Department of Psychology
The University of Hong Kong
香港大學心理學系

Adolescent Digital Activity and Mental Health: A New Developmental Theory and Some Initial Data

Prof. Edmund Sonuga-Barke

Professor of Developmental Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience
King's College London

April 14, 2025 (Monday)

6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

CPD - 3.28
The Jockey Club Tower
Centennial Campus
HKU

Zoom Meeting
(For participants who couldn't attend the seminar in person)
Meeting ID: 698 555 5998
Password: Psyc

Abstract

Digital technology use (i.e. digital activity) has been proposed to contribute to a decline in adolescents' mental health. In this talk I will present a new model, developed with colleagues, of how risky digital activity may increase depressed mood via reciprocal pathways, creating negative developmental cycles. Specifically, we hypothesize that risky digital activity increases depressed mood by evoking frequent and persistent negative affective (e.g. anger) and cognitive reactions (e.g. "I feel stupid"). These effects, we postulate, are compounded when depressed mood further increases both risky digital activity and negative affective and cognitive reactions to it. The model also proposes that these negative impacts of risky digital activity can be mitigated by actively managing it and/or the reactions it evokes. All pathways are hypothesized to be moderated by nondigital factors. I will then describe the DIORA (Dynamic Interplay of On-line Research and Resilience in Adolescence) longitudinal study designed to test this model over a 12-month period. Next, I will introduce two new self-report questionnaire measures assessing, (i) specific digital activities and the reactions they evoke (The Digital Activity and Feeling Inventory; DAFI) and; (ii) young people's perceptions of digital risk and its management (My Life On-line; MYLO). Finally, I will present DIORA baseline data providing initial cross-sectional support for the model and use it to examine the impact of ADHD on the digital activity – mental health link.