

The Rise of a New Mental Health Epidemic: TikTok and Social Media, and Their Negative Impact on Young Adults

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Background

- Technology has proven itself beneficial in many ways, with a total of 3.6 billion social media users worldwide (Silver & Clancy, 2023)
- Social media:** media consumption that allows individuals to view, create, share content, and participate in online communities.
- Current news in the U.S. shows banning TikTok due to privacy and concerns, as more than twice as many Americans support the banning of TikTok (Pew Research Center, 2021)
- Social media has become a pivotal component of the lives of many Americans, but their need for entertainment and connection creates a smoke screen for the dangers that social media imposes if not used in moderation*
- Addiction:** People experience an altered sense of time when scrolling for hours, exhibit short attention spans and cannot watch shows or movies without scrolling on their phone, they develop a dependency, may cause sleep loss (Thomson, K., et al., 2021)
- Mental Health:** Social media exacerbates anxiety and stress, endure psychological damage trying to feel of sense of belonging in the community. User compares life to others even though social media portrays perfection (O, D. E. B., & Heimberg, R. G., 2021)
- Body Dysmorphia/fitnesspiration:** Comparing physical looks to unrealistic standards, commonly seeing edited photos. Workout advice from fitnesspiration accounts as all bodies are different- can lead to body dysmorphia and other disorders (Wickline & Keel, 2020)
- Cyberbullying:** Normalized harassment, disguised as humor as a way to get likes, comments, and shares to win gratification from others (State News Service, 2021)

Objectives

- To further the understanding of how social media has deeply harmful effects that can impact one's mental well-being and relationships
- To encourage limiting social media usage and turning to healthier hobbies and activities that would instead enlighten an individual's life and decrease addictive tendencies
- To uncover the frequency of cyberbullying, which proves how universalized it is to harass others online and how easy it is to do that anonymously behind a screen



Methods

- Research was conducted through **observational research, utilizing cross-sectional secondary data** from The National Health Interview Survey
- The research question focused on the impact of social media on one's mental health status, although the data that was accessible focused on cyberbullying and receiving mental health care
- The data for the study was taken from the year 2022 and consisted of 3,087 children aged 12 to 17 years old
- Sample consisted of 1,606 male participants and 1,480 female participants
- Questions asked:
 - "During the past 23 months, did ^SCNAME receive counseling or therapy from a mental health professional such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric nurse, or clinical social worker?"
 - "During the past 12 months, has ^SCNAME been electronically bullied?"
- Answers were documented as "Yes", "No", "Refused", "Not Ascertained", or "Don't Know"
- The exposure variable of the research is whether the sample child experienced cyberbullying, and the outcome variable is whether the sample child has received mental health counseling or therapy through a mental health professional
- To test the hypothesis, a frequency analysis was conducted to test the two variables to provide frequency column percentages that show the logistic relation between them

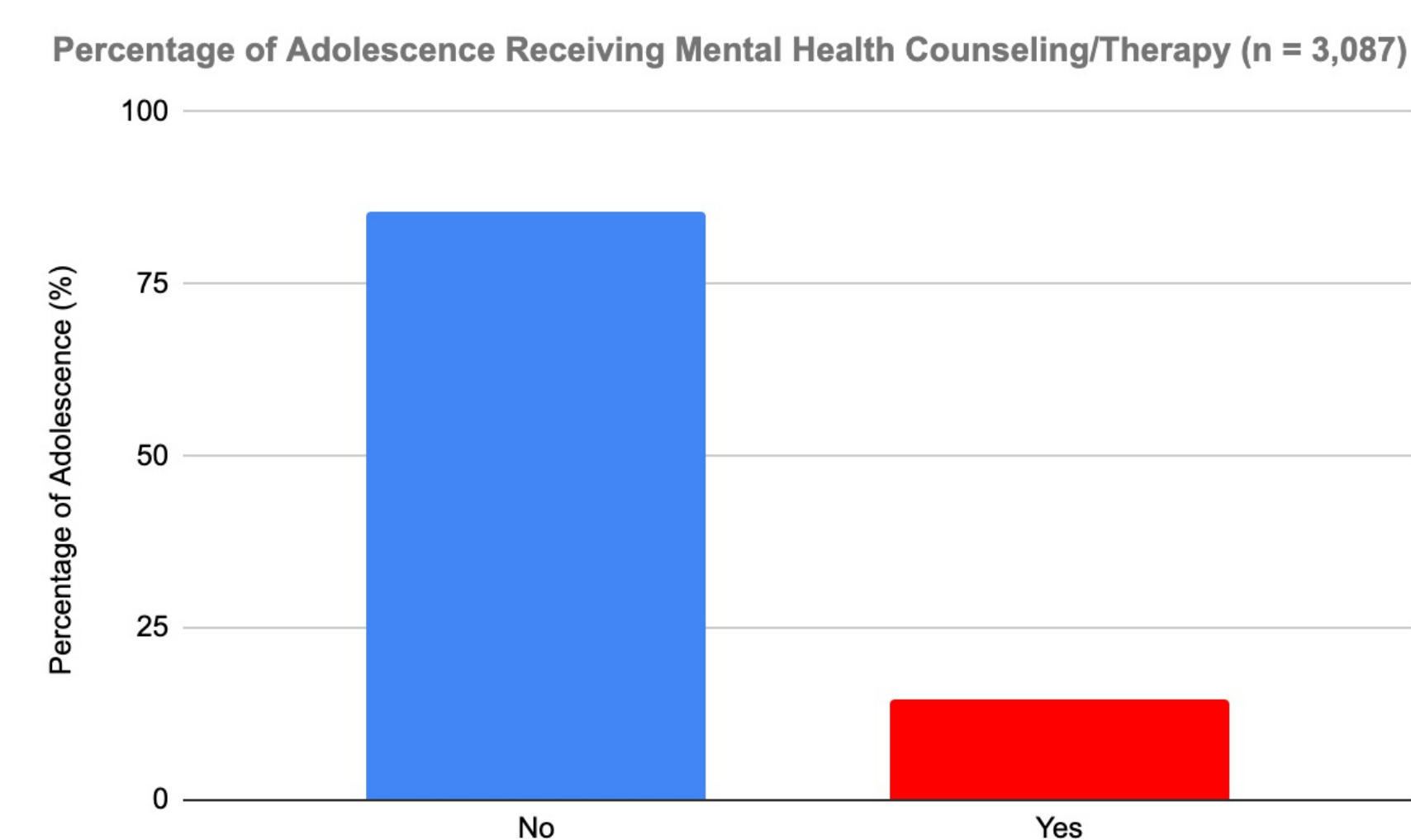


Figure 1. This graph shows the percentage of adolescence receiving mental health counseling/therapy, with 14.61% reported "Yes"

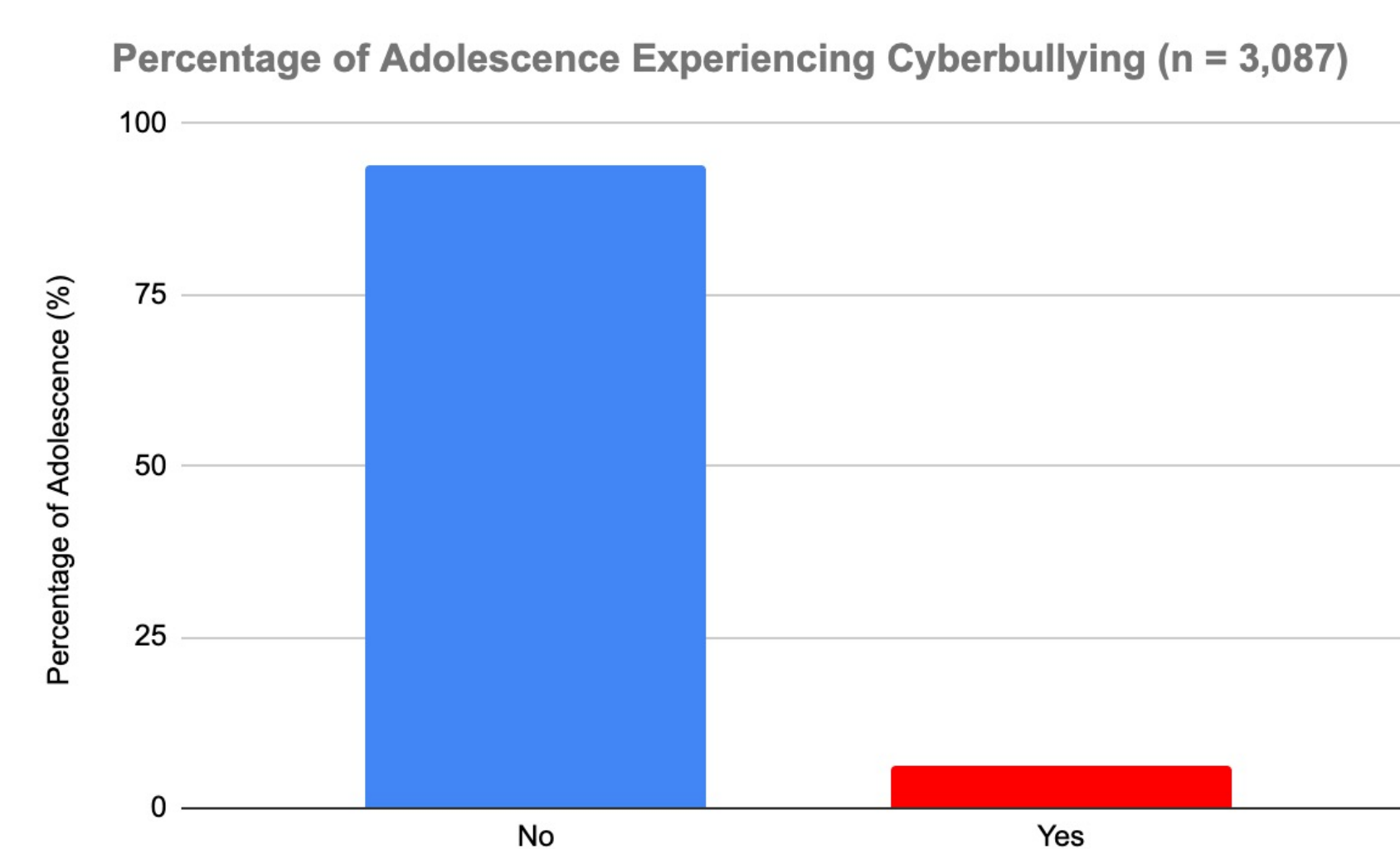


Figure 2. This graph displayed the percentage of adolescence experiencing cyberbullying, as 6.19% reported "Yes"

Results

- The final number of participants used in the analytic sample was 3,087 children aged 12 to 17 years old (n=3,087)
- When the participants were asked if they have been cyberbullied in the past 12 months, 6.19% of participants reported "Yes" and 93.91% reported "No" (**Figure 2**)
- When asked the question if the participants have received counseling/therapy from a mental health professional in the past 12 months, 14.61% of participants reported: "Yes" and 85.39% of participants reported "No" (**Figure 1**)
- When cross-analyzing the two variables, 13.1% of participants reported "Yes" to receiving mental health counseling/therapy
- 37.17% of participants reported "Yes" to receiving mental health counseling and therapy and "Yes" to being cyberbullied in the past 12 months (**Figure 3**)
- After interpreting the frequency analysis and logistic regression model, it was determined that seeking mental health services was significantly associated with cyberbullying, ($p < 0.001$)
- The odds ratio of the data set was 3.92, indicating that adolescence who reported being cyberbullied were more likely to seek mental health counseling and therapy services than those who were not cyberbullied
- The results of the correlation were found to be in line with the hypothesis because it was stated that social media usage and cyberbullying are positively associated**
- Cyberbullying is significantly associated with the confinement of mental health services, supporting the hypothesis that social media use can be detrimental to one's mental health

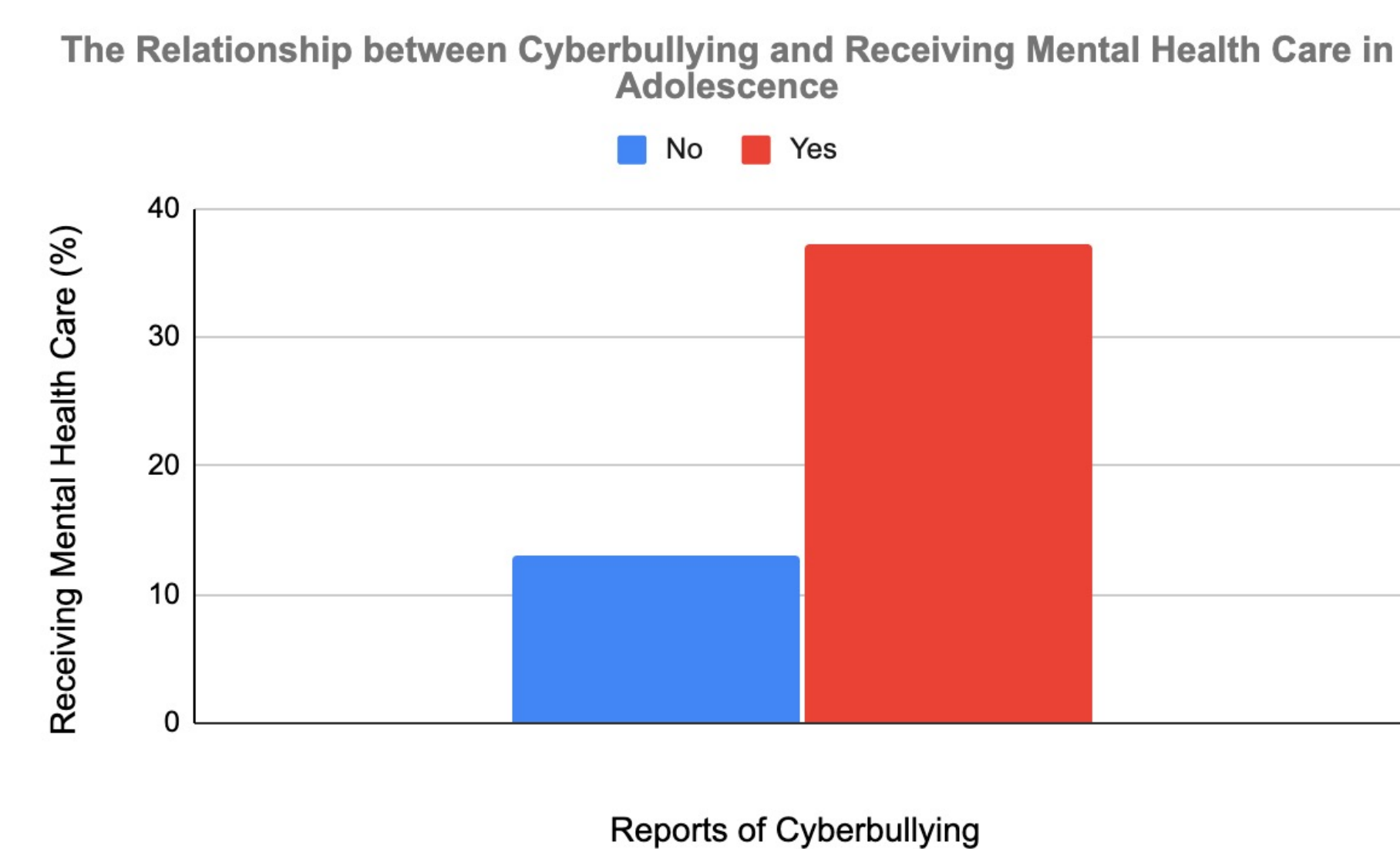
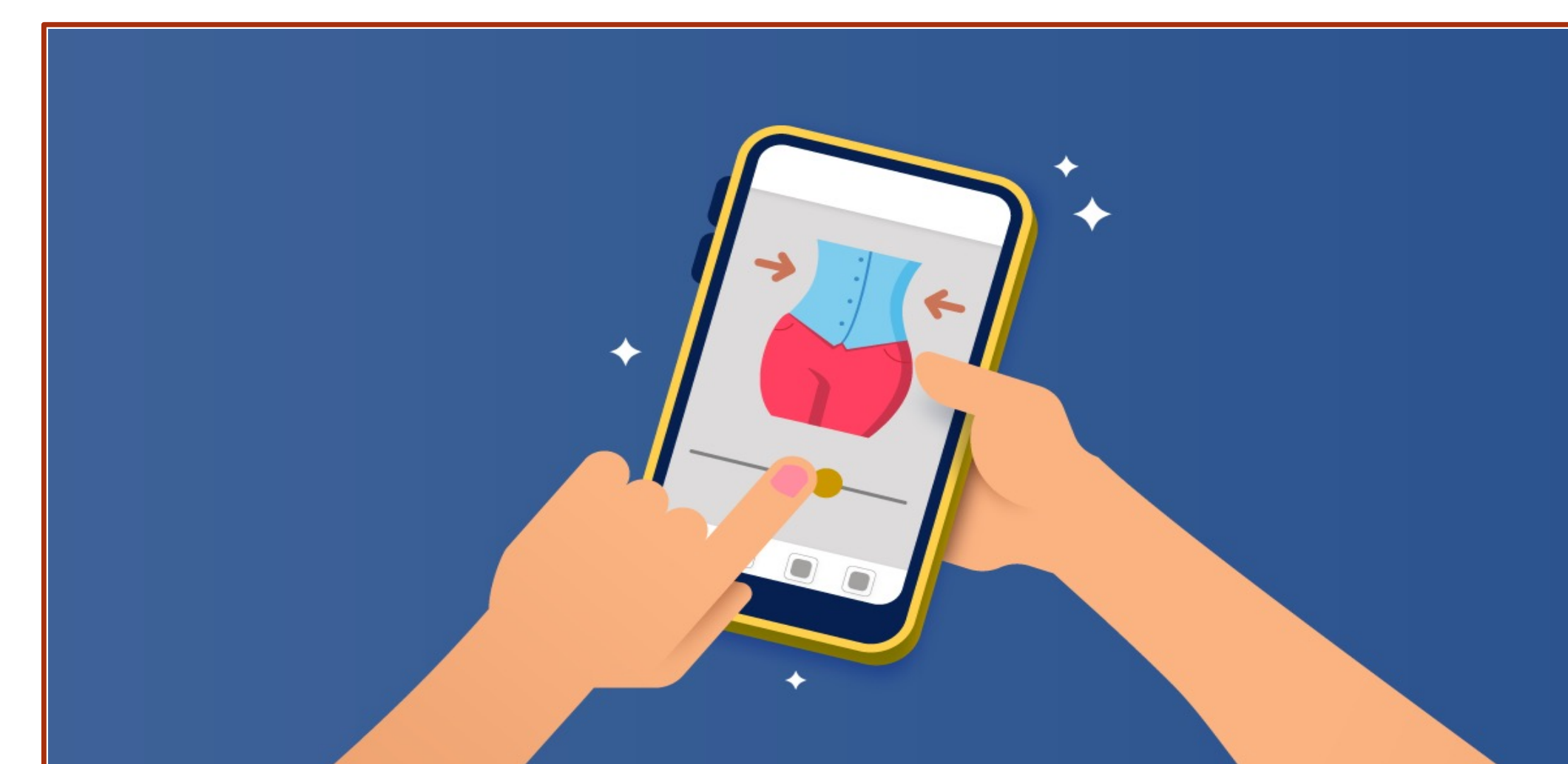


Figure 3. This graph shows the relationship between cyberbullying and receiving mental health care in adolescence, with 37.17% reported "Yes"

Conclusion

- Cyberbullying is not an uncommon occurrence in the digital world, as this behavior is normalized while others are subjected to being dehumanized by anonymous perpetrators
- Limitation:** It is worth noting that there were no datasets representing how social media has a negative impact on an individual's mental health and the focus age group
- Future studies** could explore the how TikTok and social media have become increasingly dangerous on one's mental well-being
- The algorithm was programmed to keep users engaged for long periods of time and it leads to an unreasonable amount of screen time- discover brain pathways causing long hours of scrolling
- Studies could show how social media impacts the physical and optical health of a regular users
- The feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem, and body dysmorphia should be investigated to develop solutions to dissolve the unrealistic physical standards that appear online
- Young adults struggle to watch long-length clips and movies due to their newly shortened attention spans. Healthy habits need to be formed to reset what makes a person stimulated
- Social media breaks should be promoted and regularized in order to improve attention spans, mental health, productivity, and self-esteem
- Users could set time limits on their social media usage and spend their time promoting their mental and physical health, such as chess, brain games, reading, and getting active
- Just like a new medication or vaccine, it would surely take a prolonged amount of time to pinpoint exactly how this is affecting the users. It is better to stop the problems before the effects become irreversible.

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