

Study shows disadvantaged youth can't get away from negative interactions, whether on the street or online

February 18 2016

A new, novel study from the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing) shows that there is an alarming connection between the negative social interactions disadvantaged youth experience in both the neighborhoods they live in and on social media. The study, led by Robin Stevens, PhD, MPH, Assistant Professor, Department of Family & Community Health and Director of the Health Equity & Media Lab, is set for publication in *New Media & Society*, but is currently available online.

The team conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty females and thirty males, ranging in age from 18-24 years old, about their social worlds and [neighborhoods](#), both online and offline. The study took place in a predominately African American and Hispanic neighborhoods. Forty-three percent of the participants were African American; 43 percent were Latino; and 13 percent were African American and Latino mixed ethnicity. All of the interviewees were either in high school or community college at the time.

"It is estimated that more than 75 percent of youth across the country are on some sort of social media," said Stevens. "Teens and young adults who are at the margins of society may have experiences in dealing with social media that others don't. Unfortunately, what we found was that not only do they have to deal with negative social interactions in their neighborhoods, those interactions also seep into their online lives,

sometimes in a larger, more problematic, way." The study's findings reveal a dynamic and somewhat concerning interplay between a physical neighborhood and a digital neighborhood, where negative interactions are reproduced and amplified online.

The participants told interviewers of the drama that takes place on social media, which is a byproduct of living in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Researchers not only discovered that the physical negativity that these young people experience in their neighborhoods spills over to their lives on social media, but that the opposite is also true. "Participants told us that drama that starts out on social media can also manifest itself in serious, physical altercations on the streets," added Stevens. "Social media is an amplified reflection of the real and digital neighborhoods in which they live."

A unique advantage of social media is that it can be used to bring people together and allow users to experience things they may not get a chance to. Adversely, the study found that social media can make tensions between people even worse, or at least seem even worse. To reduce their exposure to some of these negative experiences, a number of the participants elected to limit their social media activity. But by cutting oneself off of social media completely, you negate any of the potential positive opportunities social media may allow for.

The investigators suggests that more research is needed in the use and side effects of [social media](#) in diverse populations (i.e. cultural, financial and geographical).

Provided by University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing

Citation: Study shows disadvantaged youth can't get away from negative interactions, whether on the street or online (2016, February 18) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2016-02-disadvantaged-youth-negative-interactions-street.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.