

Are Women the Biggest Losers in the 'Selfie Culture'?

[Latest data published in Britain](#) suggests that young women are at the “highest mental health risk” in our culture. Statistics published by Britain’s National Health Service (NHS) indicate that one in four young women suffer from mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression.

The major NHS report examined the mental health of thousands of Britons. It revealed that 26 percent of women aged between 16 and 24 suffered poor mental health, a rise from 21 percent from 2007, when the government-funded study was last done. More than a fourth of these women had self-harmed. In 1993, young women were twice as likely as young men to exhibit common mental health symptoms, whereas they are now three times more likely to experience them.

[Experts indicated](#) that the surge in social media since 2009 has played a large role in these results, suggesting that a culture built on social media is taking its toll.

Females, it seems, are particularly vulnerable to social media. The “selfie generation” feels immense pressure over body image, researchers found, and females were found to be more susceptible to bullying and judgment from peers. Much of the anxiety stems from a deep sense of insecurity, caused in large part by their real lives not matching up to the “virtual” lives that they see on social media.

The research, based on a survey and in-depth interviews with more than 7,000 adults, demonstrated a steady increase in severe mental health problems. A particular concern is that the age group suffering most from mental health issues is the first to come of age in the era of social media, suggesting a link which bodes ill for the future.

“When we are looking at social media and the ‘selfie culture’ the problem starts far earlier,” [said Lauren Chakkalackal](#), senior research officer at the Mental Health Foundation, “and I think we are going to see these trends continuing.” She said that girls were particularly vulnerable to a social media culture which encouraged them to compete with apparently “perfect” lives. “On social media, they are seeing these edited versions of lives, bikinis, beaches, not seeing the reality,” she said. In addition, girls were more likely to fall victim to online bullying, which left them feeling that their whole identity was under attack.

Another alarming finding is the sharp increase in the number of adults contemplating suicide. Overall, 21 percent of adults had thought of taking their own life, a rise from 16.7 per cent in 2007. “The rise in people feeling suicidal, attempting to take their own life and self-harming is alarming,” said Elizabeth Scowcroft, Research Manager of the Samaritans, a charity dedicated to helping those at risk of suicide.

These figures are alarming. But should they be surprising?

The so-called “selfie” culture is fundamentally narcissistic. Narcissism cuts us off from reality and from the love of others. It isolates us within the confines of the fathomless self, groping in the egotistical dark for a light that cannot be found there. Until we stop looking addictively into the hand-held devices at our fingertips, fumbling frantically for a false “reality”, we will be condemning ourselves to a shrinking and shriveling vision of ourselves and others, with all the mental health problems that such a view of reality portends.