Adolescent screen-use patterns, their predictors, and associations with mental health and wellbeing

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Background:
Screen-use is integral to adolescents' daily lives. While there has been increased concern about its impact on adolescent mental health and wellbeing, the evidence remains mixed. Most research has focused on total screen time, overlooking engagement in different activities, such as using social media, gaming, video streaming, internet browsing. This study aimed to identify distinct adolescent screen-use patterns (by activity type and duration), examine sociodemographic and psychosocial predictors of these patterns, and assess the associations of these patterns with later mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Methods:
Longitudinal data for this study was drawn from the Future Proofing Study, involving N=3232 students, who were in Year 8 at baseline and assessed annually. Latent class analysis (LCA) was used to identify heterogeneous screen-use profiles (classes) using time spent on different screen-use types (social media, gaming, video streaming, and internet browsing), measured in 2023. Predictors of screen-use profiles were taken from 12-months prior (2022) to screen-use measurements, and mental health symptoms were measured at 12-months later (2024). Multinomial logistic regression analyses examining predictors of profile membership, and multivariable regression analyses examining associations between profile membership and depression, anxiety, and wellbeing, with gender as a potential moderator, are in progress.

Results:
The LCA identified four distinct screen-use profiles: *Low overall-use/moderate social media-use* (61.7%); *Moderate overall-use/high social media-use* (24.6%); *Moderately-high overall-use/high gaming-use* (8.7%); and *High overall-use/very-high gaming-use* (5.1%). Sociodemographic and psychosocial predictors of profile membership are being examined. Compared with the low-use profile, members in the high-use profiles are expected to show higher depression and anxiety and lower wellbeing scores. The full results will be presented.

Conclusion:
This study offers new insights into the different patterns of adolescent screen-use, their predictors, and the mental health outcomes associated with these patterns. Findings underscore the importance of targeted strategies to promote balanced screen-use during adolescence.