Online Child Protection & Safety
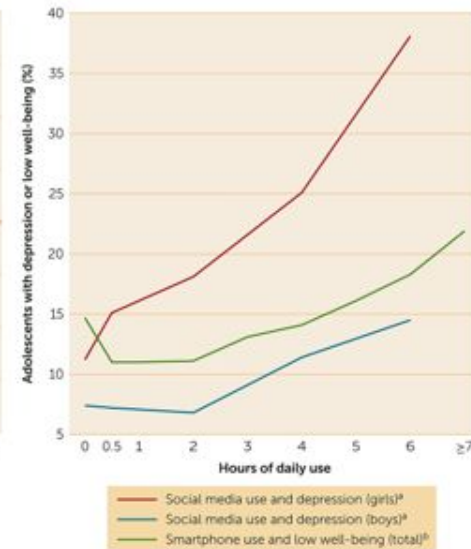
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The Rise of Social Media & the Decline of Mental Health

- Dramatic mental health decline since 2012, particularly in youngest teens

- Growing consensus that these trends may be connected to the rise in technology use

- Studies how heavy users of social media are more likely to be unhappy, depressed, or have suicide risk factors

- Social media use among girls more strongly associated with depression than heroin use

* Z=0 is the average across the entire time span of this study

Legend (left chart): Suicide[a], Self-poisoning[c], Major depressive episode[d], Depressive symptoms[c]

Legend (right chart): Social media use and depression (girls)[a], Social media use and depression (boys)[a], Smartphone use and low well-being (total)[b]

Current Legislative Landscape

In the United States:

- Utah (2023): Age verification and parental consent required for social media users under the age of 18
- Florida (2024): Parental consent required for user under the age of 14, terminates existing accounts if users under 14

Globally:

- Belgium (2018): Parental consent required for children under 13
- France (2023): Parental consent required for children under 15
- Australia (2024): Outright ban on children under 16 from using social media

Connecticut's Current Framework

SB00003 (2023):

- Established requirements for minor's personal data and social media accounts
- Create Connecticut Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force

Needs Enhancement:

- Lacks robust age verification mechanisms
- No mandated parental controls for minors
- Limited technological framework for implementation

Proposed Technological Solutions

Mandated Tech Company Requirements:

- Child-specific versions of platforms with:
  - Enhanced safety features
  - No Algorithmic content recommendations
  - Time Limits and usage controls

Device-Level Solutions:

- "iPhone/Android for Kids" with built-in protections
- Mandatory parental control dashboards
- Real-time monitoring and notification systems

Implementation Framework

Age Verification Technology:

- Multi-factor verification systems
- Parental authorization through secure channels
- Privacy-preserving age estimation models

Enhanced Parental Controls:

- Remote device management
- Content approval systems
- Usage statistics and reports
- Emergency lockdown capabilities

Conclusion

- Amend SB00003 to require tech-based solutions
- Mandate age-appropriate platform versions
- Require enhanced parental controls on devices and platforms
- Establish oversight for technological compliance
- Above all else *prioritize online safety and mental health for Connecticut's children*

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