



School phone policies and their association with mental wellbeing, phone use, and social media use (SMART Schools)

Executive summary

- [NIHR funded research, undertaken by researchers at the University of Birmingham](#) has identified that banning smartphones in schools is not enough to tackle the negative impacts of phone and social media use.
- For pupils who attend schools that ban the use of phones compared to pupils who attend schools that allow phones during recreational time, the study has found no difference outcomes for:
 - Mental wellbeing, anxiety and depression
 - Physical activity and sleep
 - Attainment (English and Maths) and disruptive behaviour
- One explanation for a lack of difference in outcomes is that school phone bans did not lower the overall time adolescents spend on their phones or social media.
- Analysis did show a connection between increased time spent on phones and social media and several negative outcomes, including:
 - Worse mental health and wellbeing
 - Less physical activity and poorer sleep
 - Lower educational attainment, and a greater level of disruptive behaviour
- This is the first study worldwide of its kind to evaluate the impacts of school phone policies on adolescent mental health and wellbeing, and other health and educational outcomes.

- The findings come from data collected in a large nationally representative cohort, including 1,227 pupils (age 12-15) from 30 schools across England

Policy recommendations

1. Approaches to reducing the time adolescents spend on phones and social media is an important focus for improving a range of aspects of health and wellbeing of adolescents. In addition to school phone policies, **there is a need for new policies and approaches that address in-school and outside of school use**, and adolescents, teachers and parents need to be involved in shaping these future policies.
2. We currently lack an evidence-based best practice approach to addressing phone and social media use in adolescents. **Therefore, all new approaches need to be accompanied by robust evaluation.**
3. Tackling phone and social media use needs to be **linked to wider holistic approaches to supporting adolescent health and wellbeing**, that cuts across school, home and community contexts

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