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# Smartphones before 13? The mental health price is high, global study warns

Mind health in young adulthood compromised by early smartphone ownership

CLAIRE KEETON

Science confirms what many parents suspect. Owning a smartphone before adolescence heightens the risk of poorer mental health in early adulthood, a global study of more than 100,000 young adults shows.

Young people aged 18 to 24, who got their first smartphone at 12 or younger, were "more likely to report suicidal thoughts, aggression, detachment from reality, poorer emotional regulation and low self-worth", found the peer-reviewed study published this week.

"These symptoms... can have significant societal consequences as their rates grow in younger generations," said neuroscientist and lead author Dr. Tara Thiagarajan from US-based Sapient Labs.

The Smartphone Free Childhood movement in South Africa has noticed similar trends said SFC-SA CEO Kate Farina. Thousands of parents in 318 schools across all provinces have joined the movement since it launched a year ago.

Giving smartphones to children under 13 is associated with significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression and even suicidal thoughts.

"The earlier a child gets a smartphone, the greater the mental health risk — especially for girls," said Farina, highlighting a recent statement on excessive screen time by the South African Society of Psychiatrists. The movement supports the call for no smartphones to be given to under 13s and no social media under 16, and the latest study highlights reasons to take this stance.

The effects of early smartphone ownership were largely "associated with early social media access and higher risks of cyberbullying, disrupted sleep and poor family relationships



**PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN:** Besides the long-term threat to mind health, the short-term risks to children's safety on social media are huge, as media lawyer Emma Sadleir has demonstrated in legal cases and explained in books. Picture 123RF/NEFTUS

by adulthood", the results showed.

Besides the long-term threat to mind health, the short-term risks to children's safety on social media are huge, as media lawyer Emma Sadleir has demonstrated in legal cases and explained in books.

She won a major victory on Friday getting Meta Platforms to permanently shut down accounts posting child porn on WhatsApp and Instagram.

The four key recommendations of the study, published in the *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, include holding tech giants accountable to strengthen the active identification of social media age violations and ensure meaningful consequences for technology companies; restricting access to social media platforms; implementing graduated access restrictions for smartphones; and a requirement of mandatory education on digital literacy and mental health.

In South Africa, 62% of children have access to a smartphone or tablet by age 10, 83%

wellbeing which spans 71 countries and is the source of this study's data.

The researchers used the Mind Health Quotient (MHQ) — a self-assessment tool that measures social, emotional, cognitive and physical wellbeing — to analyse Global Mind Project data and generate an overall "mind health" score.

The younger children get smartphones, the lower the average mind health score. For example, one young person who got a phone at five, had a MHQ score of just one compared with an average score of 50 among people who first owned phones at 13.

The Covid-19 pandemic may have magnified the trends, the scientists noted.

Younger smartphone ownership among females was associated with lower self-image, self-worth and confidence and emotional resilience.

Among males it correlated with lower stability, calmness, self-worth and empathy. While the strong results do not prove a causal link between early smartphone ownership and later wellbeing, they are a wake-up call to adults responsible for children's safety online.

Thiagarajan said: "Our evidence suggests childhood smartphone ownership, an early gateway into AI-powered digital environments, is profoundly diminishing mind health and wellbeing in adulthood with deep consequences for individual agency and societal flourishing."

"That said, I think it is also important to point out that smartphones and social media are not the only assault to mental health and crisis facing younger adults."

Farina said the SFC-SA advocates for a low-tech, slow-paced and intentional approach to digital access for children. "Before children step into the online world, they deserve time for real play, real connection and real-life experiences," she said. — *TimesLIVE Premium*



**HEALTH HAZARD:** In South Africa, 62% of children have access to a smartphone or tablet by age 10. Picture 123RF

**MNQUMA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

**ADVERT FOR NOTICE BOARD PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

BID NO.	Description	Evaluation Criteria	Consequential Tender & Site Briefing	Closing Date	QOB Grading
MNQ/SCM/14/25-26	CONSTRUCTION OF 45M2 HOUSE FOR A PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED PERSON (MRYAMAZANZA VILLAGE)	80/20	Date: 01/08/2025 Time: 10:00	Date: 25/08/2025 Time: 12:00	2GB or Higher
MNQ/SCM/17/25-26	CONSTRUCTION OF 45M2 HOUSE FOR AN ELDERLY PERSON (OLOLOA FEM LOCATION)	80/20	Date: 01/08/2025 Time: 10:00	Date: 25/08/2025 Time: 12:00	2GB or Higher
MNQ/SCM/22/25-26	CONSTRUCTION OF 45M2 HOUSE FOR A PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED PERSON (BOKA TOWNSHIP)	80/20	Date: 01/08/2025 Time: 10:00	Date: 25/08/2025 Time: 12:00	2GB or Higher

Tender compulsory briefings for all the above projects will be held atoyer Mnquma Local Municipality, corner King and Mithatha street Bulwerworth, 4860. Technical Enquiries: Mr. N Nyozwa (Manager: Building and Housing) at 047 050 1270/067 022 6170 email:nyozwa@mnquma.gov.za or Ms. N Mhume (Manager: SP) at 047 050 1270/067 022 6170 email:nyozwa@mnquma.gov.za or Ms. N Mhume (Manager: SP) at 047 050 1270/067 022 6170 email:nyozwa@mnquma.gov.za  
SCM Enquiries: Ms. Y Vava (Manager: SCM) at 047 050 1156 / 072 698 6065 email: yvava@mnquma.gov.za  
Evaluation Criteria: The evaluation will be conducted in two (02) stages namely:  
Stage 1: Administrative compliance (Compliance with mandatory and other bid requirements will not be eligible for further evaluation and will be deemed as non-responsive.  
Stage 2: Evaluation in terms of the 80/20 preference point system prescribed in Preferential Procurement Regulations 2022  
P10=30 points  
Specific goals =20 points

BID NO.	The specific goals allocated in terms of this tender	Specific goal points 20 points	Proof Required to score points
MNQ/SCM/14/25-26	An EME or USE which is at least 51% owned by black people	20	Fully completed and signed MBD 6.1 and Full Central Supplier Database Report (CSD) not older than one month.
MNQ/SCM/17/25-26	An EME or USE which is at least 51% owned by black people	20	Fully completed and signed MBD 6.1 and Full Central Supplier Database Report (CSD) not older than one month.
MNQ/SCM/22/25-26	An EME or USE which is at least 51% owned by black people	20	Fully completed and signed MBD 6.1 and Full Central Supplier Database Report (CSD) not older than one month.

**NB: No points will be claimed by the bidder if it fails to submit proof to score points for specific goals.**

**REQUIRED DOCUMENTS:**  
Potential bidders are urged to submit the following attachments when submitting their proposals, failure to do so will lead to disqualification:

Bid Number	Valid QOB Grading	Company Experience	Key Staff must be working for the bidding company	Occupational Health and Safety Officer
MNQ/SCM/14/25-26	2GB or Higher	Bidder has successfully completed One (01) building construction project	Site Agent/Project Manager	Grade 12 or equivalent qualification and Occupational Safety and Health certificate with a minimum of 01 year experience in building construction projects.
MNQ/SCM/17/25-26	2GB or Higher	Bidder has successfully completed One (01) building construction project	Site Agent/Project Manager	Grade 12 or equivalent qualification and Occupational Safety and Health certificate with a minimum of 01 year experience in building construction projects.
MNQ/SCM/22/25-26	2GB or Higher	Bidder has successfully completed One (01) building construction project	Site Agent/Project Manager	Grade 12 or equivalent qualification and Occupational Safety and Health certificate with a minimum of 01 year experience in building construction projects.

**Company Experience:** Bidder must attach Completion certificates with appointment letters in relation to the required services for building construction must be attached as a proof.  
- Key Staff: Bidders must submit detailed CVs with original certified and valid (not more than 06 months) copies of it if it is required professional qualifications. If the required certified copies of professional qualifications are not attached to the CV, will lead to disqualification (Copy of a certified copy will not be considered).

**CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS:**  
- Concrete mixer  
- 1 Plate Compactor  
- 1 Single Cab backhoe

**NB: Bidding company must attach proof of ownership for (Concrete mixer and Plate Compactor) certificate of registration for (Single Cab Backhoe) or submit original letter of intent to lease with proof of certificate of registration for (Single Cab Backhoe) and proof of ownership for (Concrete mixer and Plate Compactor). The Signed letter of intent to lease must contain the relevant bid number/project description and construction equipment tools leased**

**COMPLIANCE WITH THE TENDER SPECIFICATION: -**  
- Fully completed Tender Form 1, Form of Offer, all returnable MSDs (MSD 1-9) - Part of the tender document. Return all returnable documents to the employer after completing them in their entirety by writing legibly in non-erasable ink.  
- In the case of partnerships/consortiums/joint venture agreement, signed agreement must be submitted with the tender document and all parties/owners to the partnership/consortium/joint venture agreement must be registered on the Central Supplier Database  
- Valid QOB Grading 2GB or Higher  
- Only the original tender document will be accepted.  
- The tender offer submitted shall remain valid, irrevocable and open for written acceptance by the Mnquma Local Municipality for a period of 90 days from the closing date. The award of the tender may be subjected to price negotiation with the preferred tenderers.  
- The municipality reserves the right to extend the tender period by notice in the press and on the municipality's official website www.mnquma.gov.za

**NB: Preferred bidders will be required to furnish the municipality:**  
- CSD Company Registration: Certified ID copies not older than six (06) months  
- Tax compliance status (PIN)  
- Certificate issued by the municipality or any other municipality to which he may be indebted to the effect that he is, in the event of the bidder being a company, sole any of its directors, is not indebted to the municipality or to any other municipality or municipal entity for rates, taxes and/or municipal services charges which are in arrears for a period of more than three months and that no dispute exists between such bidder and municipality or municipal entity concerned in respect of any such arrears amounts.  
- Bidders who reside within the Mnquma Local Municipality (MLM) jurisdiction will be verified with MLM Revenue Section  
- S. Nkomo (Municipal Manager)

**BID NOTICES**

King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality hereby calls upon accredited service providers to bid for the following tender advert:

No.	Project Name	QOB Grading	Company Experience	Bid Number	Closing Date	Enquiries	Evaluation Criteria
1.	Computer Precinct management, security and recovery for a period of three months	N/A	N/A	SCM/2025/0002	12:00	Technical Enquiries may be directed to: Mr. F. Tshepo (Finance Manager) Email: ftshepo@kds.gov.za	80/20
2.	Provision of 24-Hour alarm, anti-theft, and computer crime management services for King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality for a period of three months	N/A	N/A	SCM/2025/0003	12:00	Technical Enquiries may be directed to: Mr. N. Sifiso (Finance Manager) Email: nsifiso@kds.gov.za	80/20
3.	Provision of three month interim cleaning services for a period of three months	N/A	N/A	SCM/2025/0004	12:00	Technical Enquiries may be directed to: Mr. N. Tshepo (Finance Manager) Email: nsifiso@kds.gov.za	80/20
4.	Provision of three month interim cleaning services for a period of three months	N/A	N/A	SCM/2025/0005	12:00	Technical Enquiries may be directed to: Mr. N. Tshepo (Finance Manager) Email: nsifiso@kds.gov.za	80/20

Place of tender box: 1st Floor, Mkhonto Building, Next to Room 147. All bids must be put in a sealed envelope and clearly marked with SCM Number and Project Name and be placed in a tender box. Tender documents can be downloaded free of charge from the National Treasury tender portal (<http://www.tenders.gov.za>) and the King Sabata Dalindyebo website ([www.kds.gov.za](http://www.kds.gov.za)) as from the 29th of July 2025.

**NO HARD COPIES OF THE TENDER DOCUMENT ARE AVAILABLE FOR SALE. ONLY THE ELECTRONIC VERSION WHICH IS TO BE DOWNLOADED AS PER THE ABOVE WEBSITE IS TO BE USED.**

**BIDDERS MUST TAKE NOTE OF THE FOLLOWING BID CONDITIONS:**

- Failure to submit comprehensive JV agreement (where applicable), failure to do so will result in a tender deemed non-responsive.
- Individual partners of JV are to comply and submit all relevant documents, failure to do so will result in a tender deemed non-responsive.
- Bidder to complete property and/or all tender forms, MSD 1 to MSD 9 and Annexures A to F will result in a tender deemed non-responsive.
- Bidder to submit signed financial statements for the past three financial years for any other outstanding or exceeding 12 months in arrears of VAT.
- Failure to submit or complete supplementary information will result in the tender being null, void and non-responsive.
- Bidders must submit latest municipal rates statement (not older than three months) showing that municipal rates are not in arrears for periods in excess of three months. Bidder who operates on basis of interest to submit a valid lease agreement and bidders holding on areas not subjected to municipal rates are to submit a confirmation from the Municipality's Finance Department confirming that such a bidder is not liable for municipal rates.
- The KSD Municipality reserves the right to disqualify any service provider whose members and/or related entities own municipalities & bidders.
- The KSD Municipality does not bind itself to accept the lowest or any bid and reserves the right to accept the whole or part of the bid in its entirety.
- All certified copies submitted with a tender document must not be older than six months, failure to do so will result tender deemed non-responsive.
- All alterations in proposals must be signed for and failure to sign will result in tender deemed non-responsive.
- All bids are to be sealed and clearly marked with SCM Number and Project Name and be placed in a tender box, failure to do so the document will not be considered.
- In terms of the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act 2022 (PPFFA) Points will be evaluated based on the following criteria:
  - Stage 1: Compliance
  - Stage 2: Financially healthy with a minimum threshold of 70 points out of 100 points to be obtained by bidder in order to be considered for the next stage.
  - Stage 3: Price and quality
- All queries must be in the form of an e-mail and there will be no queries that will be entertained 5 working days before the closing date.

The tender will be evaluated and adjudicated on the basis of the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act, and the regulations pertaining thereto (2022 Regulations), as well as the King Sabata Dalindyebo Municipality Supply Chain Management Policy. The preference point system to be used is specified for each project as per the KSD/M/SCM/2025/0002.

SCM related enquiries may be directed to the SCM Unit at [pl@kds.gov.za](mailto:pl@kds.gov.za)

Mr. N. Palatse - Municipal Manager

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