






# MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL NETWORKING ADDICTION AMONG HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NAGALAND: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY



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## ABSTRACT

The greater use of social networking sites by students leads to unhealthy addiction that may have an impact on their mental health. The study examines the relationship between the mental health of higher secondary school students and their addiction to social networking. In the study, a descriptive survey method was used, and 500 students (198 boys and 302 girls) from private and government higher secondary schools in Nagaland participated. Two research instruments, the Mental Health Scale (Jagdish & Srivastava, 2005) and the Social Networking Addiction Scale (Shahnawaz & Rehman, 2020), were adopted and revalidated in the context of Nagaland. The t-test, correlation, and percentage were employed to analyze the data. The study found that 55.8% students have below average to average levels of mental health, and 95% students have an average level of social networking addiction. No significant difference was found in the scores for social networking addiction between boys and girls ( $t=1.766, p > .001$ ), government and private secondary school students ( $t=1.128, p > .001$ ). There is a substantial difference in the mental health scores of boys and girls ( $t=6.667, p < .001$ ), while no significant differences were found between government and private secondary school students ( $t=1.029, p > .001$ ). The study also found a significant correlation between social networking addiction and the mental health of secondary school students. The findings of the study suggest that increased social networking addiction affects the mental health of students, highlighting the need for awareness, guidance, proper counselling, and effective and restricted use of social media among secondary school students.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the emphasis has switched from mental disease to the mental health of individuals and well-being. Refining people's good mental health and well-being is a top priority for society. The absence of disease is only one aspect of mental health; total health is also included. During the adolescent period, taking good care of their mental health is necessary, as more than half of mental health issues start either in childhood or adolescence. Therefore, improving positivity and early detection, treatment, and prevention of mental health concerns are crucial (Saad Jalil, & Mahfoud, 2025). In recent generations of youth, poor mental health is very common and increasing, and it is becoming a global concern (Nguyen et al., 2025). 11.63% of children and adolescents are suffering from mental health issues globally (Kieling et al., 2024). 27.4% of adolescents (aged 13-18) are facing issues including obsessive-compulsive symptoms, anxiety, social maladjustment, depression, and academic-related stress (Lu et al., 2026). Excessive reliance on and addiction to social networking sites and

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associated activities in daily life is known as social network addiction. A rising behavioural addiction, social network addiction is characterized by an over-reliance on social networking sites, which significantly impairs a person's ability to interact with others in daily life (Luo et al., 2025). About half of the world's population connects online through various forms of social networks today. In today's world, using social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube has become a major hobby. These platforms, which allow people to communicate virtually on portable devices, are used by about half of the world's population (Décieux et al., 2019). Excessive use of social networking sites may develop addictions and exhibit undesirable behaviours.

Understanding the relationship between social networking addiction and adolescents' mental health is essential in this age of widespread social network use, particularly among teenagers, to recognize and offer the right kind of care to those who need it most. Numerous issues, especially the young generations' mental health and well-being, have been brought up by the quick rise in social networking use that eventually leads to addiction.

The study aims to find out the level of social network addiction and the mental health of secondary school students in Nagaland, as well as to study the relationship between social networking addiction and mental health. People's increased interest in entertainment, self-exposure, etc., during adolescence leads to the development of addictive behaviours. Therefore, to provide support and counselling to those who are addicted to social networking sites, this study has been conducted.

There are six main sections to this study. The concept is framed, the study's problem is stated, and its goal is defined in the Introduction. The literature review underlines the research gap that the current study will fill and provides an overview of what is already known about social networking addiction and mental health. The research design, the data collection procedure, and the study's tools are all included in the Materials and Methods section. The study's results are presented in the Results section, and their interpretation in light of current understanding is covered in the Discussion section. The study's unique contributions, its applicability in the current setting, and recommendations for additional research are highlighted in the conclusion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to various sociocultural factors, conventions, and gender-specific experiences, gender differences are crucial in addictive behaviour. Males and females differ significantly when it comes to social networking addiction (Aparicio-Martínez et al., 2020). While investigating the relationship between a representative sample of US teenagers' regular usage of social media and their subsequent mental health, it was found that social media use significantly contributed to the explanation of teenagers' mental health. A significant sex variation in the relative strength of the association between social media use and mental health, as well as in the baseline status, directionality, and shape of mental health growth trajectories. At baseline, girls' mental health status was comparatively worse than boys', and the trend of mental health progression was in the opposite direction (Lee et al., 2022). Body comparison, addiction, cyberbullying, fear of judgment, and validation-seeking behaviours are some of the ways that social media use can lead to poor mental health. Through connections, support, and discussion boards for people with comparable conditions, it also illustrates the beneficial effects of social media on teenage well-being (Popat & Tarrant, 2023). There were no differences in social networking addiction, but men showed higher levels of internet addiction and yearning than women (Bottaro et al., 2024; Babu et al., 2025); while Muthuraman (2024) found a negative impact of social media addiction on mental health. Feng et al. (2025) found that social media addiction has a significant impact on the psychological health and academic performance of college students. Wahdi et al. (2025) examined the obstacles and enablers to adolescents seeking treatment for mental health issues. Mental health issues, such as high rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance misuse, self-harm, and suicidal behaviours, are thought to affect up to 20% of teenagers globally. Kennard et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between social media use and mental health, especially in young people, a topic that worries scholars, medical professionals, and parents. The study's conclusions showed that problematic use of social media is linked to poor mental health outcomes, adding to the empirical literature on the complicated interaction between social media and mental well-being. While studying the effects of gender on adolescents' mental health in 13 different nations, it was found that gender norms affect teenage mental health in a variety of international settings. Compared to their male classmates, females are often exposed to distinct dangers due to restrictive and patriarchal norms. These risks include more surveillance and control, discriminatory treatment, harmful beauty standards, and gender-based violence, which can result in poor mental health (Fine et al., 2025). A high frequency of emotional distress indicators, with over 55% of pupils exhibiting signs of stress, anxiety, or despair. Males had higher levels of alcohol and cannabis usage, whereas females had higher levels of tension and anxiety, as discovered in a study conducted by Rodríguez-Sáez et al. (2025). According to Cen et al. (2025), 41.2% of people had good mental health, with 39.6% of men and 41.9% of women. Ozparlak et al. (2025) examined the relationship between teenage problematic internet usage (PIU) and positive mental health. Positive mental health and PIU were revealed to be significantly negatively correlated. Adolescents who were male, had divorced parents, did not engage in non-internet activities, and had poor ratings on the positive mental health sub-dimensions of self-control, autonomy, and personal fulfilment had greater PIU.

A study was conducted to examine the relationships between teenage social media use and psychopathology and psychological well-being. According to the findings, teenagers who used social media more frequently were marginally less likely to have good mental health and marginally more likely to have poor mental health. The strength of the linkages, however, was modest (Blackwell et al., 2025). Internet addiction is significantly associated with depression and anxiety (Pham et al., 2025). Individual levels of self-compassion and mindfulness were taken into account in a study examining the relationship between social media use motivations and mental health outcomes. The study assessed self-compassion and mindfulness, and social media had very few associations with mental health variables: there was no direct correlation with

anxiety or depression; the frequency of social media checking, but not the quantity of sites used, had a slight positive correlation with self-esteem (Harvey & Aikman, 2025). Hang et al. (2026) studied the mental health among Chinese university students and found significant sex differences; compared to male students, female students had significantly lower prevalence of overall mental distress.

From the review of prior studies, it has been found that research conducted on the relationship between mental health and social networking addiction, especially in Nagaland, is very limited. To improve mental health and to become aware of the social networking addiction among teenagers in Nagaland, the research brought up these variables, and the researchers were obliged to determine the mental health state of higher secondary school students and the impact of social networking addiction on their mental health. Studying these factors is considered to be crucial for maintaining students' mental health throughout the educational process. Based on the existing literature review, the objectives and hypotheses of the study were formulated.

The study aims to examine the level of mental health and social networking addiction of secondary school students in Nagaland and to determine whether there are any significant differences in social networking addiction and mental health of secondary school students in Nagaland based on their gender and management.

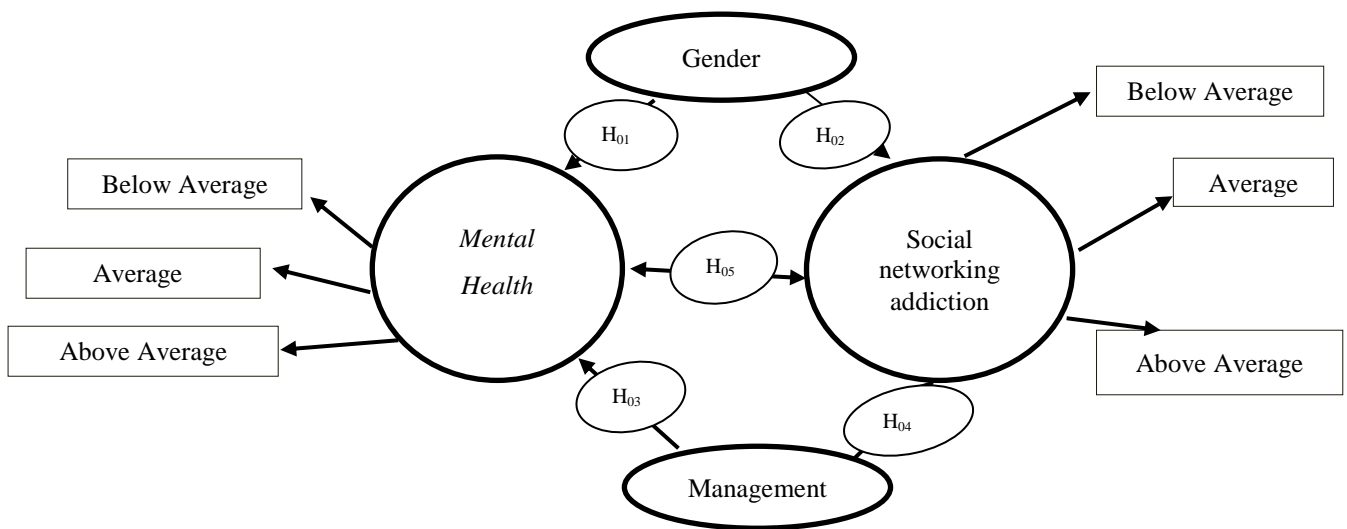


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Mental Health and Social Networking Addiction

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study uses a descriptive survey method with a quantitative approach. In this study, mental health and social networking addiction were treated as independent and gender and type of management of the school were considered as demographic variables. The psychological condition of well-being is called mental health. In contrast, the level of addictive behaviour, dependence, or attachment to social networking (social media use) among Nagaland's higher secondary school students is referred to as social networking addiction. Gender is categorized into boys and girls, and management refers to government and private higher secondary schools in Nagaland. 500 pupils from Nagaland's private and government higher secondary schools were chosen using a simple random sample technique. A standardized mental health scale with 32 statements (Jagdish & Srivastava, 2005) has been adopted and revalidated by the researchers. The tool's validity and reliability scores were 0.876 and 0.768, respectively. To measure social networking addiction, the researchers adopted and revalidated a social networking addiction scale (Shahnawaz & Rehman, 2020). The tools' validity and reliability scores were 0.961 and 0.923, respectively. The investigators conducted a direct survey from 01-11-2025 to 30-12-2025. To reach the participants, the researchers visited the schools. Informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality were prioritized to uphold international ethical norms. The t-test, correlation, and percentages were used to analyze the data.

### RESULTS

Table 1. Level of mental health of secondary school students

Score Range	Z-Score range	Level	Frequency	Percentage
72 and below	-1.0462 and below	Below Average	115	23%
73-92	-0.9460 to 0.9561	Average	164	32.8%
93 and above	1.0562 and above	Above Average	221	44.2%
<b>Total</b>			<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>

Among 500, below-average to average levels of mental health are present in 279 (55.8%) of students. 221 (44.2%) students have above-average mental health, which indicates better mental health (Table 1).

Table 2. Level of Social Networking Addiction among Secondary School Students

Score Range	Z-Score range	Level	Frequency	Percentage
65 and below	-1.0299 and below	Below Average	25	5%
66-114	-0.9886 to 0.9935	Average	475	95%

115 and above	1.0348 and above	Above Average	0	0%
<b>Total</b>			500	100%

Among 500, a below-average level of social networking addiction is present in 25 (5%) of students. 475 (95%) students have an average level of social networking addiction (Table 2).

Table 3. Comparison of demographic variables on mental health and social networking addiction

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t-value	Sig.(2-tailed)
Mental Health	Boys	198	85.98	9.877	498	6.667	0.000
	Girls	302	80.14	9.381			
Social Networking Addiction	Boys	198	87.58	23.821	498	1.766	0.078
	Girls	302	91.48	24.388			

Table 3 shows the scores of mental health and social networking addictions of secondary school students with respect to gender to test H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mental health scores between boys and girls of the higher secondary school of Nagaland. For boys and girls, the mean mental health scores are 85.98 and 80.14, respectively. It can be seen that boys have better mental health than girls. There is a significant difference in the mental health scores between boys and girls (t=6.667, p < .001). The mean value for social networking addiction is 87.58 and 91.48 for boys and girls, respectively. H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference in the social networking addiction scores between boys and girls of the higher secondary school of Nagaland. There is no significant difference found in the social networking addiction scores between boys and girls (t=1.766, p > .001). However, girls have slightly higher social networking addiction than boys.

Table 4. Comparison of demographic variables (Management: Government/Private) on mental health and social networking addiction

Variable	Management	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t-value	Sig.(2-tailed)
Mental Health	Government	229	82.95	9.502	498	1.029	0.304
	Private	271	82.03	10.381			
Social Networking Addiction	Government	229	91.27	25.718	498	1.128	0.260
	Private	271	88.82	22.860			

Table 4 shows the scores of mental health and social networking addictions of secondary school students with respect to management to test H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference in the mental health scores between government and private higher secondary school students of Nagaland. Government and private higher secondary school pupils have mean mental health scores of 82.95 and 82.03, respectively. Government and private higher secondary school pupils' mental health scores do not differ significantly (t = 1.029, p > .001). H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference in the social networking addiction scores between government and private higher secondary school students of Nagaland. The mean value for social networking addiction is 91.27 and 88.82 for government and private higher secondary school students, respectively. Students in government and private higher secondary schools did not significantly differ in their social networking addiction scores (t=1.128, p > .001).

Table 5. Correlations between mental health and social networking addiction in secondary school students

Items	Mental Health	Social Networking Addiction
Mental Health	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-.286**
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	49785.848
	Covariance	99.771
	N	500

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a statistically significant negative correlation found (r = -0.286, p < 0.01) between mental health and social networking addiction of higher secondary school students in Nagaland (Table 5). Therefore, H<sub>05</sub>: There is no significant correlation between mental health and social networking addiction in higher secondary school students of Nagaland is not accepted.

### DISCUSSIONS

The study showed that 44.2% scored above an average level of mental health, and 55.8% showed average and below-average levels of mental health. Due to a lack of awareness towards mental health and less exposure to mental health care facilities in the region, most of the students showed an average to below-average level of mental health. A similar study conducted by Wahdi et al. (2025) found that 20% of adolescents worldwide face mental health challenges. 95% exhibit an average level of social networking addiction, and 5% show a below-average level of social networking addiction. Even though social networking sites are frequently used for communication, enjoyment, and keeping up with current trends, their use has not reached an extreme level, as parents, educators, and students themselves are aware of this. Kennard et al. (2025) found that 40.3% of participants reported using social media negatively, which runs counter to this conclusion.

The study also found that the mean score of boys in mental health is 85.98, and girls are 80.14. When these mean scores are compared, there is a significant difference in the mental health scores between boys and girls (H<sub>01</sub>) (t-value = 6.667, p-value = 0.000). It may be due to the patriarchal system of society that boys are receiving more exposure, opportunity, mobility, and freedom than girls. Compared to boys, girls face more restrictions and social pressure that increase anxiety and stress. Similar findings have been found in the study by Fine et al. (2025), where findings revealed that

exposing restrictive and patriarchal norms causes poorer mental health in girls than boys. Lee et al. (2022) found that girls showed a relatively poorer mental health status compared to boys. Rodríguez-Sáez et al. (2025) found that females showed higher levels of anxiety and stress. Cen et al. (2025) discovered conflicting results: 41.2% of women and 39.6% of men had good mental health. It shows that females have slightly higher positive mental health. Hang et al. (2026) also found that females had less mental distress than males.

It has also been found that the mean score of boys in social media addiction is 87.58, and girls are 91.48. When these mean scores were compared, it was found that there is no significant difference between boys' and girls' social networking addiction ( $H_{02}$ ); still, girls showed a slightly higher addiction than boys, which is similar to the finding of Bottaro et al. (2024). It may be justified through social, behavioural, and communication-related factors. Girls spend more time on social media to connect and keep up friendships, and they engage in indoor activities most of the time. Boys, on the other hand, use social networking sites less frequently than they do video games, outdoor sports, or other forms of amusement. Aparicio-Martínez et al. (2020) discovered conflicting results in their study. Ozparlak et al. (2025) also found that problematic internet use is higher among males.

In terms of mental health, the mean score for students attending government schools is 82.95, whereas the mean score for students attending private schools is 82.03. There is no discernible difference between these two variables ( $H_{03}$ ). In the context of social networking addiction, the mean score for government school students is 91.27, and for private school students, 88.82. Although there are no significant differences between these two variables ( $H_{04}$ ), government school students still show slightly higher social networking addiction than private school students. It might be explained by demanding work schedules, increased parental awareness, improved career knowledge among adolescents attending private schools, and limited social media exposure.

There is a negative correlation between mental health and social networking addiction ( $r = -0.286$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) ( $H_{05}$ ). It indicates that when social networking addiction increases, mental health decreases. This negative correlation between mental health and social networking addiction exists among higher secondary school students of Nagaland, which may be due to excessive use of social networking platforms, which are reducing the social connections and leading the adolescents towards social isolation and loneliness, which affects their mental health. Another explanation could be that teenagers' frequent use of social networking sites makes them more conscious of their appearance. They are also involved in social comparison, which can lead to low self-esteem and feelings of superiority or inferiority, all of which have an impact on students' mental health. Similar findings by Kennard et al. (2025) showed that negative well-being characteristics, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and depressive symptoms were all more prevalent among problematic social media users. Those with high duration and problematic use performed worse than those with low duration and non-problematic usage. Ozparlak et al. (2025) found a significant negative correlation between problematic internet use and positive mental health. Blackwell et al. (2025) also discovered similar results, showing that teens who used social media more frequently were marginally less likely to have good mental health, and slightly more likely to have bad mental health. Lee et al. (2022) found that teens' use of social media had a substantial impact on the explanation of their mental health state. Muthuraman (2024) found a negative impact of social media addiction on mental health. Pham et al. (2025) found significant associations between Internet addiction, depression, and anxiety. Social networks foster the urge to connect virtually while people remain physically distant, creating pressure to develop an online identity. This can negatively impact mental health, as social networks often expose users to unwanted feedback, negative comparisons, reduced self-esteem, and a lack of social validation (Abdo & Pêgo-Fernandes, 2025). Contradictory findings have been found by Feng et al. (2025), who discovered a strong link between mental health problems and social media addiction. Popat and Tarrant (2023) found a positive impact of social media on adolescent well-being. Harvey and Aikman (2025) found that self-esteem was somewhat positively correlated with social media checking frequency, but not with the quantity of sites visited; anxiety or depression were not directly correlated.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of the current study highlight that more than half of the students exhibit below-average to average levels of mental health, and nineteen-twentieths of the students have average social networking addiction, and a negative correlation also exists between these two variables. The study has some important educational implications for addressing the mental health issues of school students and redirecting them to use social networking sites constructively. In the study, it has been observed that girls exhibit more mental health issues than boys. Therefore, equal opportunities, support, and facilities to enhance emotional intelligence should be provided to them. Social networking addiction is negatively correlated with mental health; to gain better mental health, social networking addiction should be reduced. Adolescents should be given productive and constructive forms of entertainment at home and at school, such as games, music, and art, rather than excessive use of social media.

Based on the findings of the current study, several directions for further study can be suggested. The current study is limited to students in Class XI and Class XII of higher secondary school; undergraduate students who have just emerged from adolescence could be the subject of another study. Other demographic variables, such as location, socio-economic status, etc., can be studied to gain deeper knowledge into the relationship between mental health and social networking addiction. Since the study was conducted only in Nagaland, similar studies can be conducted in different states to compare and validate the findings across different contexts.

Being in excellent mental health is not a luxury; rather, it is a fundamental human requirement. Therefore, the aim of psychology is not limited to curing mental diseases; it includes the enhancement of a positive mindset to prevent and protect the mental health of individuals. Students' mental health must be given top priority in the educational system, and different types of addictive behaviour must be addressed. People are using social networking sites and adopting more

technology as a result of societal technological advancements in order to interact with others and share personal experiences. Using social networking sites is healthy unless it becomes an addiction. Addictive behaviour towards social networks can make an individual uncomfortable with real-life social contact and cause psychological discomfort. It can affect the mental health of adolescents.

Therefore, to promote the mental health of students and reduce their social networking addiction, it is very important to create a supportive, friendly, and adaptable environment both at school and at home. Students should be provided with ample opportunities to engage in social service, community gatherings, co-curricular activities, and other productive activities that foster balanced development and psychological well-being.

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