**Attention, parents! Blame texting at night for your child's falling grades**

PTI|

24 Jan, 2016, 05.08PM IST



NEW YORK: Parents, take note! Night-time texting habits of teenagers may be to blame for their falling grades and increased yawning in school, a new study has found.

Researchers from Rutgers University in US distributed survey to three New Jersey high schools and evaluated the 1,537 responses contrasting grades, sexes, messaging duration and whether the texting occurred before or after lights out.

They found that students who turned off their devices or who messaged for less than 30 minutes after lights out performed significantly better in school than those who messaged for more than 30 minutes after lights out.

Students who texted longer in the dark also slept fewer hours and were sleepier during the day than those who stopped messaging when they went to bed. Texting before lights out did not affect academic performance, the study found.

"Students tend to go to sleep late and get up late. When we go against that natural rhythm, students become less efficient," said Xue Ming from Rutgers University.

Although females reported more messaging overall and more daytime sleepiness, they had better academic performance than males.

"I attribute this to the fact that the girls texted primarily before turning off the light," Ming said.

"The effects of 'blue light' emitted from smartphones and tablets are intensified when viewed in a dark room," she said.

This short wavelength light can have a strong impact on daytime sleepiness symptoms since it can delay melatonin release, making it more difficult to fall asleep - even when seen through closed eyelids, she said.

"When we turn the lights off, it should be to make a gradual transition from wakefulness to sleep. If a person keeps getting text messages with alerts and light emission, that also can disrupt his circadian rhythm," Ming said.

"Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep is the period during sleep most important to learning, memory consolidation and social adjustment in adolescents. When falling asleep is delayed but rising time is not, REM sleep will be cut short, which can affect learning and memory," she said.

The findings were published in the Journal of Child Neurology.

**The Elephant in the Room: Cell Phone Use and Social Media**

02/05/2016 04:35 pm ET | **Updated** 2 days ago

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Since the fall semester of my freshman year, I have noticed an interesting phenomenon among my classmates as well as in myself: it appears that we have forgotten how to hold a conversation. I walk into classrooms full of people I know and am greeted by the tops of their heads, not even looking up long enough to see who else is in the room. Surrounded by even my closest friends, our phones seem to multiply the number of people in the room. Yet it gets quieter the more phones we add to the mix.

With social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat so integrated into our daily lives, it seems impossible to put our phones down long enough to talk to one another. After all, can't we find out the same information by simply scrolling through our news feed?

Tired of being surrounded by the white noise of technology, I began to ask questions of my friends and classmates. As students at Keene State College, how often do we use our cell phones each day? Is this influenced by gender? Class year? Major? Does cell phone use affect academic performance, either positively or negatively?

In an anonymous survey of 97 of my peers ranging in grade, gender, and major, I found that Keene State College students actively use their phones on various social media for an average of 5 hours each day. This can be broken down between the four major social media interfaces: Facebook (1-2 hours), Twitter (>1 hours), Instagram (1-2 hours), and Snapchat (1-2 hours). This total does not take into account time spent texting (although the survey concluded that the average student sends 51-75 text messages each day), talking on the phone, surfing the internet, or using the phone's camera function.

Gender

Specifically, the survey found that female students tend to spend far more time on social media than their male counterparts. This one seemed to make sense, as it is much more common to find a group of girls on their phones, lost in the word of social media in place of talking, than a group of guys.

Class Year

Results also showed that the participant's class year did not affect how much students use their phones; however, it made a difference in whose company. Many students said that they did not use their phones in the presence of their professors, parents, coworkers, or boss. One student even went so far as to say that they keep off their phone when having a conversation, because "there is nothing more disrespectful than talking to someone and they couldn't care less about you because they are on their phone."

Academic Performance

Those with a higher cumulative GPA (>3.5) tended to be split between those that spent the most time on their phones and those that spent the least. This was puzzling at first; however, the results of one question showed that those that use their phones and hold a higher GPA use their phones as a tool to supplement class materials, rather than simply to use social media. On the other hand, those that used their phones in class for non class-related activities tended to carry a lower GPA.

Major

Finally, there was an interesting correlation between a student's major and his social media use. Students in the Arts and Humanities tended to spend more time using social media than those that were in areas such as Math and Science. This probably reflects the necessity to follow trends on social media, especially in areas of study such as Journalism or Sociology.

I've been told by many people in my parents' generation, "kids your age don't know how to talk to each other without a screen between them." This accusation used to offend me, but I've stopped being insulted by it. Because it appears that they're right. We don't. Our generation, with more means of communication than any before us, has forgotten how to talk to one another.