

UTOPIA OR DOOM?

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Background: We call them Generation Z and they are children born between 1997 and 2012. They feel more comfortable on the Internet than at parties, they are physically safer than adolescents have ever been (they participate in traffic less, use alcohol less). But they are on the verge of a mental health crisis. They do not know life without mobile phones and tablets. Around 2011-12. psychologists notice sudden changes in the behavior and emotional states of teenagers.

Methods and Objectives: The background and data were obtained by looking at the Netflix documentary “The Social Dilemma”, the documents of the Center for Humane Technology and the work of psychology professor Jean Twenge. Examine the link between mental health and social networks; are social media throwing today’s kids into depression?

Results: The advent of the smartphone has radically changed every aspect of teenagers’ lives, from the nature of their social interactions to their mental health. Rates of teenage depression and suicide have skyrocketed since 2011. Today’s teenagers are less likely to leave home without their parents. Therefore, they are less likely to have fun and enter into romantic relationships. The decline in dating is accompanied by a decline in sexual activity. These teenagers describe getting a driver’s license as something their parents forced them to do. That would have been unimaginable to previous generations. Across the spectrum of behaviors-drinking, going out, spending time unsupervised: 18-year-olds now behave more like 15-year-olds, and 15-year-olds more like 13- year-olds. Social networks carry additional opportunities to feel excluded and lonely when they see their friends or classmates gathering without them. Smartphones are also disrupting teenagers’ sleep: many now sleep less than seven hours a night.

Conclusions: Greater control over the use of devices, limiting the time spent on the screen, blocking dangerous contacts and “technology-free zones” at home are suggested, so that children can also adopt healthy habits.

Keywords: generation z, social networks, smartphones, mental health