

Study explores impacts of social distancing on youth

7 May 2020, by Alexandra Burza



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After weeks of staying at home, Canadians are slowly beginning to see the impact of physical distancing on decelerating the spread of COVID-19. However, for some, prolonged social isolation amplifies feelings of disconnection and can result in negative psychological effects and disorders.

Technology has been touted as a convenient, adaptable alternative to in-person socialization. After all, shouldn't eating takeout with friends over a Zoom call be just as socially fulfilling as a dinner party?

As the principal investigator of the iBelong research study, Health Studies professor Shauna Burke is examining social media use and [social connectedness](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic, and its impact on all aspects of health and wellbeing.

In collaboration with researchers at Western and Lakehead University, the study focuses on adolescents and young adults, a demographic who are simultaneously social media natives and

particularly susceptible to the impacts of [social isolation](#).

"Their wellbeing depends largely on everyday social interactions with, and validation by, peers. Because these in-person interactions are no longer possible due to ongoing school closures and physical distancing requirements, identifying effective ways to maintain [social contact](#) is critical," Burke explained.

Phase 1 of the study, which concluded in April 2020, captured young people's attitudes and perceptions around [social media use](#), physical distancing as well as health and wellbeing.

Moving forward, Burke and her team plans to investigate the ways social media helps and hinders in overcoming the various impacts currently faced by young people.

"Our findings about the influence of social media on the wellbeing of young people, including their feelings about belonging and connectedness, are important and can be used to promote overall social and psychological wellbeing among young people now and in the future," she said.

This includes young Canadians' feelings toward physical distancing, as well as how and why they're complying with public health measures. The iBelong team hopes the information they collect will inform future outreach and intervention initiatives directed at adolescents and [young adults](#).

"We might be able to identify tangible, evidence-based strategies that can be used to promote physical distancing adherence, and overall health and well-being in this population," Burke said. "Keeping [young people](#) safe and healthy at home not only protects them, but it could help to protect the health-care system and those most vulnerable by reducing the spread of the virus."

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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