



## Social Media and Youth Mental Health: Implications for Education

Connected 24

**Tracy Vaillancourt, Ph.D., FRSC**  
 Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in School-Based Mental Health and Violence Prevention  
 Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education  
 School of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences  
 Brain and Mind Research Institute, Faculty of Medicine  
 Centre of Health Law, Policy, and Ethics, Faculty of Law

- Child and Youth Mental Health



- SM and MH



- Social Media Use

- Prevention

1

2

- Child and Youth Mental Health



## Child and Youth Mental Health

3

4

## Scope of the Problem



1 in 5 have serious MH problems

Canada

World

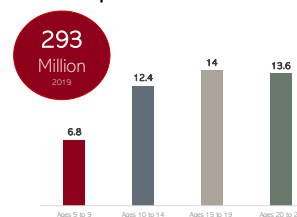


1 in 7 have serious MH problems

5



## Scope of the Problem



6



14%  
4-17yrs

### The mental health of young people in Australia: key findings from the child and adolescent component of the national survey of mental health and well-being

M.G. Sawyer, P.M. Arora, P.A. Baghurst, J.E. Clark, B.W. Chetty, R.J. Kurlak, B. Spence, G.C. Patton, M.R. Prior, B. Raphael, J.B. Roy, L.C. Whitham, S.R. Zubrick

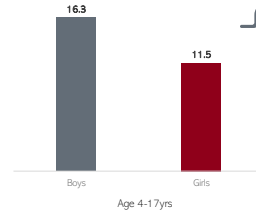
**Objective:** To identify the prevalence of four mental disorders (Depressive Disorder, Conduct Disorder and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), the prevalence of mental health problems, the health-related quality of life of those with problems, and patterns of service utilization of those with and without mental health problems, among a 17-year-olds in Australia. To identify rates of health-care utilization among adolescents with mental health problems.

**Method:** The mental disorders were assessed using the parent version of Key Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children (KIDDIS) or Parental Assessment of Child Behaviour (PACB) to identify mental health problems and associated consequences. A sample representative of the Australian population was used. The Youth New South Wales Questionnaire completed by adolescents was employed to identify health-care utilization.

**Results:** Fourteen percent of children and adolescents were identified as having mental health problems. Most of those with mental health problems had problems in other areas of their lives and were at increased risk for mental ill-being. Only 20% of those with mental health problems had accessed a professional service during the six months prior to the survey.

**Conclusions:** Child and adolescent mental health problems are an important public health problem in Australia. The development of mental health services for young people that are evidence-based and that address the needs of young people with mental health problems, or populations, requires careful study. The latter are an essential component of any strategy to reduce mental health problems as the high prevalence of problems in young people and the high rates of health-care utilization for all those needing help. Clinical and population health interventions that take into account the complex problems experienced by children with mental disorders.

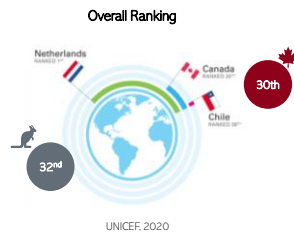
### Australia Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2<sup>nd</sup>)



7

8

### Comparison of 38 economically advanced countries



### Mental Well-Being

### Comparison of 38 economically advanced countries



9

10

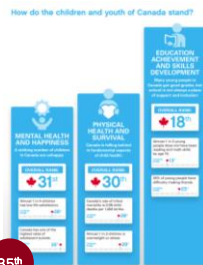
### Suicide

- Leading cause of death among youth in high income countries
- 17.6% of all deaths
- Particular problem for boys
- First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth



37th

35th



11

12



### Pandemic Decline

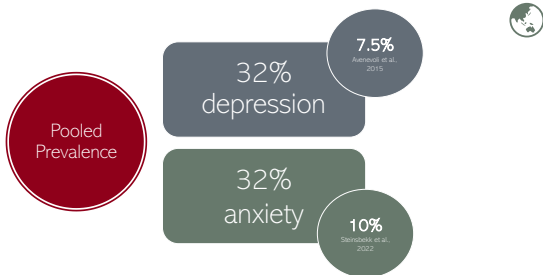


13

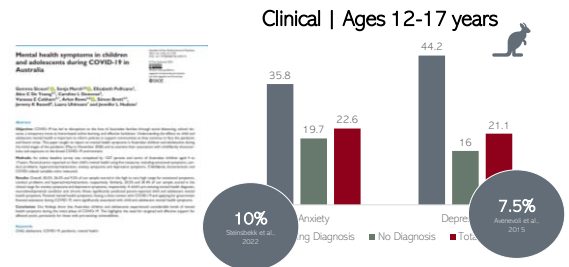


- 18 systematic reviews of 366 studies

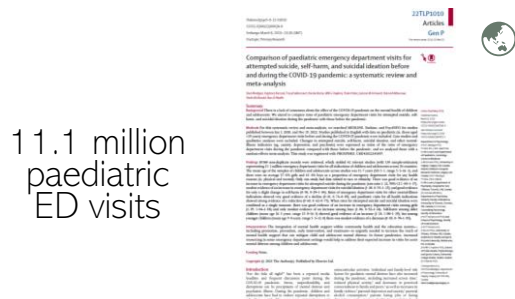
14



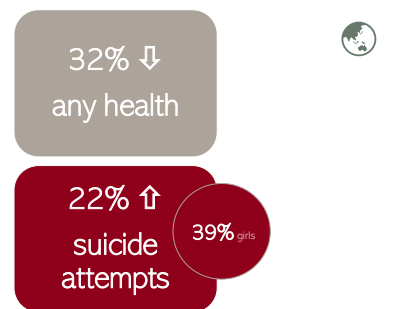
15



16



17



18

## Comparison of child and adolescent health service utilisation for eating disorders before and during the covid-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis



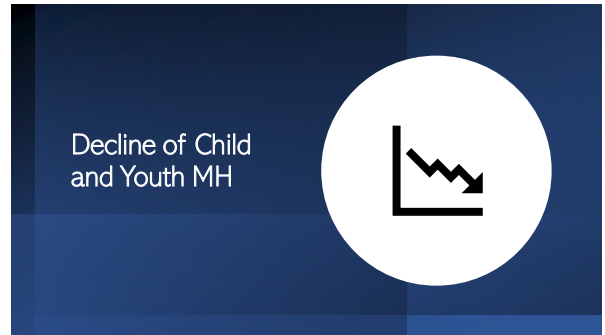
Sheri Madigan, PhD, Tracy Vallancourt PhD, Gina Dimitropoulos, PhD, Shalini Premji, PhD, Selena Kahlert, BSc, Katie Zumwalt, MD, Daphne Korczak MD, Kristin von Ranson, PhD, Paolo Pador, BSc (hons), Heather Granshorn, Ross D. Neville, PhD

Accepted: *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*

52 studies and >148,000 ED-related visits

54% ↑

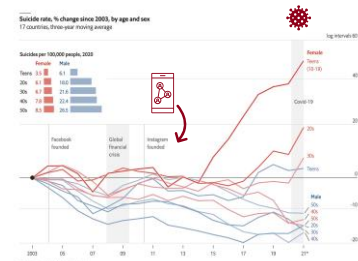
19



20

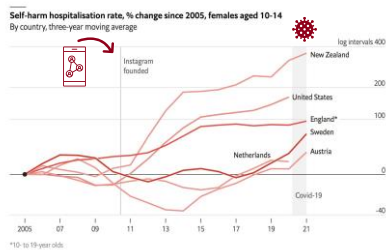


21



The Economist, 2023

22



The Economist, 2023

23



24



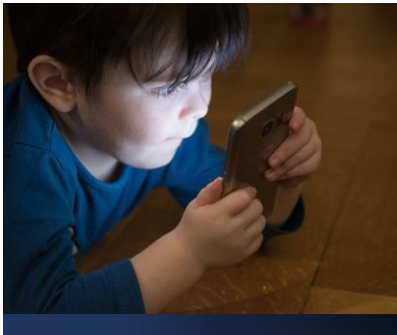
Financial Times, 2023



• Social Media Use

25

26



Social Media Use

27

5+ billion

Petrosyan, 2024



28

95%

13–17-year-olds use social media

Vogel's et al., 2022



29

40%

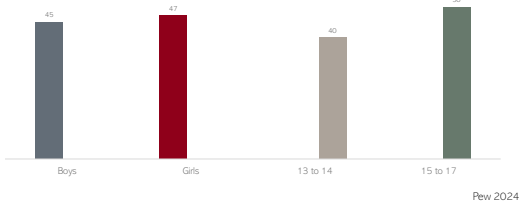
8–12-year-olds use social media

Rideout et al., 2022

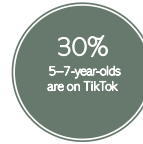


30

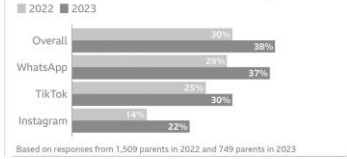
### % of U.S. teens who use internet almost constantly



31



### How the percentage of five to seven-year-olds using social media has risen in one year



Ofcom's Online Safety Group, 2024

32

### Social Media and Youth



part of daily life



used to chat, send images,  
share stories, and to keep  
up with friends



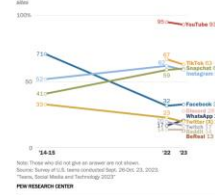
preferred way to  
communicate with one  
another

Vaillancourt et al., 2024

33



### YouTube continues to be top platform among teens, followed by TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram



34

• SM and MH

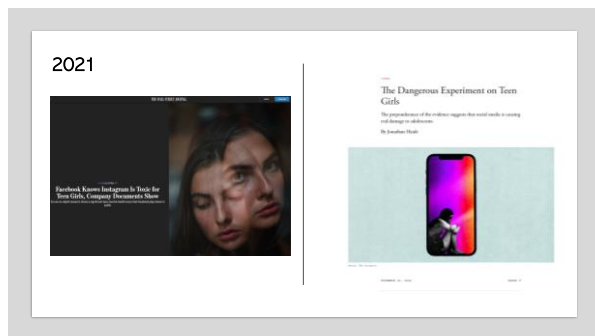


### Social Media and Mental Health

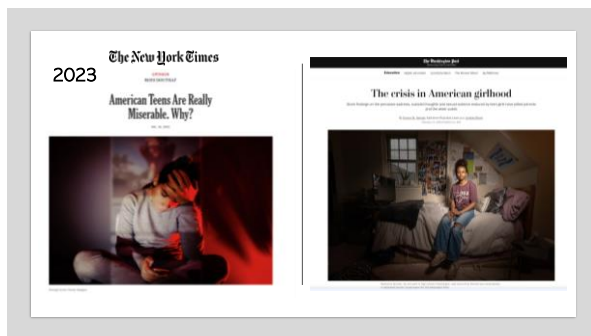


35

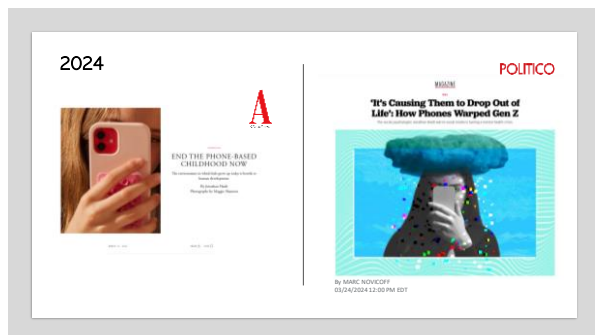
36



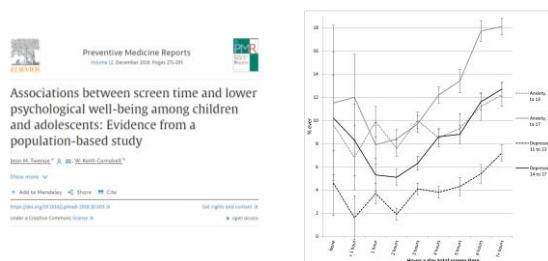
37



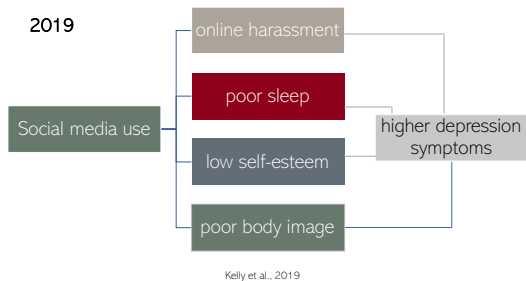
38



39



40



41



42

2020

Social media use and depression symptoms ( $r = .11$ )

Ages 11-18

2020



- Social media use:
- risky behaviour ( $r = 0.21$ )
  - substance use ( $r = 0.19$ )
  - risky sexual behaviour ( $r = 0.21$ )

$M_{age} = 15.5$ , range: 12.6–18.0 years

43

2022

Problematic social media use

Depression ( $r=.27$ )

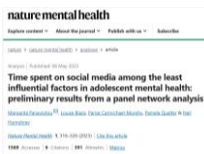
Anxiety ( $r=.35$ )

Stress ( $r=.31$ )

Shannon et al., 2022

44

2023



“...social media use is one of the least influential factors of adolescent mental health, with others (for example, bullying, lack of family support and school work dissatisfaction) exhibiting stronger associations.”

45

2024



Social media use and social anxiety ( $r = .14$ )

46



47

2022

↑ 52%

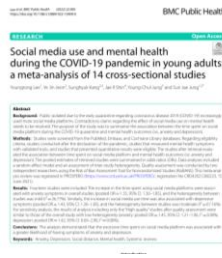


48





Higher screen use associated with poorer MH



Social media use and depressive symptoms (pooled OR=1.43)

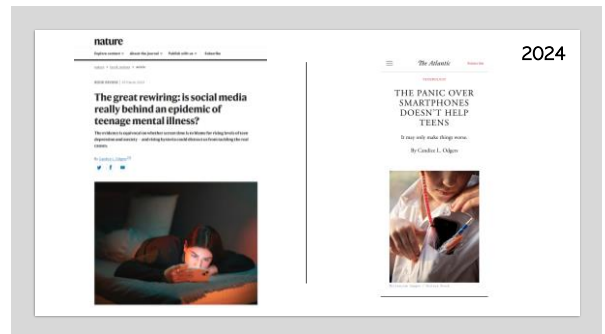
49

50

## Moral Panic?



51



52



53



54

>5 Billion Users



55

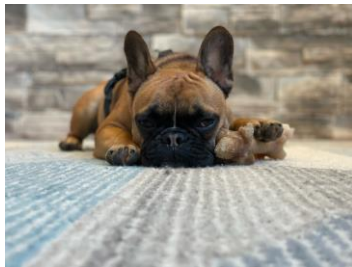
"Population risk should be measured in absolute rather than relative terms."

Small effect sizes matter

Vaillancourt et al., 2023; see also Rose, 1981

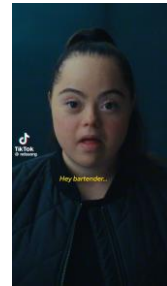
56

Benefits of Social Media



57

Social awareness and justice



58

Social connections

Access to information

Buffering effects of stress

Hughes et al., 2018

U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023

59

Social Media Features + Brain Development =

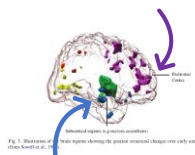


60

## Teenage Brain

Greatest structural changes

PFC: thoughts & actions in accordance with internal goals



NAc: directs motivation to seek rewards

Bradshaw & Vaillancourt, 2024

61



Motivate teens you need:

- Low effort
- High excitement

62

## Attention Economics



Bradshaw & Vaillancourt, 2024

63



### Frequent use

Alterations to developing brain

- amygdala and PFC

Heighten sensitivity to social rewards and punishments

- ↑ reactivity to social cues

Crone et al., 2018; Henienn et al., 2023; Maza et al., 2023

64

### 20 kids. One hour. 190 phone notifications. What one Ontario math teacher's experiment found

The experiment, which was done at the end of March, came a month before the provincial government announced a ban on cellphones in classrooms.

Updated 2 hrs ago  
April 10, 2024 · 2 min read

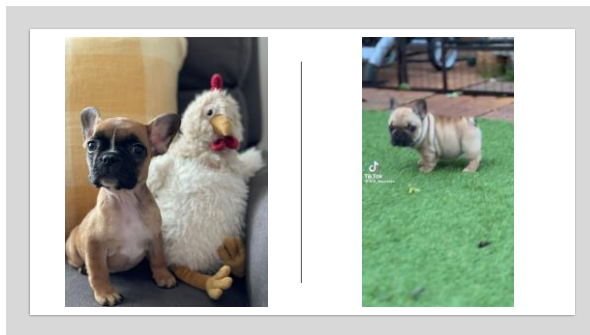


Has a distinct algorithm that pushes tailored content

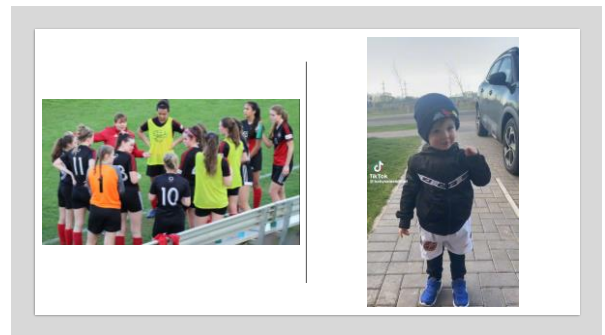


65

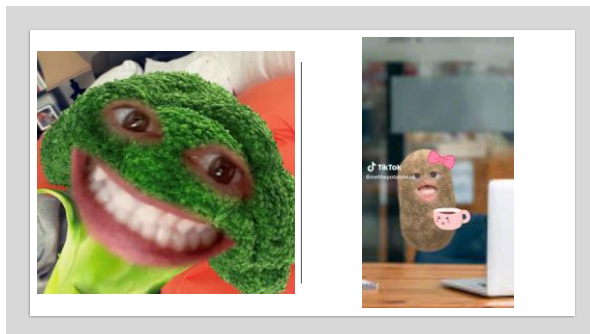
66



67



68



69



70

## TikTok

- hashtag #tourettes
- 7.6 billion views



71

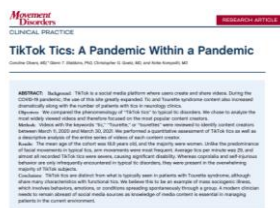
40m views



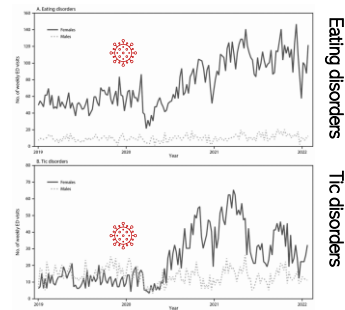
72

## Tics atypical

- Severe
- Self-injurious
- Coprolalia



CDC, 2022



Eating disorders  
Tic disorders

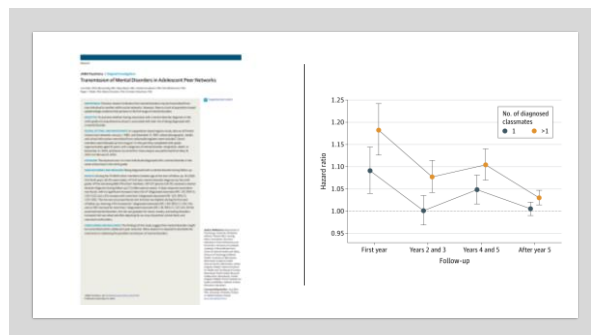
73

74



- social contagion
- ↑ self-diagnosis

75

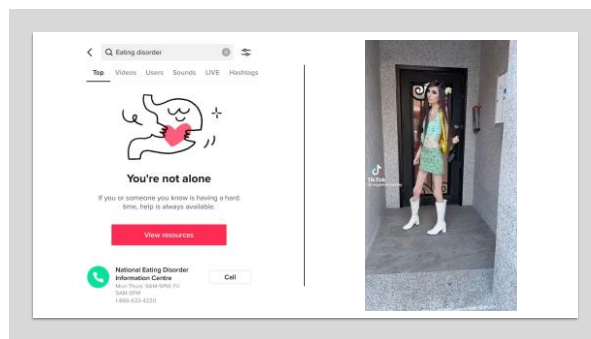


76

"Mental disorders might be socially transmitted within adolescent peer networks"

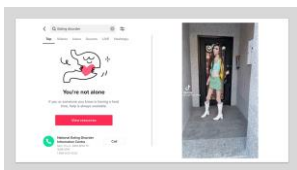


77

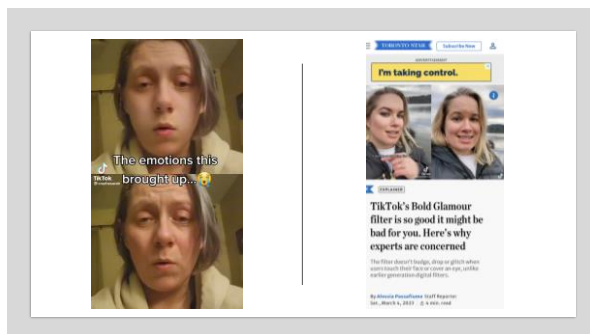


78

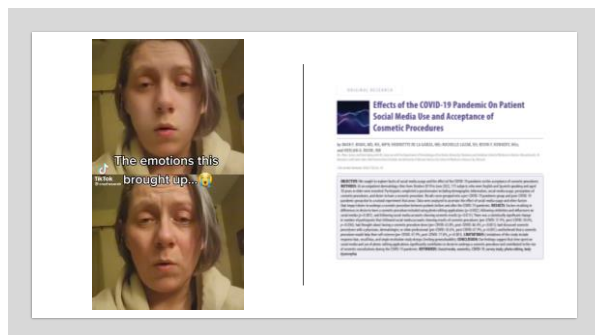
2.7 million followers



79



80



81



- depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, social anxiety, attention problems
- poorer life satisfaction and sleep quality
- greater academic stress
- lower academic performance
- higher bullying victimization
- poorer parental relationships

82



## Security Challenges

- Radicalization
- Mainstreaming of conspiracy theories
- Manipulation
- Socialization

83



52%  
misleading

84

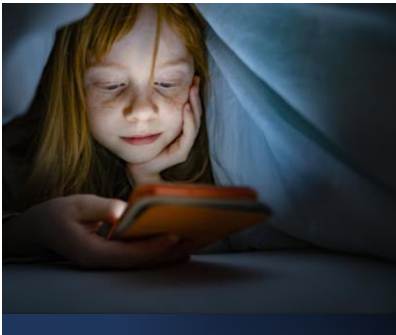


85



• Prevention

86



Prevention

87

A circular icon with a dark grey background and a white border. Inside the circle, there is a white silhouette of a person standing with their arms raised, and a small white circle above their head.

Prevention

01  
Advocacy

02  
Policy

03  
Education

88

A circular icon with a dark grey background and a white border. Inside the circle, there is a white silhouette of a person standing with their arms raised, and a small white circle above their head.

Prevention

01  
Advocacy

89

American Psychological Association

The logo of the American Psychological Association, featuring a stylized figure of a person with arms raised, and the text "APA" and "American Psychological Association".

90



## US Surgeon General



91

## National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine



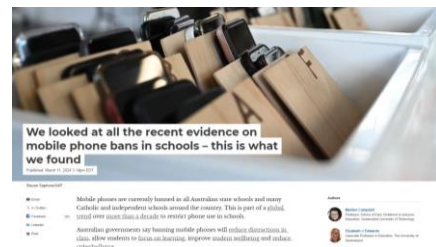
92



Australian Government  
Department of Education

Term 1, 2024

93



94

## Prevention



02  
Policy

03  
Education

95

## Policy and Education



96

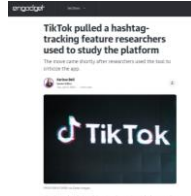


## Policy and Education

**1. Need better data about effects on youth**

Better cooperation

Study effects of platform usage on mental health and brain development



97

## Policy and Education

**1. Need better data about effects on youth**

Better cooperation

Study effects of platform usage on mental health and brain development

**2. Child protection legislation should focus addictive features**

Design and implement legislation that places restrictions on features that encourage and even reward screen time

**3. Education**

Limit access

Educate youth and parents

98

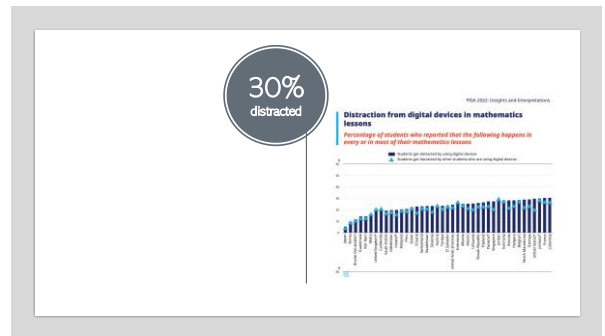
**Australian Government**  
Department of Education

**The Globe and Mail**  
@globeandmail

Ontario introducing plan to limit cellphone use, social media and vaping in schools

Ontario introducing plan to limit cellphone use, social media...  
From theglobeandmail.com

99



100

↓ medical visits for psychological symptoms

↓ reduced bullying

↑ GPA and attendance rates

largest effect sizes for ↓ SE

101



102



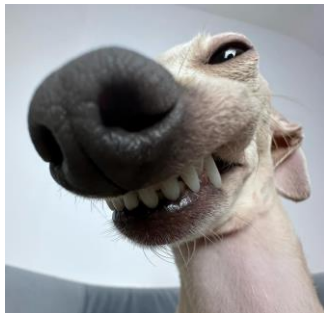
↓20%

## Physical Activity

103



104



## Contact Information

tracy.vallancourt@ottawa.ca  
X vallancourt\_dr

105