mentally, weakening their confidence and resilience.

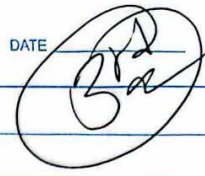
Governments are beginning to respond. Australia, for example, has taken steps to remove smartphones from schools, giving students more flexibility to focus on learning and social interaction in real life. Such policies reflect a growing recognition of the urgent need to protect young minds.

Experts argue that reducing social media use at scale could lead to significant improvements in population level well being. Imagine classrooms where students are more engaged, friendships built face to face and mental health statistics showing recovery instead of decline. For Filipino youth, the challenge is equally pressing. With one of the highest rates of social media use in the world, our adolescents are vulnerable to the same risks. Parents, teachers, and policymakers must work together to guide responsible digital habits.

Social media is not inherently evil but its unchecked use has become a silent epidemic among the youth. The evidence is clear: without balance and boundaries, the promise of connection turns into a prison of anxiety and addiction. ~~The time to act is now - for the sake~~  
~~of our children's happiness, health, and future.~~



DATE



## Robbing the Playground

### The Corporate Takeover of Adolescent Well-being

By: Altri L. Pogosa

Every morning, millions of young minds wake up not to the soft glow of dawn, but to the addictive blue light of a smartphone screen. The traditional neighborhood playground once vibrant with physical play, face to face interactions, and organic friendships has been quietly replaced by an endless digital feed. What was initially celebrated as a revolutionary tool for human connection has evolved into a digital enclosure, fundamentally altering the mental and emotional well-being of an entire generation.

The scientific consensus regarding this massive shift is becoming undeniably clear according to a special chapter in the 2020 World Happiness Report authored by social scientists Jonathan Haidt and Zachary Rausch from New York University's Stern School of Business. Social media platforms cannot be considered reasonably safe for children and adolescents. As detailed by Janine Mates in the Philippine Star, the study reveals overwhelming evidence that unrestricted social media access inflicts severe, widespread harm on youth well-being at a population scale.

The hazards hidden behind the glass screen impact young lives in two distinct yet equally devastating ways: direct and indirect harms. Direct harms include immediate digital threats such as widespread cyberbullying, online sexual harassment, and the alarming surge in financial extortion. Indirect harms, meanwhile, act as a slow-drip toxic stressor, eroding young lives through chronic sleep deprivation, screen addiction, deep seated anxiety, and skyrocketing rates of youth depression.

What makes this reality particularly alarming is that social media corporations were far from ignorant of the damage taking place. Internal documents, whistleblower leaks, legal lawsuits and corporate research confirm that social media executives and employees were fully aware that their platforms were causing widespread harm to adolescents. Yet, despite knowing that prioritized user retention and profit over the safety of vulnerable children.



## Robbing the Playground

### ~~How Social Platforms Hijacked Youth Mental Health~~

For modern teenagers, walking away from these platforms is far more complicated than simply deleting an app or logging off. Researchers explain that young users are trapped in a "collective action trap." Because virtually their entire social network lives inside these apps, any individual teen who decides to step away risks total social isolation and exclusion from peer groups. This reality forces adolescents to stay on platforms that actively harm them, simply to maintain basic social survival.

The historical roots of this mental health crisis trace back to the early 2010s, when smartphones and social apps saw rapid, widespread adoption. Researchers identify this exact time frame as the primary driver behind the sharp, unprecedented spike in adolescent mental illness across Western nations and around the globe. In essence, society unknowingly allowed technology companies to run a giant, uncontrolled experiment on real children.

Recognizing the severity of the situation, forward-thinking governments are beginning to erect strict regulatory guardrails. Australia took a bold step by raising the legal age limit for opening or maintaining a social media account to 16. Simultaneously, schools around the world are increasingly removing smartphones from classrooms, a policy shift that is already showing immediate improvements in student focus, academic learning, and overall emotional health.

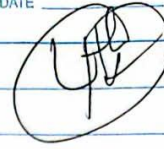
However, policy changes alone cannot fix a culturally entrenched crisis. Reclaiming childhood requires a united, collective effort from parents, educators, and local communities to break the digital addiction that dominates modern youth culture. The World Happiness Report authors emphasize, achieving a widespread, large scale reduction in adolescent social media usage could trigger profound, lasting improvements in global mental health.

The data is undeniable, and the verdict is clear: the corporate experiment on ~~spare~~ our youth has failed. To protect the well-being and future of the next generation, society must stand together, enforce firm boundaries, and put an end to the experiment giving children back the peaceful, healthy childhood they deserve.



DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Naoku C. Canonio  
Event/Medium: **FEATURE WRITING** / English  
School: Naga Elementary School  
District: San Isidro South



## Enraptured Online: Social Media Steals the Innocence of the Young

Addiction. Isolation. Insecurity. What begins with a simple click can slowly become a habit that is difficult to break.

Social Media has become an important part of young people's daily lives, giving them ways to communicate, learn, and express themselves. According to the Pew Research Center, 95% of teenagers have a smartphone, which drives continuous online access. But what if beneath the colorful posts and cheerful emojis lies a side that is darker than it appears?

Recognizing the danger of using social media, the Philippines enacted Republic Act No. 11930, or the Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act, which protects children from online sexual abuse and exploitation, including grooming, luring, and sexual extortion.

For a child, one private photo can become a nightmare when it falls into the wrong hands. What begins as a friendly message or a simple request can suddenly turn into a storm of threats, fear, and helplessness. The screen that once served as a window to the world can become a cage, locking a young victim in silence.

A special chapter in the 2026 World Happiness Report looked into evidence to answer the question, "Is social media use reasonably safe for children and adolescents?" The answer is "no" according to the authors of the Stern School of Business of New York University, Jonathan Haidt and Zachary Rausch.

For children and adolescents, social media can be a beautiful garden filled with connections, but not every path leads somewhere safe. Some paths are covered with thorns: hurtful words, cruel comments, unwanted messages, and people who take advantage of their innocence. Words become weapons, trust becomes a weakness, and innocence becomes something others may try to take away.

"Just as the recent international trend of removing smartphones from schools is beginning to produce educational benefits, the research we have reviewed suggests that removing social media from early adolescence is likely to produce mental health benefits," wrote Haidt and Rausch.

Sometimes, the bravest thing a child can do is put the phone down. In a classroom free from the constant glow of screens and the endless buzz of notifications, young minds are given room to breathe, focus, and simply be present. Without a smartphone pulling their attention away, learners can hear their teachers more clearly, share laughter with classmates, and rediscover the joy of real conversations. Silence from a screen is exactly what young minds need to be heard.

What begins with a simple click can become an addiction that steals precious time, an isolation that pushes real connections away, and an insecurity that makes young hearts question their worth. Social Media may promise a world of endless connection, but children should never have to lose their innocence to belong in it. It is time to look beyond the glow, protect young minds, and ensure that no child becomes enraptured online.



Name: Mary Annalyn B. Lardizabal  
Event / Medium: Feature Writing / English  
School: Crispin E. Rojas NIS  
District: Baguio North

### The Nerve Quicksand: Logged In, Locked Out

In some techno-thriller movie, when a senior high Vee stepped onto a moving motorcycle blindfolded and accelerates to 60 miles per hour risking their lives for an anonymous online mob "The Watchmen", it seemed like pure Hollywood hyperbole. Yet a decade later, it became an accurate blueprint of an entire generation hyperconnected to global network but cognitively isolated and falling behind in the real world.

Every scroll trades deep cognitive development for micro-doses of algorithmic validation, creating an unprecedented cultural paradox - the Nerve Quicksand - where the harder a young person struggles to find connection, the deeper they sink into an environment engineered to trap them.

The cognitive decline is not an accident - it is ruled in human biology. Educational neuroscientist Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath has repeatedly demonstrated that the adolescent brain is not structurally wired for continuous task switching and screen-based stimulations. Rapid digital interaction disrupts the brain ability to enter deep processing modes essential for working memory, critical thinking, and long-term learning. When formative years are spent bouncing between notifications and social validation loops, sustained focus erodes.

The cognitive toll is confirmed by research published in the Philippine Star by Janice Mates on March 23, 2024. A special chapter in the 2024 World Happiness Report, authored by Jonathan Haidt and Zachary Rausch of New York University Stern School of Business, definitely answers the question of whether social media is reasonably safe for children and adolescents with a resounding no. Haidt and Rausch highlight that giving smartphones and social media account to young people constituted a "giant uncontrolled experiment" that has caused population-level harm across Western nation and beyond.

