

# Anxious, depressed, and lonely adolescents are more likely to be overdependent on their smartphones

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A survey of South Korean middle- and high-school students revealed that those with increased anxiety, depression, loneliness, and experience of violent treatment are more likely to become overdependent on their smartphones. Girls were more likely to develop this overdependence than boys. The paper was published in *Scientific Reports*.

For adolescents in many world countries, smartphones have become a cultural tool they employ to organize social relationships and interact with others. In this way, they have transcended their role of just a media technology that is used when necessary or a means of communication. A national survey in South Korea found that almost 1 in 4 individuals between ages 3 and 69 can be classified as being overdependent on their smartphones. This represents a rapid increase from previous years.

Smartphone overdependence is a condition where individuals excessively rely on their smartphones for daily activities and social interactions. This negatively impacts

their well-being. The overuse of smartphones can result in reduced face-to-face communication, decreased productivity, and impaired mental health, including anxiety and depression. Physical issues like eye strain, sleep disturbances, and poor posture are also common among those who are overly dependent on their smartphones. Adolescents seem to be particularly likely to develop smartphone overdependence.



Study authors Dabok Noh and Mi-So Shim conducted a study that aimed to identify factors influencing smartphone overdependence among adolescents. They also wished to identify groups of adolescents that are at particularly high risk of developing this condition.

These researchers analyzed data from the 16th Korea Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a national web survey containing data of 54,948 students from 793 schools across South Korea. These survey data are made public each year via the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency website. The participating students were between 12 and 18 years of age. Study authors excluded participants who did not use smartphones at all, so the final analysis was done on data of 53,457 participants.

The analyses focused on data about smartphone overdependence (the Smartphone Overdependence Scale for adolescents), anxiety (the Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale), loneliness (“How often have you felt lonely in the past 12 months), depressive symptoms (“Were you feeling so sad or hopeless that you stopped doing certain usual activities for at least two weeks or more during the last 12 months?”), exposure to violence (“In the past 12 months, have you been treated in a hospital because of violence (physical assault, intimidation, bullying, etc.) perpetrated by a friend, colleague, or adult?”), and demographic data.

Results showed that older adolescents were more likely to be overdependent on their smartphones compared to younger ones. 30% of girls showed signs of overdependence compared to 21% of boys. Adolescents from families of low socioeconomic status were more likely to be smartphone overdependent.

The risk of smartphone overdependence was around 2.5 times higher among participants with high anxiety (51%) than among those with minimal anxiety (19%). The risk was higher among depressive participants, those who felt lonely, and individuals who underwent hospital treatment due to violence they suffered. Further analysis showed that girls with severe anxiety were the group at the highest risk of smartphone overdependence with 53% of adolescents in this group fulfilling criteria for this condition.

“We found that anxiety, loneliness, depressive symptoms, and treatment experiences owing to violence were predictors of the risk of smartphone overdependence among South Korean students aged 12–18 years. Interventions for smartphone overdependence ought to highlight the assessment, prevention, and treatment of anxiety because of the strong association between anxiety and smartphone overdependence.”, study authors concluded.

The study sheds light on the factors associated with smartphone overdependence among adolescents. However, it should be noted that the study only included South Korean adolescents. Results might not be identical on older individuals, or people from other cultures.

The study, “[Factors influencing smartphone overdependence among adolescents](#)”, was authored by Dabok Noh and Mi-So Shim.

