



SHORT COMMUNICATION

Body image in adolescents and the impact of social networks in Argentina

La imagen corporal en adolescentes y el impacto de las redes sociales en Argentina

Lorrayne Kathleen Silva de Paula¹ , Maria Romina Leardi¹ 

¹Universidad Abierta Interamericana, Facultad de Medicina y Ciencias de la Salud, Carrera de Medicina. Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Cite as: Silva de Paula LK, Leardi MR. Body image in adolescents and the impact of social networks in Argentina. Gamification and Augmented Reality. 2024; 2:16. <https://doi.org/10.56294/gr202416>

Submitted: 14-10-2023

Revised: 02-01-2024

Accepted: 24-02-2024

Published: 25-02-2024

Editor: Adrián Alejandro Vitón-Castillo 

Corresponding author: Lorrayne Kathleen Silva de Paula 

ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a crucial stage in human development, marked by intense physical, emotional and social changes. During this period, the perception of body image plays a fundamental role in the formation of self-esteem. However, the digital age has introduced new challenges, especially in Argentina, where the massive use of social networks has exposed adolescents to unattainable beauty standards. This constant exposure caused distortions in body image, affecting their mental and physical health. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Facebook spread unrealistic representations through filters and editing, generating body dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression and eating disorders. Furthermore, some young people resorted to risky behaviour to modify their appearance. In response to this problem, strategies such as digital education, the promotion of self-esteem, the regulation of the use of networks and professional intervention were proposed. The situation in Argentina highlighted the urgent need to foster a digital culture that promotes acceptance and the integral well-being of adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescence; Body Image; Social Networks; Dissatisfaction; Mental Health.

RESUMEN

La adolescencia fue una etapa crucial en el desarrollo humano, marcada por intensos cambios físicos, emocionales y sociales. En este período, la percepción de la imagen corporal desempeñó un papel fundamental en la formación de la autoestima. Sin embargo, la era digital introdujo nuevos desafíos, especialmente en Argentina, donde el uso masivo de redes sociales expuso a los adolescentes a estándares de belleza inalcanzables. Esta exposición constante provocó distorsiones en la imagen corporal, afectando su salud mental y física. Las plataformas como Instagram, TikTok y Facebook difundieron representaciones irreales mediante filtros y ediciones, generando insatisfacción corporal, ansiedad, depresión y trastornos alimentarios. Además, algunos jóvenes recurrieron a conductas de riesgo para modificar su apariencia. Frente a esta problemática, se propusieron estrategias como la educación digital, la promoción de la autoestima, la regulación del uso de redes y la intervención profesional. La situación en Argentina evidenció la urgencia de fomentar una cultura digital que promueva la aceptación y el bienestar integral de los adolescentes.

Palabras clave: Adolescencia; Imagen Corporal; Redes Sociales; Insatisfacción; Salud Mental.

BACKGROUND

Adolescence is a crucial human development stage characterized by significant physical, emotional, and social changes. Body image perception plays a fundamental role in building self-esteem and psychological

well-being in this context.^(1,2) However, in today's digital age, the ubiquity of social media has introduced new challenges, especially in Argentina, where its use is widespread among young people. Constant exposure to unattainable beauty ideals and social comparison can distort adolescents' body image, generating adverse effects on both their mental and physical health.^(3,4)

Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have become spaces where images that reflect unrealistic beauty standards predominate.⁽⁵⁾ Filters and editing tools allow users to modify their physical appearance, creating idealized representations that rarely match reality.⁽⁶⁾ This constant exposure can lead teens to compare their appearance to these retouched images, fostering feelings of dissatisfaction and distortion of their body image. A study published in *Psychology Today* points out that negative body image is associated with several adverse outcomes, such as low self-esteem and eating disorders.⁽⁷⁾

Body image distortion refers to an erroneous or exaggerated perception of the shape or size of one's own body. This altered perception can lead to disorders such as Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), characterized by an obsessive concern with perceived defects in appearance. According to an article in *Infobae*, BDD affects approximately 1,9 % of adolescents and is six times more common in girls than in boys. Those affected may experience anxiety, depression, and social isolation, negatively impacting their quality of life.⁽⁸⁾

Body dissatisfaction and exposure to unrealistic beauty ideals can trigger various health problems in adolescents:

Eating Disorders: The pursuit of a body that fits the standards promoted on social media can lead to harmful eating behaviors, such as anorexia or bulimia. A study published in *Revista Sanum* indicates that increased time spent on social media is related to feelings of isolation from the real world, which can lead to mental disorders.

Anxiety and Depression: Constant comparison and pressure to achieve unattainable ideals can lead to high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The feeling of not meeting these standards can lower self-esteem and increase feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness.

Risk Behaviors: Some teens may resort to extreme methods to change their appearance, such as misusing dietary supplements, steroids, or unnecessary cosmetic surgery. These practices can have serious consequences for physical and mental health.

In Argentina, social media use is particularly prevalent among young people. A study conducted by the University of Cuenca del Plata found a significant relationship between the use of filters on Instagram and body image distortion in young people in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA). In addition, social and cultural pressure to achieve certain beauty ideals is amplified by the influence of social media, which can exacerbate body dissatisfaction and its associated consequences.⁽⁹⁾

To mitigate the adverse effects of social media on adolescents' body image, it is essential to implement strategies at the individual, family, and community levels:

Digital Education: Encourage critical thinking about social media content. Adolescents must understand that many images are edited and do not reflect reality.

Promoting Self-Esteem: Encourage activities that reinforce confidence and self-worth beyond physical appearance, such as sports, art, or volunteering.

Open Communication: Create safe spaces for teens to express their concerns and feelings about their body image and social media experiences.

Regulating Social Media Use: Set healthy limits on the time spent on digital platforms and the type of content consumed.

Professional Intervention: Seek help from psychologists or counselors specializing in cases where body dissatisfaction significantly affects a teen's daily life.

Body image distortion in adolescents is a complex and multifaceted problem intensified by the frequent use of social media. In Argentina, the high penetration of these platforms among young people underscores the urgent need to address this issue. It is essential to promote a healthy digital culture that values body diversity and prioritizes the overall well-being of adolescents, recognizing that true beauty lies in authenticity and self-acceptance.⁽¹⁰⁾

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1. Zapillón FL. Influencia de las redes sociales en los trastornos de la conducta alimentaria [Internet] [Tesis]. Buenos Aires: Universidad de Belgrano - Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud - Licenciatura en Nutrición; 2022 [citado 2024 jul 11]. Disponible en: <http://repositorio.ub.edu.ar/handle/123456789/10038>

2. Pichot P, Aliño JLI, Miyar MV. Manual diagnóstico y estadístico de los trastornos mentales.

3. Ladwig G, Tanck JA, Quittkat HL, Vocks S. Risks and benefits of social media trends: The influence of "fitspiration", "body positivity", and text-based "body neutrality" on body dissatisfaction and affect in women with and without eating disorders. *Body Image*. 2024 sep 1;50:101749.

4. Rebordinos CB. Los influencer en relación con las operaciones estéticas de la juventud.
5. Garza R, Cardoso V, González C. El trastorno dismórfico corporal y las redes sociales. *Rev Mex Med Fam*. 2024 mar;11(1):33-7.
6. Ladera Otones I. La satisfacción con la imagen corporal: su relación con las redes sociales y la autoestima [Internet]. 2016 [citado 2024 jul 14]. Disponible en: <https://repositorio.comillas.edu/xmlui/handle/11531/13133>
7. Roqué Vall H, Andrés A, Saldaña C. The impact of COVID-19 lockdown on social network sites use, body image disturbances and self-esteem among adolescent and young women. *Prog Neuropsychopharmacol Biol Psychiatry*. 2021 ago 30;110:110293.
8. Ruiz PDE. El uso de redes sociales está relacionado con el aumento de cirugías estéticas, reveló un estudio [Internet]. infobae. 2024 [citado 2024 jul 14]. Disponible en: <https://www.infobae.com/tecnologia/2024/04/29/uso-de-redes-sociales-esta-relacionado-con-el-aumento-de-cirugias-esteticas-revelo-estudio/>
9. Cortez D, Gallegos M, Jiménez T, Martínez P, Saravia S, Cruzat-Mandich C, et al. Influencia de factores socioculturales en la imagen corporal desde la perspectiva de mujeres adolescentes. *Rev Mex Trastor Aliment*. 2016 dic;7(2):116-24.
10. Griffiths S, Murray SB, Krug I, McLean SA. The Contribution of Social Media to Body Dissatisfaction, Eating Disorder Symptoms, and Anabolic Steroid Use Among Sexual Minority Men. *Cyberpsychol Behav Soc Netw*. 2018 mar;21(3):149-56.

FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Data curation: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Formal analysis: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Research: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Methodology: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Project management: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Resources: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Software: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Supervision: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Validation: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Visualization: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Writing - original draft: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.

Writing - review and editing: Lorryne Kathleen Silva de Paula, Maria Romina Leardi.