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Social Support Among Young People

Introduction

Social support is an essential aspect of well-being for everyone; humans are an innately social species and need each other to survive. For young people, feeling cared for by others and having access to help when needed may be particularly important for navigating the challenging transition to adulthood, boosting motivation and academic achievement,¹ as well as building resilience in the face of adversity.²

The following report explores patterns of social support among young people (defined in this report as 15- to 24-year-olds) in seven countries across diverse global regions — Brazil, Egypt, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico and the U.S. — using data from the [Meta-Gallup State of Social Connections study](#).³

How socially supported do young people feel?

On average, across the seven countries*, 81% of young people said they felt “very” or “fairly” supported⁴ — slightly higher than 75% among older adults (defined in this report as people 25 and older). However, a notable proportion of young people in each country felt “a little” or “not at all” supported — ranging from 8% in Indonesia to 34% in Brazil.

Across the seven countries studied*, an average of 82% of young people reported needing support⁵ “rarely,” “sometimes” or “often” over the past 30 days, compared with 71% among older adults. The analyses that follow focus on the sub-population that needed support.

How do young people get support from others?

The study asked people in each country who said they needed support in the past 30 days about specific groups they may have reached out to — from friends or family who live nearby to people from work or school.⁶ The study also asked how they received social support — whether it was in person or through technology, such as email, text message or social media.⁷ Across all countries studied*, young people most often turned to nearby friends or family members; at least 61% who needed support had reached out to people in this group in the past 30 days. While results were similar among older adults, in most countries, young people who needed support were more likely than older adults to seek that support from people at work or school and less likely to reach out to neighbors.

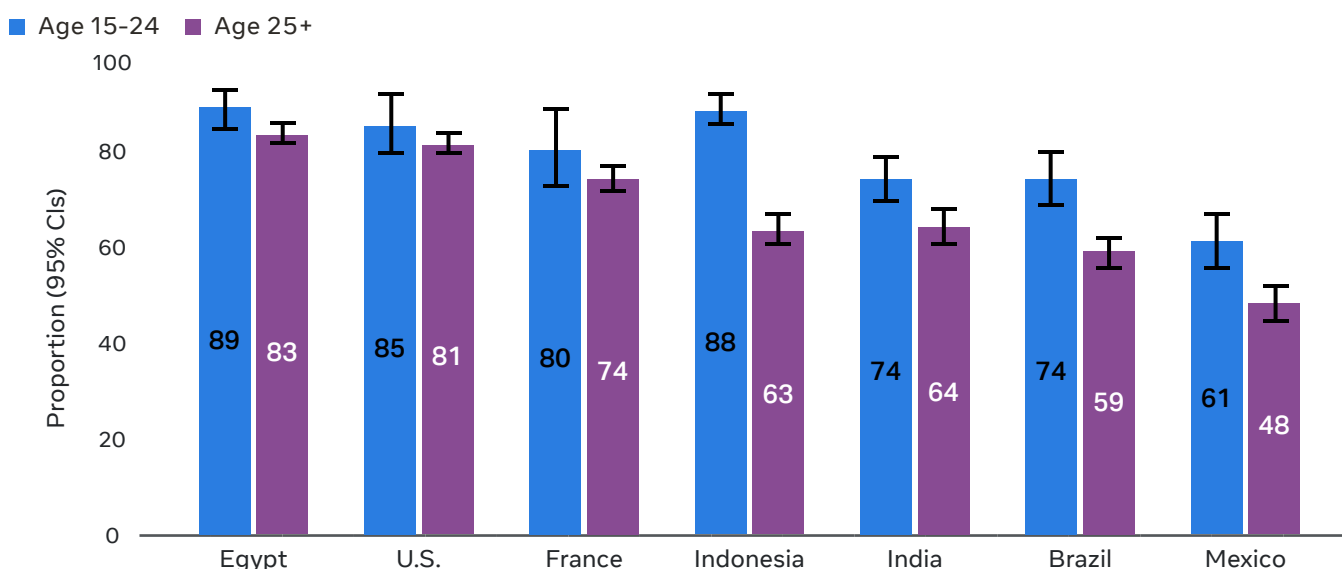
In most countries, young people and older adults alike most often reached out to others in person for support when they needed it. However, young people were more likely than older adults to use technology to seek support: On average, across the seven countries studied*, 79% of young people who needed support had reached out to others by voice or video call, text/instant message, email or social media in the past 30 days, ranging from 61% in Mexico to 89% in Egypt. Among older adults, an average* of 68% sought support via voice or video call, instant message, email or social media, from 48% in Mexico to 83% in Egypt.

* This estimate is derived by computing the average of the seven country-level estimates; it is intended to illustrate the general findings of this study only and should not be interpreted as representative of the global population or any specific group or region.

CHART 1: USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO GET SUPPORT, BY AGE GROUP

“Did you interact with people through [phone call or a voice call; video call; email; text message, instant message or SMS; social media] to get support or help in the past 30 days?”

% “Yes”



Note: Estimates from sub-population of people who needed support. Colored bars represent the median percentage, with the black lines indicating the highest and lowest percentages in the range.

In all countries, young people were more likely than older adults to use social media to reach out for support, and in all countries, they were also more likely to use text messaging to seek support. Young people were not notably *less* likely to use any one technology type to reach out for support than older adults, except in the U.S., where they were only half as likely as older adults to reach out via email (16% vs. 32%, respectively).

In most countries, both young people and older adults who had used technology to seek support in the past 30 days were also more likely to have reached out to get support from others in person, suggesting that technology may add to, rather than detract from, people’s opportunities for getting support.⁸

Conclusion/Implications

This report builds on the [State of Social Connections study](#), showing that many young people in all seven countries studied feel supported by others. In many ways, young people and older adults turn to the same people and use the same methods to get social support, though young people are generally more likely than older adults to use technology to connect with others for support when they need it. Findings also show that young people still most frequently turn to in-person interactions to seek support, but often use both technology and in-person interactions. This suggests that young people’s efforts to reach out via technology for support may supplement, rather than replace, in-person, help-seeking behaviors.

These findings highlight potential intervention opportunities for stakeholders — including governments, non-governmental organizations and private companies — to support young people when they need it most. Interventions should explore how to make use of all the ways young people connect with others, including technology — from helping them responsibly access technology to using technology⁹ to encourage young people to reach out to key people in their lives.

Endnotes

- 1 Ahmed, W., Minnaert, A., Van Der Werf, G., & Kuyper, H. (2010). Perceived social support and early adolescents' achievement: The mediational roles of motivational beliefs and emotions. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(1), 36–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-008-9367-7>
- 2 *Mental health of adolescents*. (2021, November 17). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>
- 3 Meta & Gallup, Inc. (2022). *The state of social connections* [Meta-commissioned study of at least 2,000 people ages 15+ in Brazil, Egypt, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico and the United States].
- 4 Question wording: *In general, how supported do you feel by people? By supported, I mean how much you feel cared for by people. Do you feel ... Not at all supported; A little supported; Fairly supported; Very supported*
- 5 Question wording: *How often did you NEED support or help from someone in the past 30 days? Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Often*
- 6 Question wording: *Did you interact with _____ to get support or help in the past 30 days? Friends or family who live far away; Friends or family who live with you or near you; People from work or school; Neighbors or people who live near you; Groups you are a part of based on shared interests or beliefs; Strangers or people you don't know*
- 7 Question wording: *Did you interact with people _____ to get support or help in the past 30 days? In person; Through a phone call or a voice call; Through a video call; Through email; Through text message, instant message, or SMS; Through social media*
- 8 For example, on average across the seven countries, the odds of seeking help in person in the past 30 days were higher for those who sought help via technology, compared with those who did not (5.62 and 6.81 times higher for young people and older adults, respectively). Excluding Egypt, where the odds ratios were around 0.53, odds ratios ranged from 2.52 in the U.S. to 9.97 in Indonesia for young people, and from 4.69 in France to 16 in Mexico for older adults.
- 9 *Health advisory on social media use in adolescence*. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-use>

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