

Research Paper

Online Dating's Effects on Adolescents: A Quick Overview with Reference to the Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

Background: Teenagers and adults alike are increasingly using online dating, which has both benefits and drawbacks. Online grooming, bullying, emotional abuse, revenge porn, harassment, and a lack of social connection are among the many problems associated with online dating that adolescents are more susceptible to. **Aim:** Our goal was to provide a concise overview of the material that has been written about the effects of online dating on teenagers, with a focus on the current Indian situation. **Methods:** In September 2022, a quick, no-date literature search was carried out in PubMed and Google Scholar. Various phrase combinations, including "online dating," "dating applications," "social media," "mental illness," "psychiatric disorders," "adolescents," and "mental health," were among the keywords. In our investigation, original research and review publications written in English that examined the effects of internet dating on teenagers were examined. A descriptive technique was employed to summarise the findings. **Results:** The effects of online dating on teenagers are examined in light of three factors: (1) difficulties related to teenage online dating; (2) the global context; and (3) the Indian context. **Conclusion:** Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, teenagers have been more interested in online dating. It has led to a number of troubling scenarios, including higher risk of sexually transmitted illnesses, dating violence, and mental health difficulties. The literature discusses each of these problems in relation to unsupervised use of technology, peer pressure, and desire to fit into the mainstream. There is still a dearth of Indian data on this subject, underscoring the necessity for study exploring the influence of online dating on adolescents.

Keywords: *Online, Dating, Adolescents, Apps, India*

The first use of the word “dating” in the American language appeared in the 1920s. As defined by various authors “dating” is a stage in a romantic relationship when two individuals engage in activities together, most often with the intention of weighing each other’s suitability as a partner for a future intimate relationship historically, courtship used to be a matter of family and community interest. However, around the time of the Civil War, it became a private matter for couples. The protocols and practices of dating vastly differ across cultures, societies, and time periods. In India, dating is heavily influenced by the custom of arranged marriages “Arranged marriage” refers to a marriage negotiated via matchmakers or matrimonial services and consented to by parents and relatives. There are

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Online Dating's Effects on Adolescents: A Quick Overview with Reference to the Indian Context

currently compelling signs that India's marriage institution is drastically changing. The increasing prevalence and acceptance of love weddings, particularly among urban populations, is likely due to India's growing global integration. ³Due to the increasing loneliness brought on by the lockdowns, internet dating has grown in popularity since the start of the COVID-19 epidemic. One definition of online dating is using online dating services to initiate a romantic relationship. Conversely, online dating services can be described as social media sites where people can locate friends and romantic partners. These platforms encompass dating websites, apps, and social media texting sites where people can communicate with each other online. Mobile phones, laptops, tablets, and PCs are just a few of the devices that make it simple to access these applications. Approximately 83% of respondents expressed interest in online dating during the epidemic, according to an Outlook India study from 2024. In comparison to the time before the COVID-19 outbreak, 63% of online dating platform users said they were worried about their future, and about 70% said they had changed their mind about online dating. Furthermore, 81% of users claimed to be open to getting to know their matches at a deeper level, while 66% of users said that they were open to just conversing with their matches even if there was no hope of a long-term connection. The adolescent population in India enjoys free access to online dating services, since their use is not limited to adults. Within the past two years, practically all adolescents in India have used a smart device for educational purposes, something that contributed to a dramatic surge in unsupervised usage of social media and online dating applications. Although definitions vary greatly across the literature, an individual aged between 10–19 years can be classified as an adolescent. It is vital to highlight that adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and maturity when changes occur in the emotional, physical, social, and behavioural worlds of an individual. During this transitional time, these individuals are more exposed to a number of difficulties having to do with online dating, including online grooming, bullying, emotional abuse, revenge porn, harassment, and lack of social connection. In this context, we sought to provide a concise overview of the research that has been written about the effects of online dating on teenagers, with a focus on the current situation in India.

METHODS

In September 2022, a quick literature search with no time restrictions was carried out in PubMed and Google Scholar. Keywords comprised various combinations of phrases such as “online dating”, “dating applications”, “social media”, “mental illness”, “psychiatric disorders”, “adolescents”, and “mental health”. The review comprised original research and English-language review articles examining the effects of internet dating on teenagers. A descriptive analysis technique was utilized to summarise the findings.

RESULTS

Overall, 58 publications connected to the topic of interest were found of which were part of the review. The obtained results will be given as follows: (1) difficulties associated with online dating among adolescents, (2) the international context, and (3) Indian context.

Issues linked with internet dating among Teenagers

Development of a new technology comes with its own advantages and drawbacks. Online dating applications were designed to facilitate communication. Yet difficulties, such as lack of oversight, exposure to internet grooming, harassment, and increased peer pressure have appeared along the route. People in that age group may suddenly have to deal with a variety of particular problems as a result of their usage of online dating apps due to their heightened

desire to explore in several facets of life throughout adolescence these issues are mentioned below.

1. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STDs) are a risk.

Due to unsupervised access to online dating apps, the absence of sex education, and easy access to pornography, a substantial number of adolescents are being enticed into unprotected sexual intercourses, increasing their risk of developing STDs. According to the UNAIDS 2022 report (based on data from 2000 to 2021), 160,000 people between the ages of 10 and 19 are estimated to be HIV positive. Of these, 85% live in sub-Saharan Africa, and 56% are girls. One of the main reasons for the rise in the number of male homosexuals is intercourse. HIV cases in teenagers; in addition to other variables such youth sex work and sexual exploitation throughout adolescence. Adolescents who take drugs or who identify as transgender are more likely to get HIV.

2. Teen Dating Violence (TDV)

TDV refers to the physical, sexual, or emotional violence that occurs between teenage romantic partners communicating through internet platforms. It includes psychological abuse stalking harassment, and physical and sexual assault. Online dating violence is linked significantly greater incidence of suicide compared to offline dating, However, greater degrees of peer connection and parental support were shown to lower the risk of suicidal thoughts and actions. Previous studies demonstrate that adolescents with authoritarian mothers are at higher danger of becoming a victim of abuse in online dating and that adolescent females with authoritarian fathers are more vulnerable to verbal-emotional violence A cross-sectional study from England and Wales that examined dating and relationship violence among students aged 16 to 19 revealed a high prevalence of dating and relationship victimization among teenagers in both males (two to eight times) and females (two to four times) but did not find any significant gender differences. Sexting is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "sending sexually explicit photographs, video-clips, or text messages to someone, typically via a mobile phone". A study conducted in Italy in 2016 identified a relationship between dating violence and moderate-to-high use of sexting, underlining the fact that male adolescents and non-heterosexuals were more often involved in sexting the study also revealed that dating violence victimization and perpetration was predicted by sexting and by the duration of the relationship.

3. Mental health problems

Numerous studies have looked for a connection between teenage Tinder users' weight control practices and body image problems. Compared to non-users, Tinder users were found to have greater levels of harmful weight management behaviour and body image problems. While some research has connected teenage use of dating apps to disordered eating patterns, no study has found a substantial connection between online dating and psychological discomfort.

Global background

A National Pew Research Centre survey carried out in the United States in 2014 and 2015 revealed that approximately 35% of teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 have been romantically involved with or dated someone, despite the paucity of evidence examining the effects of online dating on teenagers. Online platforms were the most popular way to interact romantically with people, even though 76% of these relationships began offline. The survey also indicated that girls were more likely to be the recipients of awkward flirty communications than boys. In particular, roughly 35% of girls had banned or unfriended

Online Dating's Effects on Adolescents: A Quick Overview with Reference to the Indian Context

someone for that reason compared to 16% of boys. Although it was suggested that online platforms assist adolescents feel closer to their partners and exhibit affection, the platforms were also the basis for envy and doubt in relationships among 27% of users. Texting was the most popular method of communication and social interaction, followed by phone calls and in-person meetings. In total, 88% of the teenagers anticipated hearing from their partners at least once a day, and 15% anticipated an hourly check-in. Approximately 4–10% of teenagers in relationships showed potentially dangerous or domineering conduct toward their current or former partner. This includes utilizing a tracking tool without the partner's knowledge, accessing their accounts, altering their social media, posing as their significant other, and sharing embarrassing photos of their spouse. Around 22% of adolescents encountered inappropriate behaviour at the hand of their previous partners, such as public shaming or publishing disparaging comments against them once the relationship ended via social media sites. Approximately 15% of teenagers said that their ex-partners used online platforms to spread false information about them. According to Winston et al. (2021), using online platforms can either strengthen or weaken relationships with peers and family.

The Indian setting

The topic of adolescent romantic connection has begun to gain more attention from researchers in India. Dating is said to help teenagers develop their social skills and explore their emerging romantic sentiments. Furthermore, it helps to build emotional feelings, form personal and social identities, and minimize the feelings of loneliness and isolation. Despite the obvious benefits of dating, risky behaviours among teenagers in love relationships—such as getting married, engaging in risky sexual conduct, and falling pregnant—have frequently been reported in a number of prominent Indian publications. The impacted teenagers get in touch with Child Welfare Committee (CWC) government children's homes and other child protection agencies. They are offered psychological care and other child protection services, pursuant to the standards of the Juvenile Justice (care and protection) Act of 2015. These services include institutional and non-institutional care, such as child line, foster care, sponsorship, shelter homes, promotion of family-based care, aftercare programs, adoption, education, vocational training, development programs, legal aid, rehabilitation, etc. Any kind of sexual interaction with someone under the age of eighteen is prohibited by the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POSCO 2012) and is subject to legal penalties. Teenagers are subject to legal duties and their sexual freedom is threatened as a result. Dating as a concept may not have been known to Indian adolescents two or three decades ago, but currently, it is very common. Here are some of the reasons which have led to the growth of a teenage dating culture in India.

1. Westernization- The rising infiltration of Western Culture has driven urban Indians closer to the concept of open dating among teens. Although they may still disapprove of teenage love relationships, the elderly do acknowledge and accept their increasing prevalence. Hence, the western influence has led to an increased popularity of dating among adolescents in India.

2. Early Puberty- In the last few decades, it has been the fact that puberty occurs in both boys and girls at a younger age than was the case in earlier centuries. Typically, girls go through puberty between menarche (first menstruation) a few years later, whilst boys start puberty between the ages of 9 and 14. Puberty early increases curiosity in sex, which causes adolescents seek for romantic partners more often. It happens in the setting of opposing emotions and the social pressure resulting from the shift from dependency as a child to independence as an adult.

3. Peer Pressure- The Majority of teens try dating due to peer pressure. Not having a spouse may raise the danger of being mocked by one's peers and can be a reason for non-acceptance into social circles. **4. Media Influence.** Dating has become more common among teenagers as a result of social media and electronic media portraying romantic relationships and love as seductive experiences. These days, publishing romantic photos, changing one's relationship status, and introducing a new partner on social media have all become essential aspects of teenagers' life.

CONCLUSION

Online dating has become more popular among teenagers since the start of the COVID-19 epidemic, which has resulted in the creation of several problems, such as a higher risk of STDs, dating violence, and mental health problems. The research discusses all of these problems in relation to peer pressure, unsupervised technology use, and the need to blend in. However, there is still a dearth of information from India on this subject, underscoring the necessity for studies that examine how internet dating affects teenagers.

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Online Dating's Effects on Adolescents: A Quick Overview with Reference to the Indian Context

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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