

## How Meta's victim-blaming failed to sway jurors

Nick Robins-Early, *The Guardian*, March 29, 2026

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When Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, sought to defend itself in the landmark social media addiction lawsuit alleging its products caused personal injury to a young user, it went on the offensive. The mental health problems that the 20-year-old known as KGM suffered since she was a child were not the result of exposure to harm on Instagram, Meta's lawyers and public relations team argued, but instead linked to her mother's parenting and her offline social problems. In a bench memo filed before the trial began, lawyers for Meta quoted excerpts from KGM's teenage personal writings complaining about her mother. Far from causing harm, they alleged that Instagram offered a helpful respite from the real world.

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Meta's arguments did not resonate with jurors, who decided 10-2 this week in favor of the plaintiffs and found that Meta deliberately designed an addictive product that hooked KGM and induced body dysmorphia and self-harm. The jury awarded her \$4.2m in damages from Meta and \$1.8m from co-defendant YouTube in a bellwether decision that could set a precedent for thousands of similar trials already in the works against social media companies.

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Meta's aggressive pushback strategy and its subsequent loss in the trial highlight a problem for tech firms that now face a flood of jury trials: a widespread distrust of social media companies and a negative view of how their products affect society. The jury saw the company as making intentional, negligent choices to entrap users in a potentially harmful online world. "We wanted them to feel it, we wanted them to know this was unacceptable," one juror told NPR.

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"For the biggest tech executives, I want to say something: stop blaming the parents. It's on you," said Julianna Arnold, a co-founder of advocacy group Parents Rise! who has said her 17-year-old daughter died after meeting a man through Instagram who gave her fentanyl.

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"Teen mental health is profoundly complex and cannot be linked to a single app. We will continue to defend ourselves vigorously as every case is different, and we remain confident in our record of protecting teens online," a Meta spokesperson said in an earlier statement to the Guardian.

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KGM herself testified that social media use starting at six years old had caused her to spiral into anxiety and insecurity that led to self harm and depression.

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Meta's defense targeting parenting as the cause of KGM's mental health drew backlash from parental advocates that have been vocal in calling for stronger regulation against big tech.

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Even as a growing number of Americans choose to use social media platforms, a strong majority believe that these same platforms have a negative impact on the country – around 64% of US adults think so. Around two-thirds of Americans also have a negative view of Zuckerberg personally. There has historically been a wider gap between how young people view social media versus older generations and parents, but that, too, appears to be closing in recent years. Another Pew Survey conducted in 2024 found that around 48% of teens say social media use harms people their age. (513 words)

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