TITLE: TRAJECTORIES OF DIGITAL STRESS AND WELL-BEING AMONG PERUVIAN

ADOLESCENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Introduction**

Increased sociability and connectivity are clear benefits of the online world. However,

these can also become a source of digital stress with negative consequences for youth well-being.

Digital stress, which is characterized by a person’s own response to distressing events occurring

online, consists of approval anxiety, availability stress, fear of missing out, connection overload,

and online vigilance (Steele et al., 2020). With the increased dependency on digital platforms

during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to characterize digital sources of stress for youth

to minimize its negative effects.

**Methods**

We investigated the association of digital stress and well-being with a sample of 698

students (66% female) in school grades 6 to 11 (ages 11-17) from low- and middle-income youth

in Perú across two time-points. In July and November 2021, participants self-reported on the

Digital Stress Scale (DSS; Hall et al., 2020), the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement

Information System Pediatric Item Bank v2.0 – Anxiety Short Form, and the Patient-Reported

Outcomes Measurement Information System Pediatric Item Bank v2.0 –Depressive Symptoms

Short Form (PROMIS-Anxiety, PROMIS-Depression; Quinn et al., 2014). Longitudinal analyses

were conducted to identify the trajectories of digital stress and internalizing symptoms. PROMIS

severity categories were observed.

**Results**

Adolescent girls endorsed higher rates of overall digital stress and anxiety than males.

Results also showed that adolescent girls endorsed higher rates of approval anxiety, FOMO, and

online vigilance. Adolescents who fell in the severe anxiety category reported increased digital

stress compared to adolescents in the normal, mild, and moderate categories. This was also the

case with adolescents who fell in the severe depression category. Older grades reported higher

rates of depression and anxiety symptoms. In addition, older grades reported higher digital stress,

driven by approval anxiety and FOMO.

**Discussion**

In summary, we find that females and older adolescents endorse more digital stress, and

that this is related to symptoms of anxiety and depression. These results from a large Peruvian

sample of youth during the pandemic contribute to our understanding of how increased

connectivity can also be a source of stress. Future interventions should work towards reducing

digital stress for adolescents and promoting the positive aspects of digital media especially as the

online context becomes a prominent space for youth.