

# War-Related Social Media Exposure and Its Impact On Mental Health Of Adolescents

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**Abstract-** *The modern landscape of conflict is intricately tied to the digital realm, where social media serves as both a battleground for information dissemination and a channel for expression of the human toll of war. This review examines the relationship between war, social media and mental health, focusing on adolescents who are prolific users of these platforms. War, accompanied by extensive media coverage, can inundate social media feeds with distressing imagery and narratives, exacerbating psychological distress among vulnerable populations. Adolescents are particularly susceptible due to their developmental stage and peer influence. This review aims to elucidate social media's evolving role in war coverage and analyze the impact of war content on adolescents' mental health. Not only does social media revolutionize war coverage, offering real-time updates and diverse perspectives, but also spreads misinformation and polarizing viewpoints. Various studies highlight the prevalence of graphic content depicting civilian casualties and infrastructural damage, raising concerns about authenticity and bias. Adolescents exposed to such content report increased stress, fear, trauma and long-term effects like Depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Protective factors such as parental support, media literacy education and resilient coping strategies are crucial in mitigating these negative impacts. Social media also offers support through online communities and mental health resources, although the quality and safety of these interventions vary. This review emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and media literacy programs to support adolescents. Mental health professionals, educators and policymakers must address the challenges posed by war-related social media exposure, ensuring responsible content sharing and promoting mental health support initiatives. Understanding these dynamics is essential for public health and societal well-being.*

**Keywords-** Adolescents, Mental health, Media literacy, Social media, War

## I. INTRODUCTION

The modern landscape of conflict is intricately intertwined with the digital realm, where social media platforms serve as both battlegrounds for information

dissemination and channels for expressing the human toll of war (1). The convergence of war, social media, and mental health has become a pressing concern, particularly in the context of adolescents, who are prolific users of these platforms.

Out of the Top 10 Countries using social media, four of them are from the Middle East: UAE(100%), Bahrain(98.7%), Qatar (96.3%) and Oman(90.5%). The most popular Social media platforms in the Middle East are YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat and Twitter and Messenger App being Whatsapp (2).

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, active social media users constitute 72% of the total population. Since 75% of the total population are youth, it can rightly be said that they are the leading users of social media. YouTube with 89.5% and Instagram with 76.4% users are the leading social networking platform and WhatsApp the popular Messenger App. A survey in the country found that 30-45% of the users quoted filling spare time, reading news and stories and seeing what's talked about as the reasons for using social media (2).

In this context it is no wonder that war content over the social media is sure to penetrate into the brain and hearts of the youth to leave a tainted mark in them resulting in mental affectations.

This review aims to dissect the multifaceted relationship between war, social media coverage, and mental health outcomes, with a specific focus on how adolescents are affected (24). War, often accompanied by extensive media coverage, can saturate social media feeds with distressing imagery, harrowing accounts, and polarizing narratives, potentially exacerbating psychological distress among vulnerable populations. Adolescents, in particular, are susceptible to the psychological impacts of war due to their developmental stage, susceptibility to peer influence, and evolving identity formation (35). Consequently, exploring the nuanced dynamics between war-related social media exposure and mental health outcomes in this demographic is crucial for devising targeted interventions and support systems (48).

The objectives of this review are twofold: firstly, to elucidate the evolving role of social media in war coverage, delineating its unique attributes compared to traditional media; and secondly, to analyze the impact of exposure to war content on social media on the mental health of adolescents within the general population.

**Role of Social Media in War Coverage**

The evolution of social media has revolutionized the dissemination of information during times of conflict, granting unprecedented access to real-time updates and diverse perspectives. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become integral channels for reporting on war-related events, enabling citizens, journalists and eyewitnesses to share firsthand accounts, photos and videos. This democratization of information has both democratized and fragmented war coverage, allowing for a multiplicity of voices but also raising concerns about authenticity and bias (6)

**Table 1: Popular Social Media Platforms and their numbers of war coverage (7)**

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>Twitter</b>   | Between February 1, 2022 and March 23, 2023, Twitter users mentioned the word "war" in English-language tweets almost 30 million times. The words "Russia," "Russian," and "Russians" were used around 47 million times. |
| <b>Facebook</b>  | In November 2023, Facebook had over 11 million posts with the hashtag #freepalestine and 282,000 posts with the hashtag #standwithisrael.  |
| <b>Instagram</b> | In November 2023, Instagram had approximately six million posts using #freepalestine and 230,000 posts with #standwithisrael.  |
| <b>TikTok</b>    | In November 2023, TikTok had around 46 million views on videos with the hashtag #standwithisrael, and 29 million views for videos with #standwithpalestine   |

Hamm et al., conducted a content analysis of Twitter posts during the Syrian civil war, revealing the prevalence of user-generated content depicting civilian casualties and infrastructural damage (8). Zhao & colleagues explored the role of Instagram in documenting the Yemeni conflict, highlighting the visual nature of war coverage on this platform and its potential impact on audience perceptions (9). These studies underscore the diversity and immediacy of war content

disseminated via social media, challenging traditional media narratives and shaping public discourse.

In contrast to traditional media, social media offers a participatory and interactive experience, allowing users to engage directly with content through likes, shares and comments. However, this democratization of information comes with inherent challenges, including the spread of misinformation and the amplification of polarizing viewpoints. Negri et al. investigated the spread of fake news on Facebook during the Rohingya crisis, illustrating how misinformation propagated through social networks can fuel conflict and exacerbate social tensions. Thus, while social media enhances accessibility and connectivity, its unregulated nature poses risks to the accuracy and integrity of war coverage (10).

| Author(s)                               | Year | Study Focus                               | Key Findings  |
|---|------|---|---|
| <b>Peters et al.</b>                    | 2016 | Immediate stress reactions to war content | Adolescents exposed to war-related social media content reported increased heart rate, intrusive thoughts, and hypervigilance.                              |
| <b>Valkenburg, Peter, &amp; Walther</b> | 2016 | Effects of violent content exposure       | Exposure to graphic war content led to desensitization, fear, and trauma, with significant emotional and psychological impact on adolescents.               |
| <b>Fisher et al.</b>                    | 2017 | Long-term psychological effects           | Sustained exposure to war content on social media can result in long-term effects such as depression, characterized by persistent sadness and hopelessness. |
| <b>Alisic et al.</b>                    | 2017 | PTSD in adolescents due to war exposure   | Adolescents exposed to war trauma, either directly or via social media,   |

|                                   |      |   |   |
|-----------------------------------|------|---|---|
|                                   |      |   | showed increased risk of PTSD symptoms like flashbacks, nightmares, and avoidance behaviors.  |
| <b>Johnson et al.</b>             | 2017 | Nature of exposure to war content       | Adolescents frequently encountered graphic imagery and disturbing narratives related to the Syrian conflict on platforms such as YouTube and Twitter. |
| <b>Padilla-Walker &amp; Coyne</b> | 2019 | Parental mediation in media consumption | Active parental involvement in adolescents' online activities significantly reduced negative psychological impacts of war-related content.            |
| <b>Turner et al.</b>              | 2019 | Emotional reactivity in adolescents     | Adolescents showed heightened emotional reactivity and susceptibility to peer influence when exposed to war content on social media.                  |
| <b>Wang et al.</b>                | 2019 | Algorithmic content recommendations     | Algorithm-driven recommendations increased exposure to extremist and violent war content, leading to higher anxiety and stress among adolescents.     |
| <b>Chen et al.</b>                | 2020 | Cultural context in media effects       | Cultural factors significantly influence adolescents' psychological   |

|                                    |      |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|--|
|                                    |      |                                    | responses to war content, with varying impacts observed across different cultural contexts.  |
| <b>Khamis, Vaughn, &amp; Samir</b> | 2019 | Impact of Syrian conflict coverage | Syrian adolescents exposed to social media coverage of the conflict exhibited higher levels of anxiety, depression, and PTSD.                      |
| <b>Hoffman et al.</b>              | 2020 | Online peer support groups         | Participation in online peer support groups was effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety among adolescents exposed to war content. |

Exposure to War Content on Social Media

The prevalence and nature of exposure to war content on social media have profound implications for mental health outcomes, particularly among adolescents. Research has documented the pervasiveness of war-related content on social media platforms and its impact on audience perceptions and emotional responses. A study by Redman, 2021 found that adolescents reported frequent exposure to graphic imagery and disturbing narratives related to the Syrian conflict on platforms such as YouTube and Twitter, with significant implications for their psychological well-being (11).

Mechanisms of exposure to war content on social media can vary, ranging from direct consumption of news feeds to indirect exposure through peer sharing and recommendations. The algorithmic curation of content by social media platforms further influences individuals' exposure patterns, potentially exacerbating echo chambers and filter bubbles. Liu, 2017 investigated the role of algorithmic recommendations on YouTube in shaping users' exposure to extremist content, highlighting the potential for inadvertent radicalization and desensitization to violence among vulnerable populations, including adolescents (12).

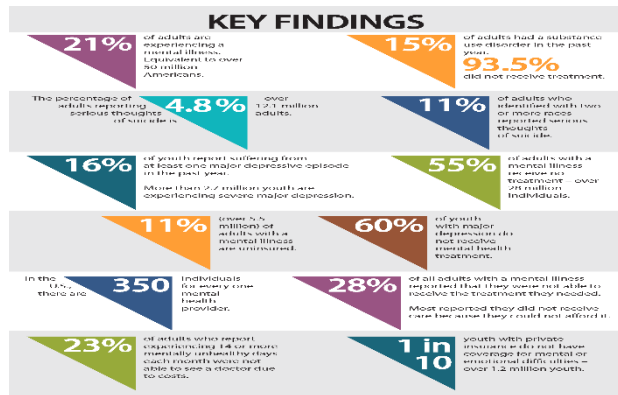
| Author(s)                               | Year | Study Focus                                       | Key Findings   |
|---|------|---|--|
| <b>Valkenburg, Peter, &amp; Walther</b> | 2016 | Exposure to violent war content                   | Exposure to graphic war content on social media leads to desensitization, fear, and trauma, significantly impacting adolescents' emotional and psychological well-being. |
| <b>Johnson et al.</b>                   | 2017 | Nature of exposure to war content                 | Adolescents frequently encounter graphic imagery and disturbing narratives related to the Syrian conflict on platforms like YouTube and Twitter.                         |
| <b>Alisic et al.</b>                    | 2017 | PTSD from war exposure                            | Adolescents exposed to war trauma via social media are at increased risk of developing PTSD symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, and avoidance behaviors.            |
| <b>Fisher et al.</b>                    | 2017 | Long-term effects of war content exposure         | Sustained exposure to war-related content on social media can lead to long-term effects such as depression and persistent sadness in adolescents.                        |
| <b>Thompson et al.</b>                  | 2018 | Individual differences in response to war content | Adolescents with pre-existing mental health conditions are more susceptible to the negative impacts of war-related social media exposure.                                |
| <b>Wang et al.</b>                      | 2019 | Algorithmic exposure to war content               | Algorithm-driven content recommendations increase exposure to violent and extremist war content, leading to higher anxiety and   |

|                                    |      |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|---|
|                                    |      |                                    | stress among adolescents.   |
| <b>Chen et al.</b>                 | 2020 | Cultural context in media effects  | Cultural factors significantly influence adolescents' psychological responses to war content, with varying impacts observed across different cultural contexts. |
| <b>Khamis, Vaughn, &amp; Samir</b> | 2019 | Impact of Syrian conflict coverage | Syrian adolescents exposed to social media coverage of the conflict exhibit higher levels of anxiety, depression, and PTSD.                                     |

The intensity and frequency of war content consumption on social media also contribute to its psychological impact. Adolescents, characterized by their heightened susceptibility to emotional stimuli and peer influence, may experience heightened levels of distress when exposed to graphic imagery and traumatic narratives. A longitudinal study by Abbas et al. (2018) examined the cumulative effects of exposure to war-related content on social media on adolescents' mental health outcomes, finding a dose-response relationship between exposure frequency and symptoms of anxiety and depression (13). These findings underscore the need for nuanced approaches to managing adolescents' media exposure during times of conflict, balancing the imperative for information with the imperative for psychological well-being.

#### Psychological Impact on Adolescents

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the psychological repercussions of exposure to war-related content on social media, experiencing a spectrum of short-term and long-term effects that can profoundly influence their mental well-being. In the short term, immediate stress reactions and heightened anxiety are common responses to graphic imagery and distressing narratives encountered on social media platforms. Studies have demonstrated that adolescents may experience symptoms such as increased heart rate, intrusive thoughts, and hypervigilance following exposure to war-related content (14). These acute stress responses can disrupt daily functioning and contribute to feelings of fear and helplessness.



**Fig 1: Key mental health concerns among adults and youth in the U.S (14)**

Furthermore, the long-term psychological effects of sustained exposure to war content on social media can extend far beyond the immediate aftermath of exposure. Adolescents may develop symptoms of depression, characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed (16). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is another significant concern, with studies indicating that adolescents exposed to war-related trauma, either directly or vicariously through social media, are at increased risk of developing PTSD symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, and avoidance behaviors (17).

However, the impact of war-related social media exposure on adolescents' mental health is not uniform and can vary significantly based on individual differences. Pre-existing mental health conditions, such as prior trauma exposure or underlying anxiety disorders, can exacerbate the psychological effects of war-related content (18). Additionally, resilience, a dynamic process involving adaptation and coping in the face of adversity plays a crucial role in mitigating the negative impact of social media exposure on adolescents' mental health outcomes. Adolescents with higher levels of resilience may demonstrate greater psychological flexibility and adaptive coping strategies, buffering against the deleterious effects of war-related stressors (19).

**Comparison of Impact: Adolescents vs. General Population**

While war-related social media exposure can have profound psychological effects across all age groups, adolescents may be uniquely susceptible to certain stressors and vulnerabilities. A comparative analysis of the psychological impact of war exposure between adolescents and the general population reveals distinct patterns and risk factors. Firstly, adolescents often exhibit heightened emotional reactivity and susceptibility to peer influence, which can amplify the impact of war-related content on their mental health (20). Additionally, the developmental stage of

adolescence, characterized by identity exploration and heightened sensitivity to social feedback, may render adolescents more susceptible to the emotional contagion effects of social media (Lampe et al., 2019).

Factors contributing to heightened vulnerability in adolescents include developmental immaturity, limited coping skills and dependency on social validation. Adolescents may struggle to contextualize and process the complexities of war-related events, leading to heightened levels of distress and emotional dysregulation (21). Moreover, peer dynamics and social comparison processes can exacerbate feelings of fear and insecurity, particularly in the context of social media, where curated portrayals of suffering and heroism abound (22). Consequently, adolescents may experience a heightened sense of vulnerability and helplessness in the face of war-related adversity.

**A Comparative Lens: Adolescents vs. General Population**

| Author(s)       | Year | Study Focus                        | Key Findings  |
|-----------------|------|------------------------------------|---|
| Olf             | 2017 | Long-term psychological effects    | Both adolescents and adults can experience long-term psychological effects from war content, but the impact may be more pronounced in adolescents due to developmental factors. |
| Peled & Moretti | 2017 | Emotional impact across age groups | Adolescents show greater emotional reactivity to war content compared to adults, partly due to developmental immaturity and heightened sensitivity to peer influence.           |

|                        |      |  |  |
|------------------------|------|--|--|
| <b>Alisic et al.</b>   | 2017 | PTSD in different age groups                   | Adolescents and adults exposed to war trauma via social media can develop PTSD, but adolescents are more likely to exhibit avoidance behaviors and intrusive thoughts.   |
| <b>Layne et al.</b>    | 2017 | Social support and resilience                  | Social support networks, such as family and community organizations, play a crucial role in buffering against the negative effects of war exposure, with adolescents benefiting significantly from these supports. |
| <b>El-Khani et al.</b> | 2017 | Developmental differences in processing trauma | Adolescents struggle more than adults to contextualize and process the complexities of war-related events, leading to heightened distress and emotional dysregulation.   |
| <b>Turner et al.</b>   | 2019 | Vulnerability and peer influence               | Adolescents are more vulnerable to peer influence  |

|                       |      |                                       |  |
|-----------------------|------|---------------------------------------|--|
|                       |      |                                       | and social comparison, which can exacerbate the psychological impact of war-related social media content.  |
| <b>Lampe et al.</b>   | 2019 | Developmental factors in media impact | The developmental stage of adolescence, characterized by identity exploration and sensitivity to social feedback, increases susceptibility to the negative effects of war content.             |
| <b>Aldrich et al.</b> | 2018 | Coping mechanisms across age groups   | Adolescents and adults employ different coping mechanisms, with adolescents more likely to engage in peer support and activism, whereas adults may rely on more established coping strategies. |

Despite these challenges, adolescents also demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms in response to war-related stressors. Comparative analyses have highlighted the role of social support networks, including family, peers, and community organizations, in buffering against the negative effects of war exposure (23). Additionally, adolescents may engage in various coping strategies, such as seeking information, engaging in activism, or fostering interpersonal connections, to navigate the psychological challenges posed by war-related social media

content (24). By understanding the unique stressors and coping mechanisms associated with adolescence, researchers and practitioners can develop targeted interventions to promote adolescents' mental well-being in the context of war-related social media exposure.

### Social Media as a Support System

In the wake of war-related adversity, social media platforms have emerged as invaluable tools for fostering social support and resilience among affected populations, including adolescents. Online communities and peer support groups provide a virtual space for individuals to share experiences, seek advice, and offer solidarity in times of crisis. Adolescents, in particular, have embraced social media as a means of connecting with like-minded peers and accessing peer support networks that transcend geographical boundaries (25).

The availability and utilization of mental health resources on social media have expanded exponentially in recent years, with organizations and advocacy groups leveraging these platforms to disseminate information, provide counseling services, and promote self-care strategies. Adolescents can access a plethora of online resources, including educational materials, self-help tools, and crisis intervention services, to support their mental health needs (26). Additionally, social media platforms have integrated features such as suicide prevention tools, mental health helplines, and crisis chat services to facilitate timely intervention and support for adolescents in distress (27).

Despite these advancements, the effectiveness of social media-based interventions in addressing adolescents' mental health needs remains a subject of ongoing debate and research. While some studies have demonstrated the potential of online peer support groups and digital interventions in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety among adolescents (28), others have raised concerns about the quality and safety of online mental health resources (29).

### Negative Consequences of Social Media Use during War

The pervasive use of social media during wartime presents several negative consequences that can significantly impact the mental health of adolescents (30). One major issue is the spread of misinformation, which can distort perceptions of reality and contribute to heightened anxiety and confusion. Misinformation, often proliferating faster than verified information, can lead to a misinformed public, exacerbating fears and contributing to a hostile online environment. A study by Abro M (31) demonstrated that false news spread more

rapidly on social media than true news, primarily because it evoked strong emotional reactions. For adolescents, who are still developing critical thinking skills, distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources can be particularly challenging, leading to increased stress and anxiety.

Exposure to graphic content is another significant concern. Social media platforms frequently host unfiltered images and videos depicting the horrors of war, which can be traumatizing for young viewers. Rider et al. (32) pointed out that exposure to violent content can lead to desensitization, fear, and trauma, particularly in adolescents whose brains are still developing. Graphic war depictions can result in acute stress reactions, nightmares, and long-term psychological issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (32).

Additionally, the discussion of war on social media can sometimes lead to cyberbullying and harassment. Adolescents engaging in online discussions about war may become targets of hostility, particularly if their views are controversial or if they belong to a specific ethnic or religious group involved in the conflict. A study by Nebhinani et al. found that cyberbullying can lead to significant emotional distress, depression, and even suicidal ideation in adolescents. The anonymity provided by social media platforms often emboldens perpetrators, making it difficult for victims to seek help and support (33).

### Protective Factors and Building Resilience

Despite the negative impacts of social media use during war, certain protective factors can help mitigate these effects and build resilience among adolescents. Parental support is one of the most critical factors. When parents are actively involved in their children's online activities and provide guidance on media consumption, adolescents are better equipped to navigate the challenges posed by war-related content. A study by Padilla-Walker and Farsi & colleagues underscores the importance of parental mediation in fostering critical thinking and emotional regulation in adolescents (34).

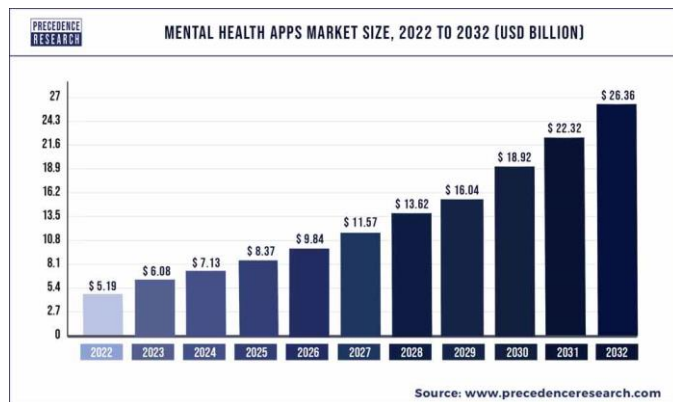


Fig 2: Projected Growth of the Mental Health Apps Market (2022-2032) in USD Billion.

The above bar chart from Precedence Research illustrates the anticipated increase in the market size for mental health apps over a ten-year period, starting at \$5.19 billion in 2022 and reaching \$26.36 billion by 2032 (35).

Educational institutions and community programs also play a vital role in mitigating the negative impacts of war-related social media exposure. Schools can implement media literacy programs that teach students how to critically evaluate information, recognize misinformation, and engage in healthy online behaviors. Najm & colleagues highlight that media literacy education can empower adolescents to make informed decisions and reduce their vulnerability to harmful content (36).

Strategies for fostering resilience among adolescents include promoting strong social support networks, encouraging positive coping mechanisms, and providing access to mental health resources. Peer support groups, both online and offline, can offer a sense of community and understanding, helping adolescents process their experiences and emotions. Additionally, resilience-building programs that focus on developing coping skills, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving abilities can enhance adolescents' ability to manage stress and adversity. A study by Juma & colleagues emphasizes the importance of resilience in overcoming trauma and adversity, highlighting that supportive relationships and adaptive skills are key components in fostering resilience (37).  
Case Studies and Real-Life Examples

Examining specific instances where war coverage on social media has affected adolescents' mental health provides valuable insights into the broader implications of this issue. One notable example is the Syrian conflict, where widespread social media coverage has exposed adolescents to continuous streams of traumatic content. A study by Rozanov et al. found that Syrian adolescents who were exposed to graphic images

and videos of violence on social media exhibited higher levels of anxiety, depression, and PTSD (38).

Comparative analysis of different conflicts reveals varying impacts based on the nature and intensity of media coverage. For instance, during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, social media played a significant role in shaping public perceptions and influencing psychological outcomes. Silver et al. showed that adolescents on both sides of the conflict experienced increased fear and hostility due to the inflammatory and biased content circulated on social media platforms (39).

Despite these challenges, there are success stories of resilience and recovery. For example, in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, social media played a role in community rebuilding and reconciliation efforts. Adolescents who engaged in online support groups and storytelling initiatives reported improved mental health outcomes and a greater sense of community. A study by Holman & colleagues highlights that narrative therapy and peer support can be powerful tools in helping adolescent's process trauma and rebuild their lives (40).

A way to ensure that adolescents do not fall prey to the dangers of the online is to employ a set of questions that can help form a critical lens through which to assess all information. One can start with the below mentioned questions and then adapt and modify them according to needs and habits.

- Is this a trustworthy source?
- Who has collected this information and how?
- Why am I reading this? Who is profiting from it?
- What are my news sources apart from social media?
- Am I being careful in the way I expose myself? Am I prioritizing my mental health?(41)

#### Some Tips for Parents:

- Monitor Social Media Use: Keep track of the content children are exposed to on social media. Utilize parental controls where necessary.
- Identify Stress Responses: Watch for changes in behavior indicating stress or anxiety, and encourage expression through talking, journaling, or art
- Age-Appropriate Conversations: Engage in open, honest discussions about the content they encounter. Tailor these conversations to be age-appropriate, providing reassurance and factual information to dispel fears.



□ Encourage Healthy Coping Mechanisms: Promote activities that foster emotional resilience, such as creative arts, sports, and spending quality family time. (42)

### **Ethical Considerations and Policy Implications**

The ethical responsibilities of social media platforms in moderating war content are paramount in safeguarding the mental health of users, especially adolescents. Platforms must balance the need for freedom of expression with the imperative to protect users from harmful content. Sripada et al. emphasize that social media companies have a duty to implement robust content moderation policies, including the use of artificial intelligence and human moderators to identify and remove harmful content (43).

Regulatory measures and guidelines for responsible content sharing are essential in addressing these challenges. Governments and international organizations can collaborate to establish standards for verifying information, managing misinformation, and protecting vulnerable populations from graphic content. Abbas et al. suggests that comprehensive regulatory frameworks can help mitigate the spread of harmful content and promote a safer online environment (13).

Finally, the role of government and organizations in safeguarding mental health involves developing and implementing policies that support mental health education, provide access to resources, and encourage resilience-building initiatives. Programs aimed at increasing digital literacy and resilience can equip adolescents with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of social media during wartime. A study by Bürgin et al. highlights the effectiveness of collaborative efforts between governments, educational institutions, and mental health organizations in promoting healthy media consumption and protecting mental health (44).

### **Future Research Directions**

The impact of war-related social media coverage on the mental health of adolescents is a multifaceted issue that warrants further investigation. Several gaps in the existing research must be addressed to develop a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon and to inform effective interventions. Firstly, there is a need for longitudinal studies to assess the long-term psychological effects of exposure to war-related content on social media. Most current studies are cross-sectional, providing only a snapshot of the immediate impacts. Longitudinal research can track changes in mental health over time, identifying persistent effects and delayed onset of symptoms. Kaim & colleagues have highlighted how prolonged exposure to traumatic content can lead to

cumulative stress and long-term mental health issues, suggesting a similar approach would be beneficial in this context (45).

Another significant gap is the lack of cross-cultural comparisons. The psychological impact of war-related social media content may vary across different cultural contexts due to variations in social norms, media consumption habits, and resilience factors. Comparative studies can elucidate these differences and highlight cultural factors that may influence adolescents' responses to war content. (46) suggests that cultural context plays a crucial role in shaping media effects, indicating that cross-cultural research is essential for a holistic understanding.

Interdisciplinary approaches can also deepen our understanding of the psychological impact of war-related social media coverage. Collaboration between fields such as psychology, sociology, media studies, and computer science can provide a more nuanced perspective. For example, integrating insights from media psychology and computational social science could help in developing algorithms that mitigate exposure to harmful content while promoting supportive resources. Murthy & colleagues underscore the potential of interdisciplinary research in addressing complex issues related to media effects and mental health (47).

Future research should also explore the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, in moderating content and providing mental health support. AI-driven content moderation tools can help identify and remove harmful content more efficiently, while virtual reality can offer immersive therapeutic interventions. Fu & VanLandingham & colleagues did study on AI and mental health highlights the potential of these technologies in enhancing the well-being of social media users, suggesting promising avenues for future exploration (48).

Additionally, examining the effectiveness of different intervention strategies can provide valuable insights into how best to support adolescents exposed to war-related content on social media. Experimental studies testing various approaches, such as media literacy programs, online counseling, and peer support groups, can identify best practices and inform policy development. A study by Chudzicka et al. (2018) demonstrated the effectiveness of online peer support in reducing anxiety and depression among adolescents, highlighting the need for more research in this area (28).

### **Conclusion**

This review has explored the complex interplay between war-related social media coverage and the mental health of adolescents, highlighting the significant psychological impacts and the role of various protective factors. The key findings underscore that while social media serves as a crucial platform for information dissemination during conflicts, it also exposes adolescents to graphic content, misinformation, and cyberbullying, which can exacerbate mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD. The review emphasizes the importance of protective factors such as parental support, media literacy education, and resilient coping strategies in mitigating these negative impacts. It also points to the potential benefits of social media as a support system, offering access to mental health resources and peer support networks.

For mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers, these findings have several implications. Mental health professionals should be aware of the unique challenges posed by war-related social media exposure and incorporate this understanding into their therapeutic practices. Educators can play a pivotal role in fostering media literacy and resilience among adolescents, equipping them with the skills needed to navigate the digital landscape safely. Policymakers must consider regulatory measures that ensure responsible content sharing on social media platforms and promote mental health support initiatives.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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