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**PERINATAL SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH: A REVIEW
OF CURRENT EVIDENCE**

Abstract

The widespread use of social media has generated growing interest in its potential effects on people's mental health. This issue may be particularly relevant during pregnancy, a period characterized by heightened psychological vulnerability. This review article examines recent evidence on the relationship between social media use and maternal mental health, with particular attention to depressive symptoms, anxiety, and prenatal bonding. Available findings suggest that social media may serve both as a source of support and a potential source of distress during pregnancy. It can provide access to information, emotional support, and shared experiences; however, excessive or problematic use may contribute to psychological difficulties and impaired well-being. Overall, the impact of social media on pregnant women seems to be complex. Distinguishing between adaptive and problematic use is therefore essential for understanding its role in maternal mental health.

Keywords: pregnancy, social media use, perinatal mental health, postnatal, depression.

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Introduction

Pregnancy is a major life transition characterized by substantial physical, hormonal, and psychological changes. Considering that pregnancy is an emotionally vulnerable period, many factors can influence women's psychological well-being and contribute to mental health difficulties. Among these, depressive symptoms are particularly important because of their potential impact on both maternal well-being and pregnancy-related outcomes. Furthermore, recent longitudinal studies have demonstrated that adverse developmental and behavioral outcomes in early childhood are significantly associated with depressive symptoms observed during the antenatal period, indicating that this is not solely a maternal concern [1]. Despite advancements in living

conditions and healthcare for pregnant women worldwide, depressive symptoms during pregnancy continue to represent a significant concern [2].

One of the important factors associated with the increase of depressive symptoms in pregnant women is the excessive use of social media [2]. Research suggests that the inherent characteristics of digital platforms, such as ephemeral content and engaging visual features, have a significant impact on user engagement and contribute to the development of problematic usage behaviors [3]. Empirical research has demonstrated that excessive time spent on digital platforms can lead to a sense of social isolation from real-life interactions and emotional exhaustion among pregnant women, thereby increasing psychological

vulnerability [4]. Additionally, recent studies show that when psychological resilience is weakened, digital addiction increases social anxiety, thereby creating a cyclical impact on mental well-being [5].

Given that social media has become a significant part of our lives, it is inevitable that pregnant or postpartum women use it frequently as well. However, despite this, the current literature still contains several gaps. First, there is limited evidence regarding pregnant women's vulnerability to problematic social media use across different trimesters. Second, the possible effects of social media use on maternal-fetal attachment have not been sufficiently investigated. In this context, recent studies indicate that while using social media for information-seeking purposes can enhance prenatal attachment, excessive time spent on digital platforms may shift the mother's focus toward social comparison, thereby contributing to the development of emotional distance [6]. Furthermore, the pressure experienced in digital environments may also be intensified by how motherhood is represented between caregiving and career identities [7].

In addition, relatively little is known about how problematic social media use may influence body image and dietary behaviors among pregnant women. Therefore, the main aim of this review is to examine the negative effects of problematic social media use during pregnancy, with particular attention to maternal mental health, maternal-fetal attachment, and factors such as body image and health-related behaviors.

Pregnancy and mental health. The antenatal period is marked by heightened emotional and psychological vulnerability. During this period, women must adapt not only to the bodily and hormonal changes, but also to the transition to motherhood. Research indicates that successful adaptation to pregnancy significantly influences the overall course [8]. In this context, lower levels of psychological well-being during early pregnancy are associated with adverse pregnancy outcomes, including an increased risk of complications during childbirth [8].

1. Depression and anxiety in pregnancy. As a result, prenatal and antenatal period may be accompanied by increased psychological vulnerability, with depression and anxiety among the most frequently reported mental health concerns. The prevalence of antenatal depression is estimated to range between 7% and 20%, whereas antenatal anxiety may affect up to 35% of pregnant women [9]. Since the psychophysiological processes of pregnancy contribute not only to maternal adaptation but also to the formation of fetal brain structures, depressive states during pregnancy have been associated with a reduction in the size of the amygdala- the region responsible for emotional regulation- in children by the age of four [10]. This finding suggests that pregnancy is not merely a hormonal transition, but also a critical psychophysiological period that plays a significant role in shaping the child's future mental health [10].

At the same time, not all emotional distress experienced during pregnancy is pathological. Some degree of worry may be adaptive and may function as eustress, helping women prepare for childbirth and motherhood [9]. However, in addition to these general worries, pregnancy-related anxiety has been identified as a distinct and multifaceted construct involving worries about maternal health, fetal health, childbirth, and possible complications [11]. This form of anxiety has been associated with adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes, including fetal death, premature birth, and poorer physical and psychological outcomes for both mother and child [9].

Mental health difficulties may emerge during pregnancy (antenatal period) and continue into the postnatal period [12]. Elevated levels of anxiety and commonly observed during the third trimester of pregnancy and may continue following childbirth [13]. In addition, evidence suggests that pregnant women who have been diagnosed with a serious mental illness are also at a higher risk for suicide, underscoring the importance of appropriate monitoring and

psychological support during pregnancy and perinatal period [12].

2. Postpartum mental health outcomes. Academic approaches indicate that maternal mental health during the postpartum period is a key determinant of the child's future behavioral trajectory and developmental outcomes [14]. In other words, timely and appropriate interventions for mothers experiencing psychological difficulties function as a protective factor for the child's mental development as well [14]. Furthermore, postpartum mental health can be adversely affected by external social pressures, discrimination, social injustice, and a lack of socio-ecological support, which may impair the mother's ability to carry out her daily functional responsibilities toward both herself and her infant [15].

Social media use and mental health

1. Psychological outcomes of social media use. Social media has become an integral part of daily life across different age groups and populations. Especially during the pandemic period, the increase in social media use has further heightened exposure to anxiety, depression, addiction, low self-esteem, and other psychological problems [16]. While for some users' social media provides broad opportunities for social support, strengthening relationships, and information exchange, however, as social media use increases, the likelihood of psychological distress also rises [17]. In particular, increased usage, particularly late-night and prolonged use, as well as exposure to negative content, has been shown to contribute to the increase in depressive symptoms [17].

This issue may be especially relevant during pregnancy, when women often seek information and reassurance through online platforms. A recent study conducted among 2,749 pregnant women found that 52.5% of participants reported using social media to obtain medical information [16]. Although social media may serve as an accessible source of health-related content, the findings also showed that its use for medical information was associated with higher levels of stress and anxiety by the end of the third trimester [16]

A 2026 study of 200 university students found that social comparison on social media was associated with greater dissatisfaction and more negative self-perception, particularly among women [18]. Although this study was not conducted in pregnant women, it suggests that social comparison may be an important mechanism through which digital platform use affects psychological well-being [18]. However, research indicates that large-scale data analytics processing on social media platforms facilitates the implementation of preventive measures for mental health and, through the application of appropriate methodologies, serves as a resource that enhances the accessibility of mental health services [19].

2. Social media use across different age groups. Exposure to social media platforms varies considerably across age groups, particularly in terms of its impact on mental health [20]. From the perspective of psychological well-being, these effects also appear to be significantly age-dependent. Research indicates that social media use tends to have more pronounced negative psychological effects among younger individuals, largely due to their heightened sensitivity to idealized representations of life, which may contribute to increased psychological distress [21].

Adolescence, in particular, represents a developmental stage characterized by a strong need for validation and a sense of belonging; consequently, individuals in this period may engage more intensively with social media as a compensatory mechanism, potentially triggering or exacerbating psychological symptoms [22]. However, some studies indicate that adolescents with more advanced emotional regulation skills are less susceptible to negative content, and may even benefit from peer support and interactive engagement on these platforms, which can mitigate symptoms of depression and anxiety [23,24].

Pregnancy and social media use. The use of social media and other screen-based technologies is widespread during pregnancy; however, the extent and patterns of use vary across different populations and contexts.

According to a 2015 study conducted in China, 62.6% of healthy pregnant women spent approximately one hour per day on screen-based activities [25]. Another similar study reported an average of 5.5 hours per day, while another study reported an average of 5 hours per day [25]. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously, as screen use may differ according to cultural context, available technologies, and daily routines. Recent shifts in digital habits also suggest that smartphone use has become more common than computer use, particularly during evening hours, whereas computer-based screen exposure may be more closely related to work activities and may not carry the same level of psychological risk [26].

1. Dynamics of social media use across pregnancy and parity. Especially in early pregnancy, more screen time has been associated with depression, and these are things that should not be ignored. Overall, for all people, and especially for pregnant women, there should be established guidelines and clear limits regarding daily screen time to ensure awareness of the recommended duration of use. At this time, we can know that women who use screens for less than the set limits may be less likely to be depressed [25].

Across the three trimesters of pregnancy, both the purpose and intensity of social media use undergo notable changes. Research indicates that while digital technologies are primarily used for informational and learning purposes in the early antenatal period, their use in later stages shifts more toward seeking emotional support [27].

Patterns of social media use may also differ across pregnancy and according to parity. Earlier research suggested that use might be higher in the first trimester because of miscarriage-related concerns, and in the third trimester because of reduced work and social activity [28]. However, some studies reported the lowest use during the first trimester [28]. In addition, the results of a longitudinal study showed that, primiparous women may use social media more frequently than multiparous women, particularly during the second trimester, possibly reflecting

greater uncertainty and a stronger need for information and reassurance among first-time mothers [28]. According to research, interactive digital resources play a significant role—particularly for primiparous women—in increasing awareness of their condition, reducing uncertainty, and discouraging engagement in risky behaviors such as unhealthy dietary practices [29].

2. Problematic use and body dissatisfaction. During pregnancy, a woman's mental health is influenced not only by her own behaviors but also by her partner's problematic use of social media, which can increase emotional loneliness and perceived insufficiency, thereby elevating the risk of prenatal depression and intensifying emotional distress during the prenatal period [30].

Problematic social media use may be especially relevant during pregnancy because of its links with social comparison and body dissatisfaction. Pregnancy is associated with visible bodily changes, and some women may become more vulnerable to comparing themselves with peers, other pregnant women, or idealized online images [9]. Available evidence suggests that this comparison-based use may contribute to body dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem, and greater psychological distress, including antenatal anxiety and depressive symptoms [9]. This increases the risk of the possibility of postnatal depression, low birth weight, and premature birth [9].

Evidence has shown that women are not satisfied with their appearance both during pregnancy and postpartum periods [31]. Considering that they tend to compare themselves more with pictures of their peers, other pregnant women or celebrities on social media, this results in unrealistic beauty standards [31]. Negative social comparison increased exposure to appearance-related content has been associated with more selective eating behaviors and greater concern with body image, which may have broader implications for maternal well-being during pregnancy [9]. Overall, these findings suggest that social media use during pregnancy is a multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing both

psychological risks and broader implications for maternal and fetal health [32].

3. Maladaptive eating patterns: social media and orthorexia nervosa. Additionally, it has been shown that social media increases the risk of eating disorders such as orthorexia [31,33], anorexia and bulimia, as well as the new types of eating disorders [31]. Orthorexia nervosa is an obsessive-compulsive disorder characterized by careful and sensitive selectivity in food selection [33]. During this condition, individuals impose strict rules on themselves, which results in increased psychological distress and social dysfunction. During pregnancy, women's attention to dietary behaviors tends to increase naturally; however, this focus may also contribute to maladaptive patterns such as orthorexia nervosa [33].

Research suggests that social media plays a significant role in the development of orthostatic tendencies, particularly during pregnancy [33]. Social media platforms frequently present various diet programs and examples of 'clean eating'. Such exposure may contribute to the development of obsessive thoughts, characterized by excessive control and rigid dietary rules [33]. Pregnant women may internalize the content they are exposed to as normative and attempt to adhere to it, which in turn increases orthorexia nervosa-related behaviors [33].

4. Seeking information vs. emotional strain. Social media may also play an important role as a source of information during pregnancy. Many pregnant women, particularly first-time mothers, use online platforms to seek advice about pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care, and this may provide reassurance and perceived support [34]. A recent study showed that half of pregnant women use social media to get information about childbirth, while the other half use it to get information about pregnancy [34]. At the same time, frequent reliance on social media for health-related information may increase stress, unrealistic expectations, and confusion, particularly when the information encountered is inaccurate, idealized, or not evidence-based [34].

5. Psychological correlates: FOMO and maternal bonding. Other psychological mechanisms may further explain the association between social media use and maternal mental health. Fear of missing out, self-criticism, and reduced self-compassion have all been linked to poorer emotional well-being in pregnant women and new mothers [34,35]. In particular, higher self-criticism has been associated with lower perceived social support, while lower self-compassion has been associated with greater depression and anxiety [35]. Consistent with these findings, some studies suggest that women who use social media more frequently may be more likely to show persistent depressive symptoms across pregnancy [2]. These depressive symptoms may, in turn, negatively influence maternal well-being and early mother-infant bonding after birth [2].

Conclusion

Pregnancy is a period of substantial physical and psychological change, during which women may be particularly vulnerable to emotional distress. In this context, social media appears to play a complex role. On the one hand, it may provide access to information, social support, and shared experiences. On the other hand, problematic or excessive use may be associated with greater anxiety, depressive symptoms, body dissatisfaction, stress, and difficulties related to prenatal bonding.

The findings reviewed in this article suggest that the psychological effects of social media during pregnancy depend not only on the amount of use, but also on the purpose and pattern of engagement. In particular, problematic use, social comparison, exposure to idealized content, and reliance on inaccurate online information may increase vulnerability to poorer mental health outcomes. These effects may influence not only maternal well-being but also, indirectly, maternal-fetal and early mother-infant relationships.

Overall, the current evidence highlights the importance of paying greater attention to social media use during pregnancy. Future research should further examine the

mechanisms linking problematic social media use with maternal mental health and should also explore possible preventive strategies and supportive interventions for pregnant women.

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PERİNATAL DÖVRDƏ SOSIAL MEDIA İSTİFADƏSİ VƏ ANA PSİXİ SAĞLAMLIĞI: MÖVCUD DƏLİLLƏRİN İCMALI

Xülasə

Son dövrlərdə sosial media istifadəsinin geniş yayılması, onun insanların mental sağlamlığına vurduğu mənfi təsirləri daha çox araşdırmağa sövq edib. Xüsusilə də həssas dövəmdə olan hamilə qadınların bundan çox və ya sıx-sıx istifadə etməsinin nələrə yol açma biləcəyi maraqlı mövzusu olub. Bu icmal məqalədə də son illərdə bu kontekstdə aparılan araşdırmalar gözədən keçirilmişdir. Beləcə, bu məqalənin məqsədi, sosial media istifadəsinin hamilələrin mental sağlamlığına necə təsir göstərməsini araşdırmaqdır. Xüsusilə də depressiya, təşviş və prenatal bağlanma mövzularına daha çox fokuslanılmışdır. Bunlarla yanaşı, sosial media hamiləlik dövründə qadınlara həm də müsbət təsir göstərə bilər. Çünki onlar təcrübəsiz və ya stressli olduqlarından məlumat mənbəyi kimi sosial mediaya üz tuturlar. Bu zaman bu onlar üçün həm də dəstəkçi ola bilər.

Açar sözlər: hamiləlik, sosial media istifadəsi, perinatal psixi sağlamlıq, postnatal, depressiya.

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ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ СЕТЕЙ В ПЕРИНАТАЛЬНЫЙ ПЕРИОД И ПСИХИЧЕСКОЕ ЗДОРОВЬЕ МАТЕРИ: ОБЗОР СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ДАННЫХ

Резюме

Широкое распространение социальных сетей в последнее время привело к увеличению числа исследований их негативного влияния на психическое здоровье людей. Интерес вызывает вопрос о том, что может произойти, если беременные женщины, находящиеся в особенно чувствительном периоде, используют их слишком часто или чрезмерно. В данной обзорной статье также рассматриваются исследования, проведенные в этом контексте в последние годы. Таким образом, цель данной статьи — исследовать, как использование социальных сетей влияет на психическое здоровье беременных женщин. В частности, основное внимание уделяется таким темам, как депрессия, тревожность и пренатальная связь. Цель данной статьи — исследовать, как использование социальных сетей влияет на психическое здоровье беременных женщин. В частности, она фокусируется на таких темах, как депрессия, тревожность и пренатальная связь. Кроме того, социальные сети могут оказывать положительное влияние на женщин во время беременности. Из-за неопытности или стресса они обращаются к социальным сетям как к источнику информации. В этот период это также может оказывать им поддержку. В результате социальные сети оказывают двойное воздействие на беременных женщин. В этот период следует различать правильное и неправильное использование.

Ключевые слова: беременность, использование социальных сетей, перинатальное психическое здоровье, послеродовой период, депрессия.

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