

Rising Mental Health Issues Among Generation Z: Myth or Reality

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Abstract

Mental health is an essential aspect of human well-being that influences emotions, thoughts, and behavior. In recent years, increasing concern has been raised about the mental health of Generation Z, leading to debates on whether the reported rise in mental health problems among young people is a genuine reality or a social exaggeration. This article explores the causes and contributing factors such as social media pressure, academic stress, unemployment, family expectations, and the psychological impact of global uncertainties. It further analyses the consequences of these issues on Gen Z's emotional stability, relationships, and performance in education and work. The paper also discusses the societal response through growing awareness, counselling support, and advocacy for mental health care. Overall, the study provides a balanced understanding of whether the mental health crisis among Generation Z a real phenomenon or a perceived outcome is shaped by changing lifestyles and digital exposure.

Keywords: Mental health, Generation Z, psychological distress, social media, societal response

Introduction

According to World Health Organization (WHO), “mental health is a state of well-being where an individual can realize their potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their community.” Mental health is an integral part of our general health and well-being and a basic human right. Having good mental health means we are better able to connect, function, cope and thrive (World Health Organization, 2022).

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act as we cope with life. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood and aging.

The International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision (ICD-11) provides a standardized framework for understanding mental disorders. According to ICD-11, mental, behavioral, and neurodevelopmental disorders are grouped into categories such as:

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- Mood disorders (e.g., depression, bipolar disorder)
- Anxiety and fear related disorders (e.g., generalized anxiety, panic disorder, PTSD)
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders (hallucination, delusion, disorganized thoughts and thinkings)
- Substance abuse and addictive behaviors (e.g., alcohol drugs, gambling)

Mental health disorder is a condition that significantly affects a person's thinking, emotional regulation, or behavior. These disorders usually cause distress or difficulty in important areas of daily life, such as relationships, studies, or work. There are many different types of mental health disorders. Mental health disorders may also be referred to as mental health condition, psychosocial disabilities, and other mental health states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm.

Methodology

This study uses a descriptive and analytical approach to understand the mental health challenges faced by Generation Z and to explore whether these concerns are real or exaggerated. Instead of collecting new data, the study is based on a review of existing research, reports, and statistics from trusted sources such as the WHO, UNICEF, AIIMS, and NIMHANS. Academic journals, books, and government documents were also examined to better understand the causes, effects, and social responses related to youth mental health.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature revealed several important findings regarding the mental health status of Generation Z.

Mental Health issues & Generation

According to Joel Vos, Ron Roberts, and James Davies in their book of *Mental Health in Crisis*, the mental health crisis has two faces: First, many people including Gen Z are struggling because of real life problems like financial stress, social inequality, and lack of support. Second, there is a deeper crisis in how society treats those with mental health issues. Many individuals face discrimination and are not properly understood or cared for, which makes their pain even worse. (Vos & Roberts, 2021)

According to a 2025 UNICEF survey involving over 5,600 Gen Z individuals (ages 14–25), 60% reported feeling emotionally overwhelmed by national and global events, highlighting the psychological burden of continuous exposure to crises (UNICEF, 2025).

In these days, many Gen Z individuals feel they must appear “perfect” on the outside, while inside they are feeling lost, pressured, or exhausted. Social media plays a big role in this people often compare themselves to others, thinking everyone else is doing better or living a happier life. Academics stress, career worries, family expectations, and even the fear of failure add more weight to their minds. On top of that, many young people are still afraid to talk openly about their mental health because they fear being judged or misunderstood. And yes, it is true that many families have parents or parents or other members who don't understand these things.

Even in society, there are people who still ignore mental health struggles as something “not serious” or “just a phase”. This makes it even harder for young people to express what they’re going through.

Myth or Reality: Examining the evidence

The rise in mental health problems among Generation Z has become a global concern. And India is no exception. Studies and reports from around the world show that young people today experience higher levels of anxiety, stress, and depression than older generations, making it more of a reality than a myth.

A study in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence found that symptoms of depression, anxiety, and loneliness have significantly increased among adolescents belonging to Generation Z compared to earlier generations (Twenge et al.,2025). The study linked these issues to the influence of social media, academic pressure, and the changing pace of modern life. Similarly, the World Health Organization (2022) reported that “depression and anxiety are now among the top causes of illness and disability among people aged 15-24 years globally”. In India, the National Mental Survey (2016) also found that about 7.3% of young people are struggling with anxiety, depression, or other mental disorders. This shows that mental health problems among youth are increasing and need serious attention.

Social media plays a big role in this. Too much time on platforms like Instagram, Facebook and Tik Tok often makes young people compare themselves with young people compare themselves with others and feel insecure or lonely. A study in The Lancet Psychiatry (2021) found that using social media for long hours is linked with poor sleep, sadness, and stress. In India, research by the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS,2021) found that more than 32% of schools and college students in urban areas had symptoms of anxiety depression related to excessive screen time and online competition. AIIMS also noted that students who spent more than six hours a day on social media had higher chances of mood changes, poor concentration, and social withdrawal.

Addiction has also become a growing concern among Generation Z. It is only about drugs or alcohol but also about digital addiction, especially gaming and internet use. The National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS, 2021) reported that around 11-14% of Indian youth show the signs of gaming or internet addiction.

Apart from these, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and psychotic disorders are also increasing among youth. According to Frontiers in psychology (2022), exposure to distributing or traumatic online content can lead to obsessive thoughts and post-traumatic symptoms. The Indian Journal of Psychiatry (2023) also found that many young people in India cities are facing psychotic symptoms such confusion, emotional detachment and fear, often caused by long-term stress, social isolation, and substance use.

Even though more people now talk about mental health, stigma still exists in the life of young people. Many young people hesitate to share their problems and visit counselors or psychologists because they fear being judged. From all this evidence, the increasing mental health issues among Generation Z are not myths but a real and serious concern. The studies by

WHO, NIMHANS, AIIMS, and others clearly show that young people are struggling with anxiety, depression and addiction. There is a strong need for awareness, school-based mental health programs, and supportive families to help the young generation live a balanced and healthy life.

Causes and contributing factors

Generation Z is facing a growing number of mental health challenges. These issues are not caused by one single factor but result from several factors social, emotional, environmental, and psychological. The following section highlights some of the major causes and contributing factors influencing the mental well-being of Generation Z.

1. **Academic Pressure and Competition:** One of the major causes of stress and anxiety among young people today is academic pressure. In India, exams like NEET, JEE, and UPSC created intense competition among students. Many fears failure or disappointing their parents, leading to anxiety, low confidence, and depression. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2022), “academic stress is a leading factor in student suicides in India. Such constant performance pressure often results in sleeplessness, poor focus, and emotional exhaustion.
2. **Social media and Online influence:** Social media has become an essential part of Gen Z’s daily life. While it helps them connect with others, it also brings comparison, insecurity, and addiction. Studies by the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS, 2023) show that excessive use of apps like Instagram and TikTok is linked with poor sleep, mood swings, and social withdrawal. The constant need for likes and validation creates emotional instability and lower self-esteem.
3. **Family Conflicts and Lack of support:** Family environment plays very important role in shaping one’s mental health. When there are arguments, emotional neglect, conflict or misunderstanding at home, young people often feel lonely or unvalued. In Indian families, mental health is sometimes not taken seriously sadness is seen as a weakness or attention seeking behavior. This lack of understanding stops youth from expressing their struggles, which increases depression and frustration over time.
4. **Addiction and Substance use:** Addiction has become another major concern among Gen Z. it may include phone addiction, gaming, alcohol, or drugs. According to the "Magnitude of Substance Use in India" survey, released in February 2019 by the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC), AIIMS, New Delhi, “the most used psychoactive substance was alcohol, followed by cannabis and opioids”, nearly one in seven Indians has used a psychoactive substance, and the highest use is found among the youth.

Impact and Societal Responses

The growing mental health issues among Generation Z have led to serious impacts on individuals, families, and society. These problems not only affect emotional well-being but also influence education and relationships.

1. Impact on Individuals

- Many Gen Z individuals experience stress, anxiety, and depression, which often interfere with their daily and performance.
- According to a study by the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS, 2023), nearly 35% of young adults between 18-25 years in India report symptoms of anxiety or mood disorders.
- Social media pressure, comparison, and constant connectivity have led to low self-esteem and identity confusion among youth.
- Addiction to online platforms and games often results in sleep problems, isolation and poor concentration.

2. Educational and Work-Related Effects

- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2023) reported that student suicides in India increased by 4.5% compared to previous year, showing the growing emotional distress among youth.
- Mental health struggles have a direct impact on academic performance. Many students find it difficult to focus or attend classes regularly.
- In workplaces, young professionals face burnout and job security, especially in fast-paced industries that demand continuous output.

3. Social and Family Impact

- Families often fail to understand the seriousness of mental health issues, leading to misunderstanding and conflict at home.
- Youths suffering from depression or anxiety may withdraw from social interactions, causing loneliness and social isolation.
- Stigma remains a major barrier many hesitate to seek professional help due to fear of judgement or being labelled as “mentally weak”.

4. Societal Responses

India has started taking important steps to improve mental health awareness and care:

- The National Mental Health program (NMHP) promotes community-based mental health services across India.
- The Mental Healthcare Act (2017) ensures that every individual has the right to mental healthcare and protection from discrimination.
- AIIMS and NIMHANS have also launched online counselling initiatives for students and young professionals facing emotional distress.

Conclusion

Mental health problems among Generation Z are truly increasing, and this is not just an assumption. Research from organizations such as the WHO, UNICEF, AIIMS, and NIMHANS shows that many young people today struggle more with stress, sadness, and addiction than earlier generations. These challenges are linked to academic pressure, excessive use of social media, family conflicts, and the fear of being judged for sharing emotions. These struggles affect not only young individuals but also their education, work life, and relationships, creating wider impacts on families and society. While the situation is serious, steps such as India's

National Mental Health Program and mental health laws offer hope and support for those in need.

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