

# **Assessment of Problematic Social Media Use and Its Effect on Mental Health Among Adolescents in Selected Secondary Schools in Jos North L.G.A, Plateau State**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** The pervasive integration of social media into daily life has transformed adolescent interactions, identity formation, and emotional development globally. However, the design of these platforms, centered on maximising engagement, has led to a rise in Problematic Social Media Use (PSMU), characterised by addiction-like behaviours. International research has established a strong link between PSMU and adverse mental health outcomes, including depression and anxiety, particularly during the vulnerable period of adolescence. While social media use is rapidly increasing in Nigeria, there is a critical lack of localised, empirical data on this relationship, especially in Northern regions like Plateau State.

**Objective:** This study aimed to fill this gap by assessing the Problematic Social Media Use (PSMU) and its effect on mental health among in-school adolescents in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria.

**Methodology:** A cross-sectional study design was employed, recruiting 336 adolescents aged 14-19 years from Senior Secondary classes (SS1-SS3) in six selected public and private schools in Jos North LGA. A multistage sampling technique was used to ensure a representative sample. Data were collected in five sections: socio-demographics, social media use patterns, the 9-item Social Media Disorder Scale (SMD-9) to assess PSMU (with a score of  $\geq 5$  indicating high PSMU), the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) for depression, and the Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) for anxiety.

**Results:** The study found universal social media use (100%) among respondents, with Facebook (62.5%), WhatsApp (56.3%), and TikTok (54.8%) being the most popular platforms. A significant 32.4% of adolescents were classified as having High PSMU. The mental health assessment revealed a substantial burden, with 31.6% of adolescents reporting moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms (PHQ-9  $\geq 10$ ) and 18.5% reporting moderate-to-severe anxiety symptoms (GAD-7  $\geq 10$ ). Bivariate analysis showed that age and type of school were significantly associated with PSMU. However, multiple logistic regression identified age as the only significant independent predictor, with older adolescents (17-19 years) having 2.36 times higher odds of high PSMU compared to their younger (14-16 years) peers (AOR=2.36; 95% CI: 1.37–4.06;  $p=0.0019$ ). Crucially, strong and significant associations were found between high PSMU and worse mental health outcomes, with a clear dose-response relationship observed for anxiety severity ( $p < 0.0001$ ).

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** The study concludes that problematic social media use is highly prevalent among in-school adolescents in Jos North LGA and is significantly associated with increased levels of depression and anxiety. These findings underscore an urgent public health concern.

