



# University of Kisubi Public Lecture

**Topic: Impact of Intensive Digital  
Platforms Usage on Students'  
Academic Life and Mental Health in  
Higher Education Institutions in Uganda**

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# KEY WORDS

- **Digital Platforms**
- **Academic Life**
- **Mental Health**
- **Higher Education**

# Definition of Key Words

## Academic life

- In these context is described as the activities that relates to the work done in colleges and universities especially which involves studying and reasoning **rather than practical or technical skills.**

## Higher education

- Is an educational level that primarily describes post-secondary school learning that takes place at the universities as well as other colleges and institutions that awards academic degrees and professional qualification.

# **Mental Health**

- Is a state of wellbeing in which the individual realizes his/her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, can make contribution to the community.


## **Digital platforms**

- Are the collective of online communication channels dedicated to communication based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration.

# Digital Platforms Usage on Students' Academic Life

## Examples of digital platforms

- **Social media platforms** - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, LinkedIn, Google Plus, and Flickr.
- **Knowledge platforms** - StackOverflow, Quora, and Yahoo! Answers
- **Media sharing platforms** - YouTube, Spotify, and Vimeo
- **Service-oriented platforms** - Uber, Airbnb, and GrubHub

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- The emergent of social media platform is significantly influencing the academic life of students.
  - The term “Social media” is defined as the application that allows users to converse and interact with each other; to create, edit and share new forms of textual, visual and audio content, and to categorize, label and recommend existing forms of content (Selwyn 2019).
  - Today social media has been accepted by higher education institutions in Uganda making it a platform where students connect with their instructors / lecturers, fellow students and other higher authorities across the board.

# **The Use of Digital Platforms in Higher Education Institutions:**

- Provides students with the ability to access basic and more useful information as quick as possible.
- Help students to connect with learning groups, instructors and institutions with multiple opportunities to improve learning.
- Used to build relationship among students
- Read books, listen to music, look at photos.
- ✓ Digital platforms have greatly simplified our lives and are tightly tied to our selves.

# Impact of Intensive Digital Platforms

## Usage on Students' Academic Life

- In today higher education, social media platforms have impacted significantly on how students learn and the mode instructors teach.

## Class material is strengthened

- Social media applications can strengthen class material and positively influence discussions, collaborative work, and authoring.

## Multitasking

- Increased tendency for students to multitask, to rely on a digital juggling of daily academic activities and commitments (Subrahmanyam and Šmahel, 2011).



## **Increased control over the nature and form of what they do**

- Autonomous nature of social media allows students an increased control over the nature and form of what they do, as well as where, when and how they do it.

## **Interaction, sharing resources and expression of learner voice**

- The zoom classroom are now being used by universities as alternative spaces in which students can adapt to the university lifestyle through interacting online with peers and faculty. Certainly, many universities now maintain profiles and groups on social networking sites such as Google classroom, Facebook, where students and faculty can interact, share resources and express learner voice.

## **Discussion, sharing views and opinions**

- Social media poses a liberal environment for students to discuss, share their views and opinions easily freely on issues that otherwise would not have been done in a normal traditional classroom.

## **Persistence and Motivation to Learn**

- Shared community spaces and inter group communications are a massive measure of what excites students and therefore contributes to their persistence and motivation to learn (Mason & Rennie, 2007)

## **Collective exploration and innovation rather than individualized instruction is promoted.**

- Social media supports the aspect of knowledge consumption and construction that are very different to the epistemological principle of formal education and individual instruction.

## **Evaluation of the academic environment**

- It provides students a direct medium by which to publicly evaluate and comment on their campus environments, institutional policies, classes, professors, and administration and fellow students in real-time.

# Negative impact

## Time expenditure


- Students devote more attention to social media platforms than they do to their studies. Instead of students reading their books, they spend time chatting and making friends which might definitely have an influence on the academic performance.

## Use of English Language is affected.

- Students tend to use short-hand writing to chat and get used to it at all levels of education including university.

## **Inappropriate Behaviour**

- Student engaging in a private relationship outside the classroom circles begs for inappropriate behavior to commence (Gurman 2015).
- There is the likelihood of users not being courteous and respectful of others such that Profanity, vulgarity, obscenity, or language that is harassing, derogatory, or otherwise inappropriate for the school environment sometimes circulates in these platforms.
- Users could easily display, send, retrieve, or download any items that are sexually explicit, or contain hate-based or discriminatory material without the notification of a lecturer, university administrator or even their peers in the event. This in turn could make students concede that they have no right or expectation of privacy with respect to their use of university technology and therefore would not want to participate fully (Gurman 2015).



**“Don’t use social media  
to impress people; use it  
to positively impact  
people & yourself.”**


**(Dave Willis)**

# Impact of Intensive Digital Platforms Usage on Students' Mental Health


## Mental Health

A state **of wellbeing** in which the individual realizes his/her

- Own abilities
- Can cope with normal stresses of life
- Can work productively and fruitfully
- Can make contribution to the community.

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- Many young adults (students) in higher education face substantial adjustments throughout their undergraduate years. Epidemiologically, early adulthood (18–25 years old) is the peak age at which **serious mental health disorders emerge**.
  - Moreover, many of these students experience **situational depression** as they transition to higher education. During this time, they have to largely replace parental support with peer support structures and use of digital platforms a challenge that is compounded by academic pressure.




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- There is a relationship between heavy use of digital platforms and an increase in mental health disorders.
  - Overuse of digital platforms may affect **brain development, sleep, mood, concentration, memory, learning and relationship behaviors**
  - Multiple studies have found social media use as a contributing link to various mental health symptoms associated with **depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and negative well-being** (Ashford, 2017; Hardy Hussain & Griffiths, 2018)

# Types of Mental Health Disorders Linked to intensive use of Digital Platforms

- Mood Disorders (Depression & Bipolar Disorders)
  - Anxiety Disorder
  - Low self-esteem
  - social media addiction, is a prevalent mental disorder that requires treatment
  - Personality DO
  - Sleep Disorder
  - Eating Disorder
- (Lin et al., 2016; Pantic, 2014)

# Mood Disorders (Depression & Bipolar Disorders)

- Depression is a severe mood disorder characterized by extreme sadness, negative view of self, feelings of apathy (lack of interest), passivity and feelings of helplessness & suicidal tendencies.
- Bipolar disorder / manic depressive illness – a condition of mood swings; high & low mood
- Negative social media behaviors can cause isolation, depression, and mood changes based on negative content users see while scrolling (Belluomini, 2015).

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- Some students develop cognitive distortions when comparing their lives to other users' content, which may lead to feelings of sadness and depression.
  - Aspects of social media that contribute to Facebook depression are friend tallies, status updates and pictures of friends enjoying themselves, all of which can make students with negative self-images feel worse about themselves.

# Symptoms of Depression

- **S**leep disturbance – too much or too little
- **I**nterest / pleasure loss (anhedonia)
- **G**uilty feelings (feelings of worthlessness)
- **E**nergy reduced (Feel exhausted all the time)
- **C**oncentration decrease
- **A**ppetite increase or reduction
- **P**sychomotor agitation or retardation  
(fatigued, movement is slow, speech is low)
- **S**uicidal Ideation


# Anxiety Disorder

**The symptoms of social media anxiety disorder include the following:**

- Stopping to check social media in the middle of a conversation
- Spending more than six hours each day using social media
- Lying about the amount of time spent on social media
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Failing in attempts to cut back on social media use
- Neglecting or losing interest in university, work and favorite activities
- Experiencing severe nervousness, worry or withdrawal symptoms when not able to check social media
- Having an overwhelming desire to share on social media feeds


# Low self-esteem


- Students experience discomfort due to comparison of their self-image and life satisfaction to other users (Belluomini, 2015).
- Young people (students) naturally compare themselves with the people they interact with on social media, but doing so can be detrimental to a healthy self-image.
- Researchers report that undergraduate women felt worse about their own appearance after they viewed the social media page of someone they considered more attractive.

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- This “social comparison” factor takes many forms online that can negatively affect young users of social media.
  - To compensate for the natural tendency to compare themselves with the people they interact with online, young people need to remind themselves that social media makes people and things look better and more attractive than they are in real life.

**Avoid Falling into the Negativity Trap**



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- Students who feel good about themselves tend to post only positive things online, which creates a **positive feedback loop**. Conversely, those with low self-esteem may find themselves **posting only negative material**, which often puts them in a negative feedback loop.
  - **Remember That What You See on Social Media Isn't Real**

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- How we truly feel about ourselves begins from the inside and is expressed outwardly. Conversely, social media can cause us to measure our self-worth by what others think, or lead us to create a false persona in an attempt to be accepted by others.

# Social Media Addiction

- Social media addiction, is a prevalent mental disorder.
- Some of the symptoms include constant thinking about internet games, irritability, anxiety or sadness when restricted access to internet games, and using internet games as a way to escape from difficult emotions (DSM, 2013)



- **Mental Fatigue**

The excessive use of texting and time spent online contributes to **mental fatigue and increased problems with memory, attention, concentration and learning**, particularly learning at a deep level.


- **Visual & Auditory challenges**

When we take in information online, we encounter a variety of visual and auditory information (words, videos, hyperlinks, ads, etc.). As a result, we read in a nonlinear way and may not process the information as deeply.

- **Empathy, compassion & emotion**
- ✓ Overuse of digital technology lowers our levels of **empathy**. Although technology can enhance some of our connections with one another, it's important to balance the online aspects of our relationships with opportunities for face-to-face connections.
- ✓ When we connect in-person, we can slow down, have deeper and more nuanced interactions with fewer interruptions, and more clearly experience each other's perspectives and emotions. While some people's online interactions feature a lot of focus on "me," spending time with others while offline can offer more focus on "we" and can deepen our levels of empathy and compassion.

# Personality Disorders

- **Personality** is the pattern of enduring characteristics that produce consistency and individuality in a given person. It encompasses the behaviours that make each of us unique and that differentiate us from others
- It also refers to the pattern of thoughts, feelings, social adjustments, and behaviors consistently exhibited over time that strongly influences one's expectations, self-perceptions, values, and attitudes

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- Personality disorder is an enduring pattern of inner experience and behaviour that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress or impairment (DSM V) (APA, 2013).

# 10 Personality Disorders

## I. Paranoid Personality Disorder

People with paranoid personality disorder:

- are suspicious, bigoted / narrow minded
- are constantly threatened by the actions of others
- are unforgiving
- have explosive tempers





## **2. Schizoid Personality Disorder**

People with schizoid personality disorder:

- are withdrawn and distant, socially detached, aloof, cold, indifferent
- are preoccupied with their own thoughts
- are fearful of close relationships

### **3. Schizotypal Personality Disorder**

People with schizotypal personality disorder:

- loner with strange / odd beliefs and strange habits
- may be eccentric in their manners or clothing
- are socially anxious
- may talk to themselves

## **4. Antisocial Personality Disorder**

People with antisocial personality disorder:

- Have hostile-aggressive, violent and deceitful behaviors
- Show no regard for the feelings of others / guilt-free /
- Do not obey rules / rule-breaking; are often in trouble with the law

## 5. Borderline Personality Disorder

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a mental health disorder that generates significant emotional instability. This can lead to a variety of other stressful mental and behavioral problems.

- With borderline personality disorder, you may have a severely distorted self-image and feel worthless and fundamentally flawed. Anger, impulsiveness and frequent mood swings may push others away, even though you may desire to have loving and lasting relationships.

People with borderline personality disorder:

- Have intense and unstable emotions and moods that can shift fairly quickly.
- They suffer from extreme mood changes, swinging from being unrealistically happy to feeling extremely depressed.
- They generally have a hard time calming down once they have become upset. As a result, they frequently have angry outbursts and engage in impulsive behaviors such as substance abuse, risky sexual liaisons, self-injury, overspending, or binge eating.

## **6. Histrionic personality disorder - overly dramatic**

- Feel very uncomfortable if you are not the centre of attention
- feel that you have to entertain people
- flirt or behave provocatively to ensure that you remain the centre of attention
- get a reputation for being dramatic and overemotional
- feel dependent on the approval of others.

## **7. Narcissistic Personality Disorder**

Narcissistic personality disorder is a mental disorder in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for admiration and a lack of empathy for others.

### **People with narcissistic personality disorder:**

- constantly seek attention
- imagine unrealistic personal success
- have difficulty talking about anyone but themselves
- are manipulative in relationships

## **8. Avoidant Personality Disorder**

People with avoidant personality disorder:

- socially inhibited
- oversensitive
- fear rejection
- may exhibit extreme shyness
- avoid relationships outside the family

## **9. Dependent Personality Disorder**

People with dependent personality disorder:

- Insecure. Are more commonly women than men
- over-reliant on others and may have an extreme fear of being alone
- fear abandonment, have difficulty making or refuse to make decisions



# 10. Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder

People with obsessive-compulsive personality disorder:

- are perfectionists,
- are often very responsible, but can drive others away
- are inflexible / rigid
- have difficulty adapting to change and are ritualistic

# Sleep Disorder

- The overuse of digital technology in all its forms can negatively affect the **quantity** and **quality** of our sleep.
- Regular, high quality sleep is essential for well-being, and evidence shows that sleeping problems contribute to adverse mental health effects, such as depression and memory loss.
- This may be due to frequent interruptions during sleep from incoming texts or social media notifications.
- It's also related to ways that our biological and nervous systems react to the **light levels produced by these devices** particularly when we use them before bedtime.



- **Electronic Signals**

- ✓ Our bodies can also react to the **electromagnetic signals** used with cell phones. Sleeping with a cell phone within reach means that our bodies are also taking in **these signals in ways that can negatively affect the quality of sleep.**
- ✓ By changing habits related to sleeping near cell phones and using digital devices before bedtime, students may see important improvements in their sleep, which is critical to our overall health and well-being.

# Importance of Sleep

- Sleep is important part of life for: The maintenance of biological functions, such as homeostasis, metabolism.

## I. **Body and brain restoration**

- Sleep serves the purpose of restoring and repairing our bodies and brains. We sleep to restore ourselves physically and psychologically. Sleep is necessary to the physical health of the body and serves to replenish chemicals that were used up during the day's activities and repair cellular damage. Most bodily growth and repair occur during the deepest stages of sleep, when enzymes responsible for these functions are secreted in higher amounts. This may account for the fact children in periods of rapid growth need to sleep more

## **2. Memory reinforcement and Consolidation**

- People sleep in order to process information that has been acquired during the day. Sleep allows the brain to prepare for the day to come. Sleep helps cement the things we have learned during the day into long-term memory.

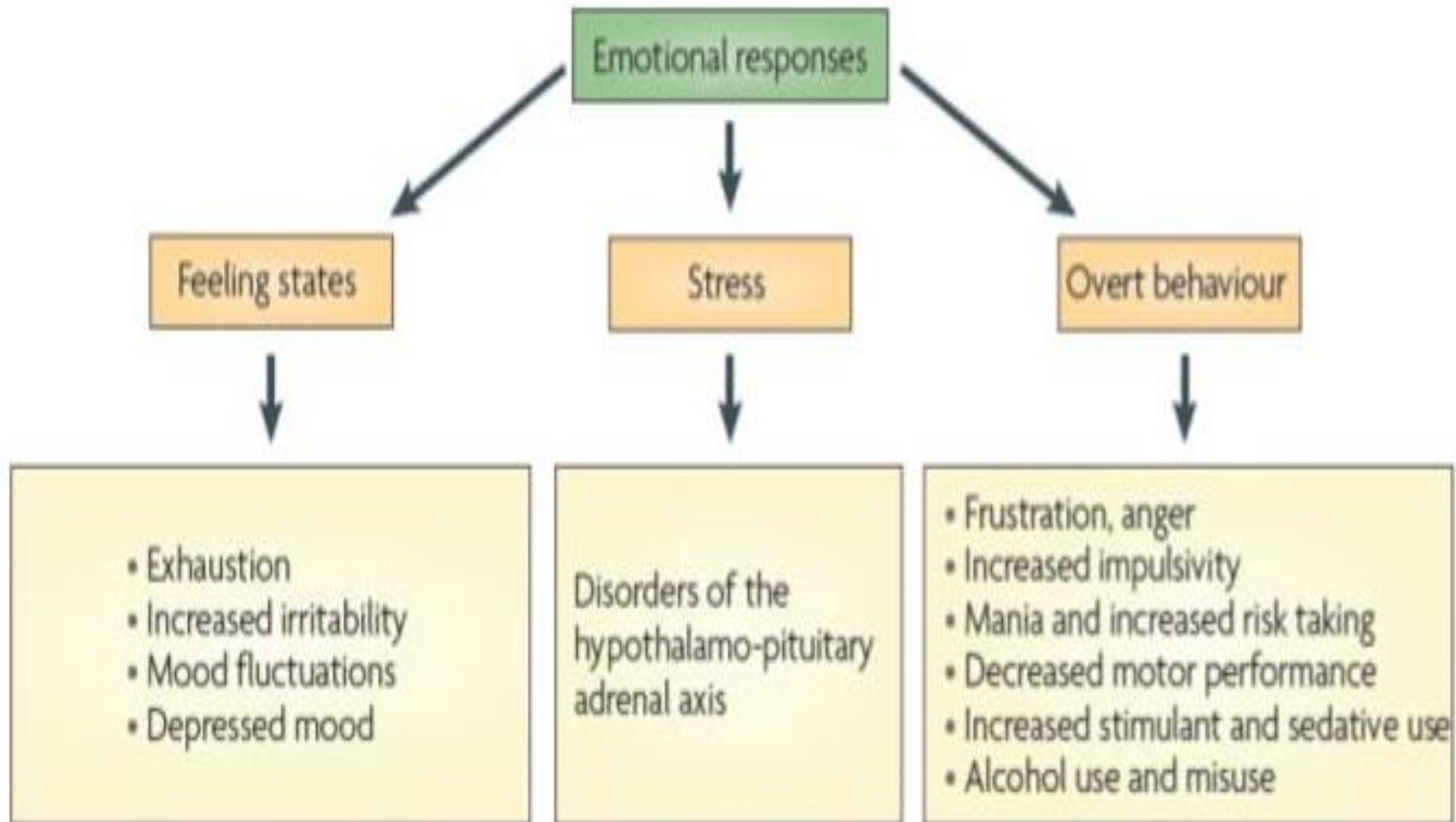
### **3. Energy Conservation**

- Sleep helps a person to conserve energy in a number of ways: during sleep, behavioural activity stops, meaning less energy is spent on movement; body temperature and metabolic rate slow down, saving energy.

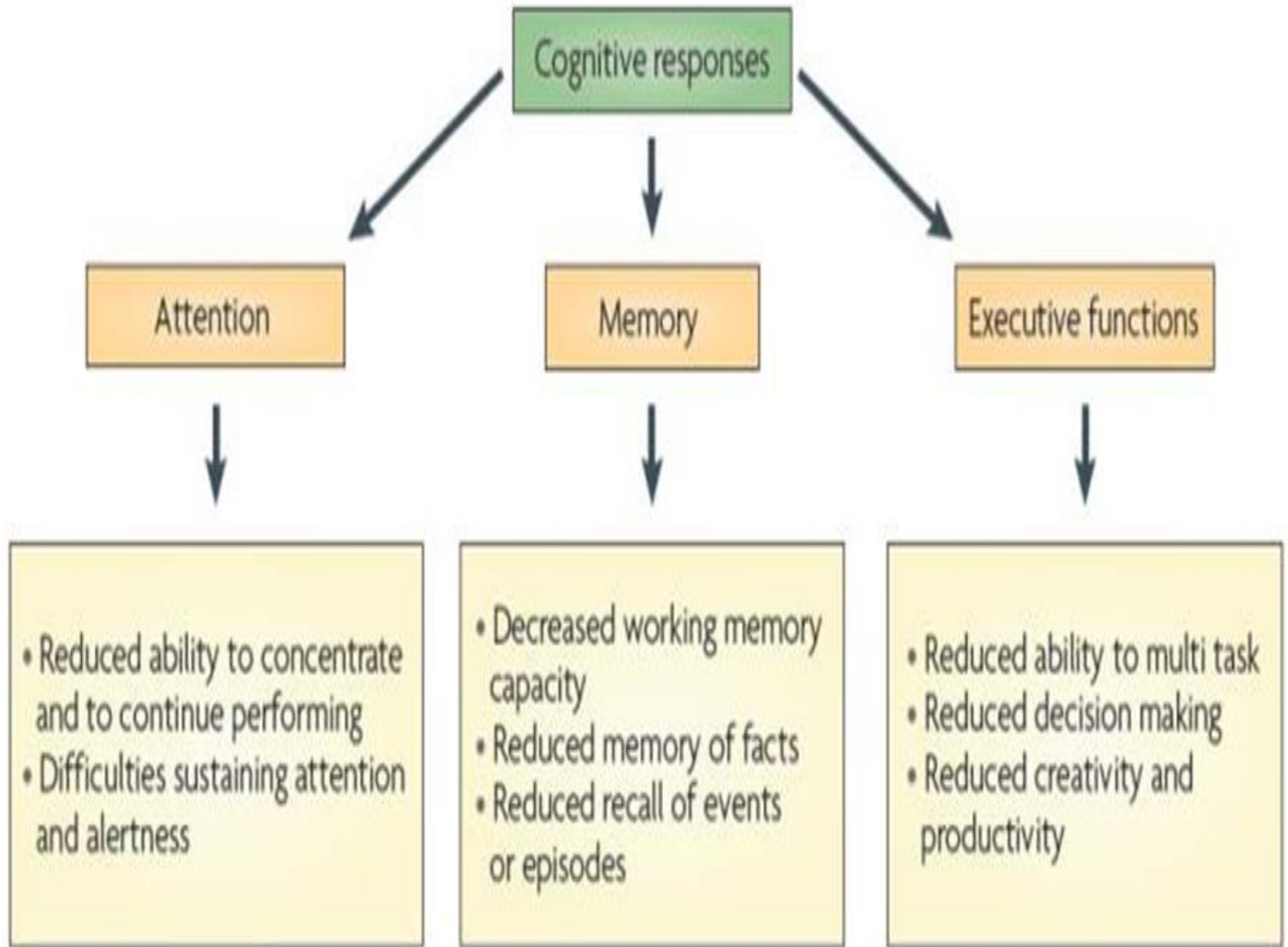
## **4. Synaptic Neuronal network integrity**

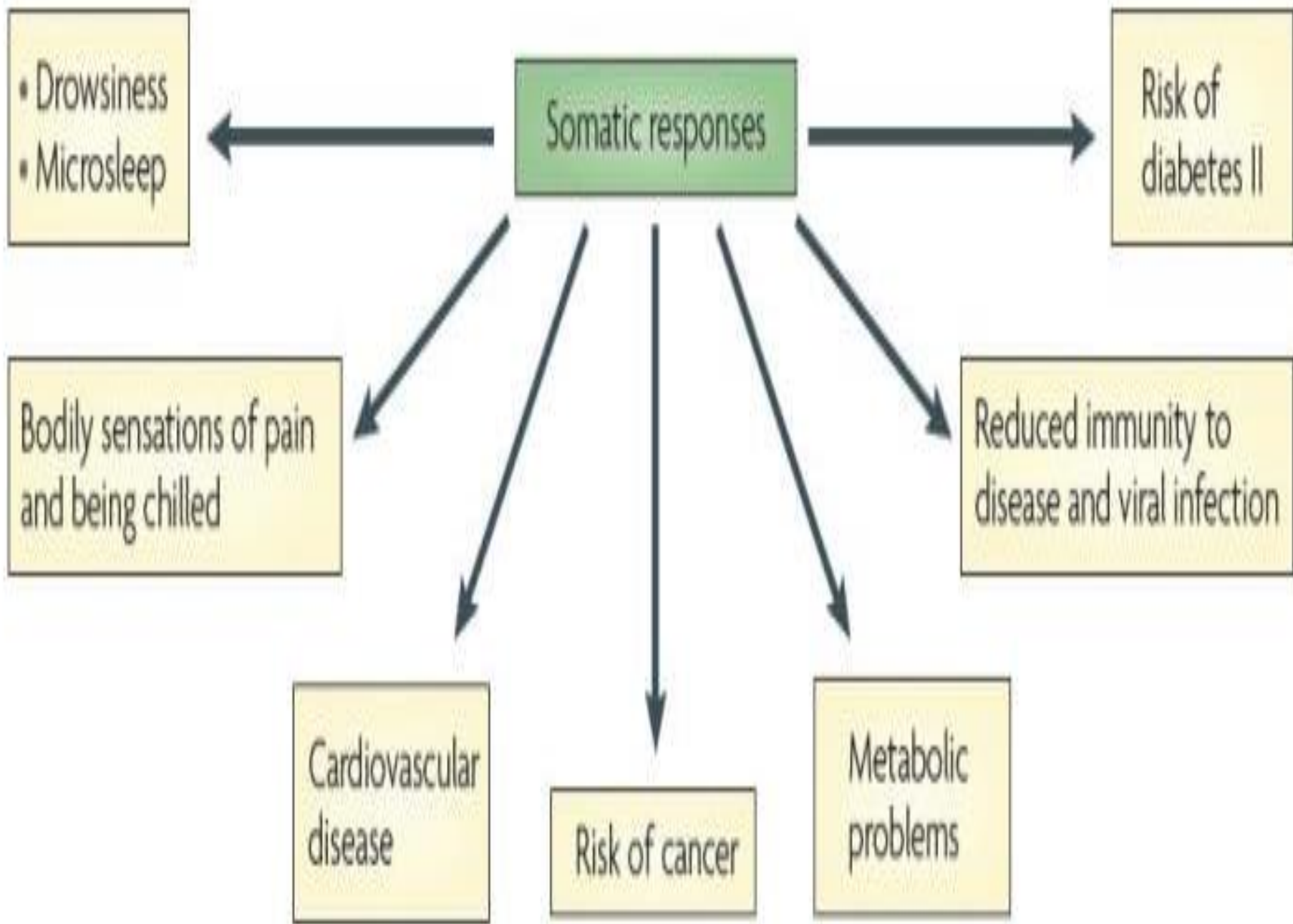
- Sleep has a particular function within the brain. The Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep is controlled by a noradrenalin pathway going up through the brain and therefore has a neurological purpose to replenish the noradrenalin levels that may have been depleted by daily activities.

# Consequences of Sleep Loss










# Eating Disorder

- There has been increasing awareness of the potentially harmful impact of promoting particular body images in digital platforms.
- Social media is unique as it allows individuals to present the most attractive images of themselves and remove images they think are unattractive. This is linked to disordered eating (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).
- Anorexia nervosa – a severe eating disorder in which people may refuse to eat while denying that their behavior and appearance which can become skeletal like are unusual.

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- **Bulimia** – Eating disorder in which a person binges on large quantities of food, followed by efforts to purge the food through vomiting or other means.

# Treatment Intervention And Modalities

- Counselling Psychologists, Social workers and Mental Health Practitioners can provide individuals with effective treatment intervention and modalities such as **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** to address symptoms of depression, self-esteem, and anxiety through reframing technique

# Interventions Cont.....

- Providing psycho-education about both the negative and positive impacts social media can have on mental health.
- Providing education about social media impacts on mental health may offer higher education systems and students new ways of addressing the overuse of social media.
- Social media can be utilized in positive ways for higher education systems to identify education about mental health diagnosis, treatment, and management for students.

# Interventions

- Social workers and mental health practitioners to advocate for the inclusion of social media as a diagnosis in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-5) to guarantee widespread acceptance of social media impact on mental health in the service field





**WHAT IS NEEDED TODAY**