

Original Research Article

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20260295>

Impact of social media among women in a rural community, South Kerala, India – a community based cross sectional study

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Received: 30 April 2025

Revised: 15 December 2025

Accepted: 19 January 2026

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social media has emerged as an influential virtual space revolutionizing the digital world across diverse settings. It enables women to bypass traditional, cultural and mobility barriers, it also potential risks such as cyber bullying and addiction. This study explored the impact of social media among rural women.

Methods: A cross sectional study was conducted among 289 women in a rural community in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala using a pre designed, pretested interviewer administered questionnaire. Data analysis was done using SPSS. Variables were expressed in mean and percentages. Association between socio demographic variables with cyber bullying was analyzed and p value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results: Median age was 31 years, demographic analysis showed 62.3% were graduates, 85.8% were married and 70.2% belonging to low socioeconomic strata. 83.8% of women had a special preference to the social media site Facebook. 55.7% believed that social media has boosted their self-concept but nearly 75% reported deception. 87% felt that children and spouses have been sidelined due to excessive usage consequently decreased productivity. Most women reacted by deleting their accounts. There was a strong association between low socioeconomic and poor educational statuses and chance of having a negative impact.

Conclusions: The digital revolution has enhanced access to information and self-development; however, its negative effects, particularly on family life and risk such as addiction and bullying needs greater attention to promote balanced and safe social media use.

Keywords: Censorship, Cyber bullying, Empowerment, Rural community, Social media, Women

INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged as an important determinant of social interaction, information dissemination, and health-related behaviors across populations.^{1,2} The rapid expansion of mobile technology and internet connectivity has facilitated its widespread use in rural communities of India, including south Kerala, where women are increasingly engaging with digital platforms for communication, information seeking, and social participation.³

Among rural women, social media use offers potential public health benefits such as improved access to health information, awareness of government welfare schemes, enhanced social connectedness, and opportunities for informal learning and economic engagement.^{4,5} These platforms have also played a role in reducing social isolation by enabling continued social interaction beyond immediate household and community settings.⁶

However, increased engagement with social media may influence psychosocial well-being and family dynamics.

Excessive use, prolonged screen time, and exposure to idealized social representations may contribute to emotional distress, altered self-perception, and changes in interpersonal relationships.^{7,8} In rural settings, where traditional gender norms and family structures remain influential, these effects may have broader public health implications for women's mental and social well-being.

Despite Kerala's high literacy and human development indicators, evidence on the public health impact of social media among rural women remains limited. This study aims to assess the impact of social media use among women in a rural community of South Kerala to inform context-specific public health interventions.⁹

Objectives

The objective of this study was to assess the impact of social media among women in a rural community, focusing on self-concept, interpersonal relationships, empowerment, and the risks associated with its use.

METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted among 289 women, based on previous prevalence of cyber-crime among women being 58% with an allowable error of 10%.¹⁰ Data was collected from a Gram Panchayat in south Kerala from August 2022 to October 2022.

The study was approved by the institutional review board and institutional ethics committee [IEC No:

SMCSIMCH/EC(PHARM)02/07/19]. A consecutive sampling method was used, with participants aged 18-40 years who had access to the internet included in the study. Purposive sampling technique was adopted.

Instruments

Demographic data were collected using a structured questionnaire.¹¹⁻¹³ 25 self-administered binary scale on self-concept, interpersonal relationships, information sharing, women empowerment, and addiction was developed to assess the impact. The scale had good reliability, with a CVI of 0.80 and a Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.7.

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 21.0, with results expressed as frequencies and percentages. Univariate analysis was performed to assess associations between sociodemographic variables and the impact of social media. A p value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

Of the 289 women surveyed, 52.2% were aged 31-45 years, 62.3% were graduates, 85.8% were married, and 70.2% belonged to a low socioeconomic status. The most popular social media platform was Facebook (83.8%). Approximately an average of 55.7% of women reported that social media boosted their self-concept.

Table 1: Distribution of study subjects based on sociodemographic variables (n=289).

Variables		N	%
Age in years	18-30	138	47.8
	31-45	151	52.2
Marital status	Married	248	85.8
	Widowed	5	1.7
	Separated	4	1.4
	Divorced	2	.7
	Single	30	10.4
Educational qualification	Illiterate	5	1.7
	Primary	20	6.9
	Higher secondary	84	29.1
	Graduate	180	62.3
Occupation	Skilled	119	41.2
	Unskilled	36	12.5
	Homemaker	134	46.4
Socioeconomic status	APL	86	29.8
	BPL	203	70.2
Family type	Nuclear family	234	80.96
	Extended family	41	14.2
	Single family	7	0.024
	Step family	6	0.020
	Childless family	1	0.003

However, among the participants 24.9% had experienced deception online, while 85% has benefited in enhancing knowledge. About 87% believed that social media usage had led to a decrease in family time and productivity. Only 16.3% of the study participants preferred online friends. More than half the study subjects have witnessed in women empowerment, in terms of increased opportunities (71.3%), career building (72.7%), decision making (55%). Moreover, 10% of women reported

experiencing cyber bullying, and 5.6% experienced cyber infidelity and henceforth 71.6% of the subjects prefer censorship. Although it's alarming to observe 85.4% of women checking their phones as soon as waking up, only 12.1% of the participants remain addicted to technology while 86% realizing how it has decreased their productivity. There was a significant association between low socioeconomic status and the negative impacts of social media.

Table 2: Distribution of study participants based on impact of social media (n=269).

Statements	Agree		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%
Self-concept				
I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others	253	87.5	36	12.4
I am able to do things as well as most other people	240	83	49	17
I do not have much to be proud of as others	213	73.7	76	26.3
I express my views and opinions which boosts my self confidence	212	73.4	77	26.7
I use social networking sites to create my social identity	128	44.3	161	55.7
Interpersonal relationship				
My online friends on social media are more interesting and captivating than offline ones	39	13.5	250	86.5
My connectivity through social media helps to deepen the relationship with others	104	36	185	64
I feel I am not alone when I see someone with the same passion and hobbies as mine in social media	73	25.3	216	74.8
I am closer to my friends on Facebook than those whom I see everyday	47	16.3	242	83.8
I prefer social networking sites to social gathering	48	16.6	141	83.5
Information sharing and exchange				
Social media help in updating knowledge	245	84.8	44	15.2
Social networking sites are valuable for getting job related information	226	78.2	63	21.8
I have been deceived by others through sharing on social media	72	24.9	217	75.1
Social media help in sharing controversial posts	102	35.3	187	64.7
The sites help to view interesting comments about latest news and recent events through social media	224	77.5	65	22.5
Women empowerment				
Social media sites act as a platform to raise the voices of women who are otherwise restricted	189	65.4	100	34.6
Social media have provided a variety of opportunities for women to become entrepreneurs	206	71.3	83	28.7
Social media help in skill enhancement and career improvement	210	72.7	79	27.3
Social media are a source of consolation for women in a society with gender inequality	143	49.5	146	50.5
Social media improve the thinking power and decision making of women	158	54.7	131	45.3
Addiction				
I constantly check my phone immediately after getting up from sleep, so as not to miss out on social media updates from groups/followers	220	76.1	69	23.1
I am interested in spending more time on social media than with my children and spouse	35	12.1	254	87.9
My performance and productivity decrease due to excessive social media usage	247	85.4	42	14.5
Getting more likes and more followers can make social media an addiction	62	21.5	227	78.5
Life will be boring without social media	68	23.5	221	76.4

Table 3: Distribution of study participants based on their opinion on need for censorship (n=289).

Statements	Agree		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%
Social media collects and stores all information they receive about you which questions privacy	79	27.3	210	72.6
Uncensored internet sites have to be banned	157	54.3	132	45.7
Censorship can affect one's productivity either in a positive or negative way	90	31.1	199	68.9
Censorship enables user restriction of controversial content	151	52.2	138	47.8
Censorship provide security to social media users	207	71.6	82	28.4

DISCUSSION

In the present study, a majority of participants (72.38%) agreed that social media use boosted self-concept; however, this finding contrasts with earlier work by Kumari et al where 82% of respondents disagreed with such an effect.¹⁵ Improvement in interpersonal relationships was reported by only 21.54% of participants in the current study, which is comparable to the findings of Kumari et al, where 13.33% reported similar benefits, suggesting limited positive influence of social media on interpersonal bonding.¹⁵ A substantial proportion of respondents (78.2%) perceived social media as beneficial for obtaining jobs, a finding that aligns partially with the study by Deekshita et al, in which 38% reported similar advantages, indicating variability in employment-related outcomes across populations.¹⁶ The prevalence of cyberbullying in the present study was 10.4%, which is lower than that reported by Lee et al (14.6%) and Copper et al (37%), possibly reflecting differences in awareness, reporting practices, or study settings.¹⁷ Overall, the findings highlight both convergences and divergences with existing literature, underscoring the complex impact of social media on psychosocial well-being and cyberbullying experiences.

CONCLUSION

While social media offers numerous benefits, including empowerment and self-expression, it also presents challenges such as addiction, decreased productivity, and online harassment. The study suggested that censorship may help mitigate these negative effects, leading to a more balanced and secure online environment for women. Further research and policy interventions are necessary to ensure the responsible use of social media and protect women from its potential harms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Dr. S. Blessed Singh, HOD, Community Medicine, Dr. Somervell Memorial CSI Medical College, for his invaluable support and guidance. And also, their deepest thanks go to the professors, for their insightful feedback and encouragement. They are grateful to all the participants who contributed to this study.

Funding: No funding sources

Conflict of interest: None declared

Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee [IEC No: SMCSIMCH/EC(PHARM)02/07/19]

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Cite this article as: Saju M, Mohan S, Joice YS, Rajmohan K. Impact of social media among women in a rural community, South Kerala, India – a community based cross sectional study. *Int J Community Med Public Health* 2026;13:711-5.