

## A Study on the Dynamic Factors Influencing Youth Mental Health

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**Abstract:** The landscape concerning the state of youth mental health has indeed shifted dramatically and the consequences are evident in terms of mental health issues among the younger generation. Social media platforms have reshaped how youth perceive themselves and the world. The constant exposure to carefully curated, often unrealistic, images and lifestyles creates a culture of comparison, affecting self-esteem and self-worth. The pressure to meet beauty standards and measure success through online metrics exacerbates this issue. Shifts in family structures and dynamics can impact support systems for youth. Difficulty in effective communication with parents, peers and mentors hampers the ability to seek help or guidance. Changes in societal norms and perceptions add to the struggle, often leading to feelings of anxiety, depression and loneliness. Rising divorce rates and changes in parenting styles can lead to a lack of stable emotional support, leaving youngsters feeling isolated and disconnected. The intense focus on academic achievement, coupled with a competitive environment, adds immense pressure on youth. This result-based culture contributes significantly to stress and mental health issues, often pushing some to extreme measures like suicide. The alarming rise in student suicides, as reflected by the statistics in India, emphasizes the urgency for effective measures to address mental health issues among young individuals. Addressing youth mental health requires a concerted effort from multiple stakeholders—families, educators, policymakers and mental health professionals. It's crucial to create a supportive environment that fosters mental well-being and provides the necessary resources for young individuals to thrive emotionally and academically. This study aims at exploring the aforementioned factors and how the stakeholders come into play in the mental health & stability of youth through a secondary comprehensive analysis.

**Keywords:** Youth mental health, result-based culture, mental well-being, social media platforms, anxiety, depression

### INTRODUCTION

Mental health and related issues have been the major topic of discussion as of late especially post the deadly Covid-19 pandemic. Changes in socio-cultural contexts, the rapid growth of digital media and similar technologies, shifts in the family dynamics are some of the factors which come into play when we speak of mental health & related issues. The omnipresence of social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc., have heavily altered & influenced youth perception in terms of self-esteem & confidence, self-worth, measurement of success, beauty standards and comparison culture.

The latest social media trends have heavily influenced the thoughts & expectations of the young minds from the world and themselves, which reflect the disastrous effects that the social media has had on youth mental health. To make matters worse, rising divorce rates and obsolete support from parents have adversely impacted the mental stability and health of youngsters. Ineffective communication with parents, peers & well-wishers, shifts in perception & mentality and the lack of self-care due to the drastically changing social norms have been some of the major causes behind the rise of grave issues such as anxiety and depression disorders.

Additionally, academic pressure and the extremely competitive nature of success has created an

intense result-based culture which has made matters worse. In 2021 alone, around 13,089 students died by committing suicide causing the suicide rates among students in India to significantly rise. This is a cause for concern and action. The quality of counsel made available to students on campus must thus, be made more efficient such that the suicidal tendency among students decreases. Families must also take effective measures to avoid disastrous ends.

This is a comprehensive study on the mental health of youth and the influential factors involved.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

A blend of comprehensive & quantitative approach was employed for this study. A systematic review of bibliographical literature examining the influential factors of this study such as the impact of Covid-19, social media platforms and social dynamics on youth mental health. A quantitative questionnaire was employed for this study and it included a wide array of multiple-choice questions and Likert scale which collected the data of the respondents under different heads (academic pressure, social media, peer relationships & community, mental health & management). The questionnaire was created and administered on the Google Forms platform which required the respondents to login with their email IDs to participate in the survey and ensured that

multiple entries from an individual account was restricted. The Google Form was floated to the young adult population across social-media platforms & emails.

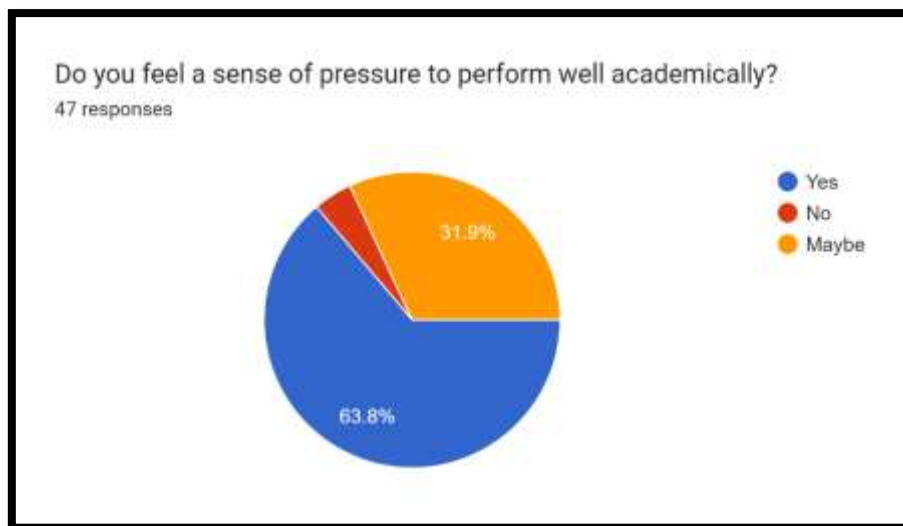
## RESEARCH DESIGN

An online survey was conducted with the young adult audience as the target through the medium of Google Form and contained five sub-divisions:

- Respondents' age group
- Academic pressure and the impact of family & peer expectations
- Social media usage and its effect on self-image
- The effects of peer relationships on personality and related issues.
- Personal mental health management and factors affecting the same

The central idea behind this survey is to examine the impact of the aforementioned factors on youth mental health & perception.

### Academic Pressure



**Fig-1:** Sense of pressure to perform well academically

The above graph reflects that more than 50% of the respondents feel the pressure to perform well academically while a negligible portion of the

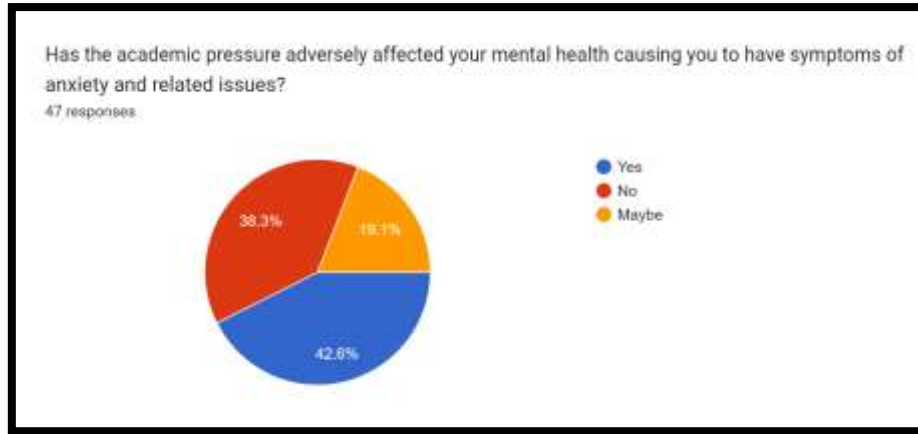
## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The given questionnaire on 'the factors affecting youth mental health in the current scenario' was conducted in an informed setup with consented participants. No individuals were forced to attempt this survey against their will or consent and no identifiable information was collected.

## RESULTS

A 15-question online survey was conducted for this study through the platform of Google Forms. The survey constituted cross-sectional questions regarding youth mental health and mental health management. The online questionnaire garnered 47 responses from students between the age group of 13-20. Enclosed below are the graphical representations of the data collated regarding the various factors influencing and affecting youth mental health.

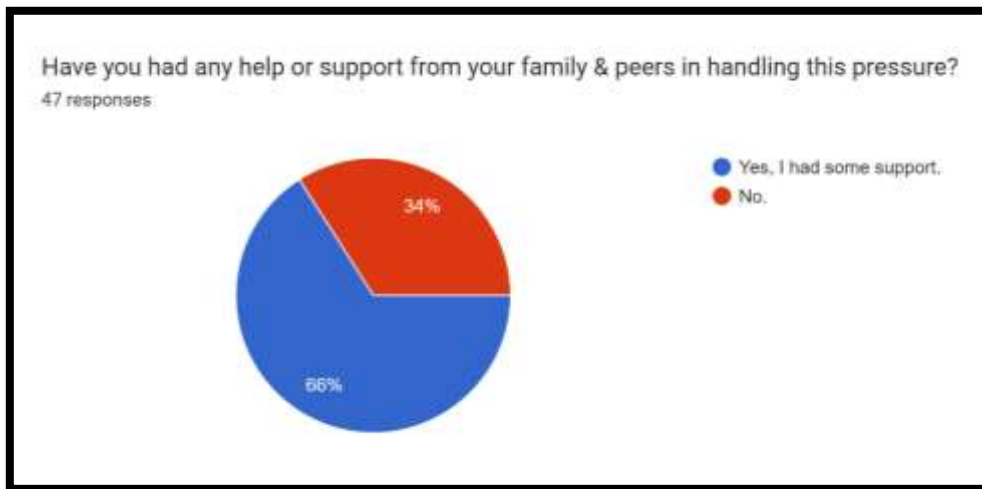
respondents denied feeling any sense of academic pressure.



**Fig-2:** Effect of academic pressure on personal mental health

While 38.3% of the surveyors claimed that the academic pressure they may or may not have felt affected their mental health adversely, a whopping 42.6% reported that the pressure they felt gave rise

to anxiety and related issues. This reflects the degree of effect that academic pressure has on the young minds and their mental health.

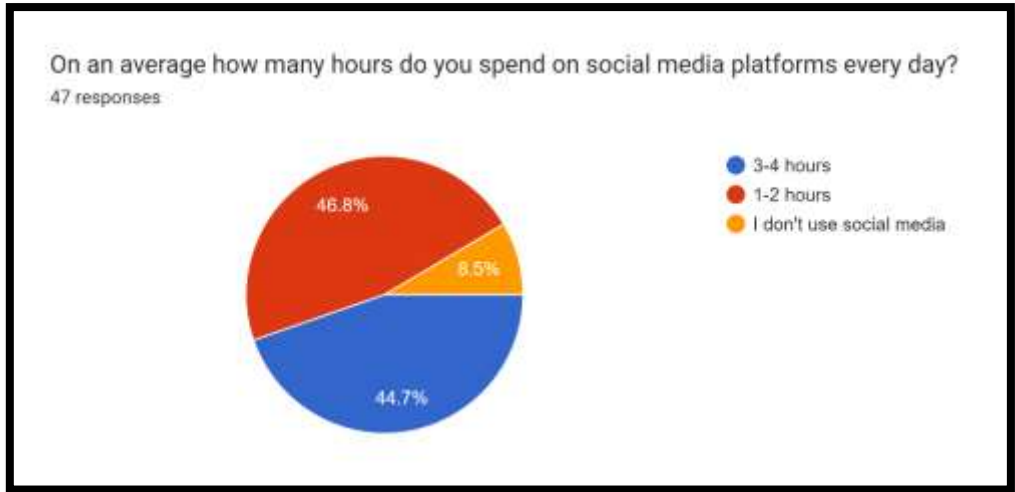


**Fig-3:** Support from family & peers in handling academic pressure and tensions

An evident majority of the participants responded positively and reported to have some support & help from their family & friends in managing the

academic pressure and their anxieties associated with the same.

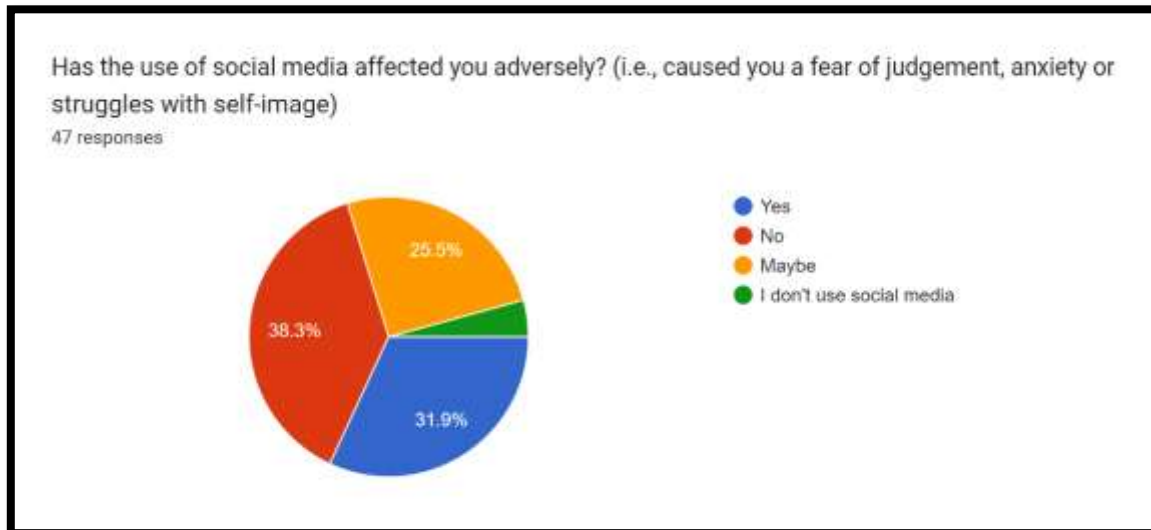
**Social Media**



**Fig-4:** Time spent on social media on a daily basis

It is observed that the average time spent by the respondents on social media platforms like

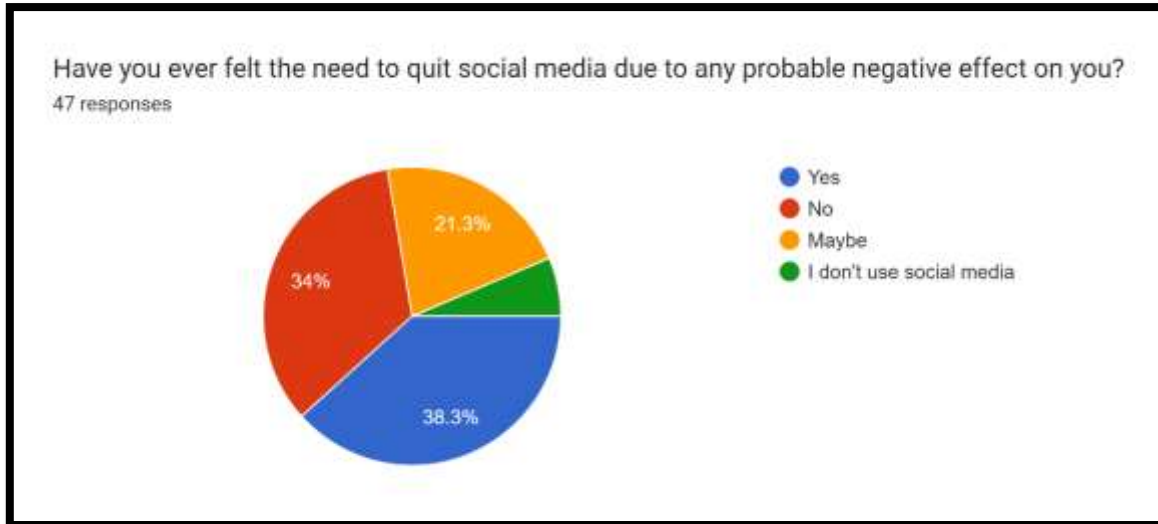
Instagram, Snapchat and more lies somewhere between 2-3 hours per day.



**Fig-5:** Impact of social media on personality-related issues

Around 55% of the respondents reported that they may have struggled with body image issues, felt a

fear of being judged and experienced some anxiety while using social media.

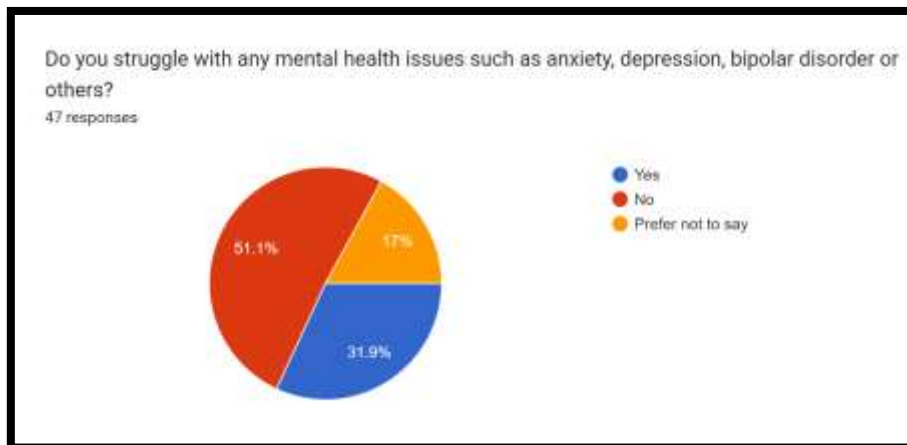


**Fig-6:** Negative effect of social media influencing the idea of quitting it

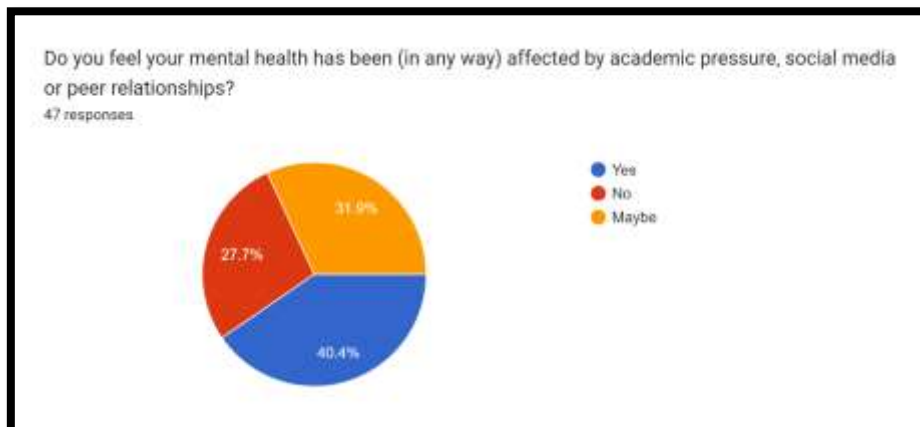
Social media is although considered an excellent tool for mass communication and networking, holds the potential to influence a way of thinking be it positively or negatively. Of the 47

respondents, approximately 59% of them have felt the need to quit social media because of some negative experiences that they have had while using them.

**Mental Health**



**Fig-7:** Struggles with mental health issues



**Fig-8:** The extent to which factors such as academic pressure & social media influences personal mental health

The chart effectively conveys the influence that the aforementioned factors have on the participants' mental health. More than 70% of the participants

opined that these elements might have played a significant role in shaping their mental health.

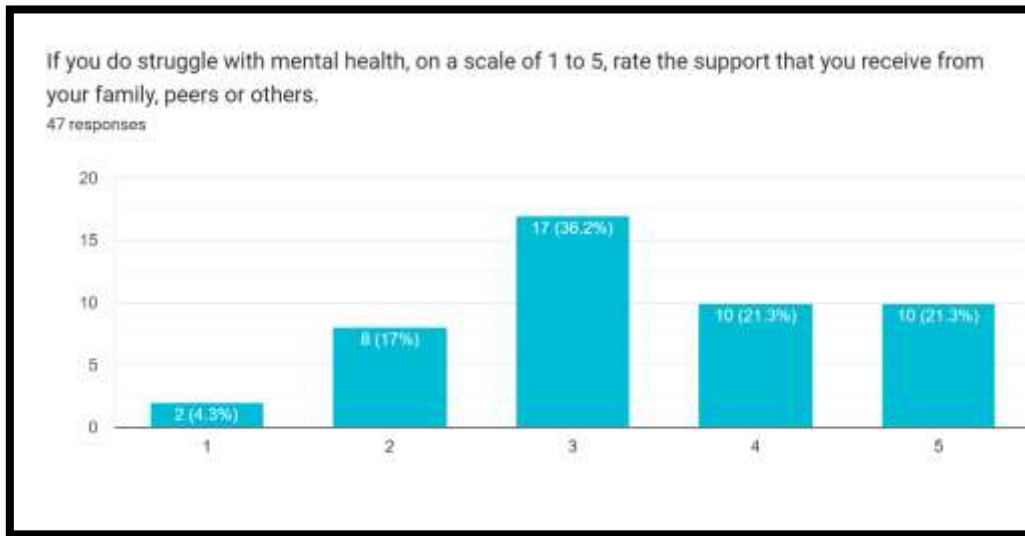


Fig-9: Rating of the support received from family & friends

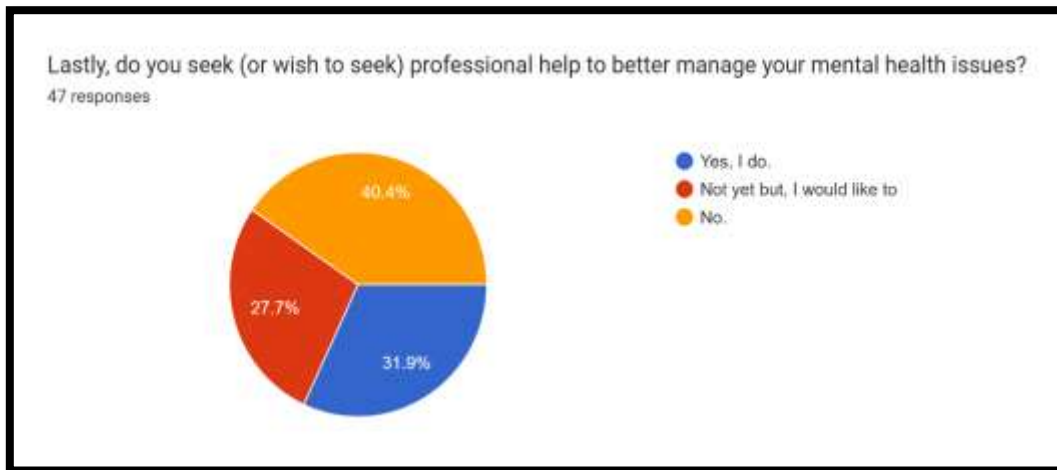


Fig-10: Professional helps to regulate personal mental health

A significant majority of the participants have responded that they either seek or would like to seek professional help from psychiatrists or psychotherapists to manage their mental health.

### SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF LITERATURE & DISCUSSION

#### The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Psychological Well-Being

The precautionary measures levied to control the pandemic wreaked havoc on the psychological environment & well-being of all individuals regardless of their age or background. The restriction protocols were although undertaken for safety reasons brought significant disadvantages

such as anxiety, depression and isolation due to lack of peer contact and increased stress.

(Fegert *et al.*, 2020) evaluated the psychological reactions towards the pandemic in three stages- the beginning of the pandemic when lockdown & social-distancing restrictions were levied for the first time, the phase of the pandemic when the Covid-19 cases witnessed an all-time high and the re-enabling phase wherein effective measures were undertaken to adapt to the “new-normal”. It was observed that the mental health deterioration saw a significant rise in the introductory stage of the pandemic with anxiety and depressive symptoms being the most common ones. The caged environment restricted the day-to-day interactions of adolescent and young adults in the social-set



ups like schools, colleges, sport clubs and more. Studies have shown that the quarantine effect demonstrated an increase in symptoms of post-traumatic stress (PTSS), insomnia and emotional exhaustion due to the stressful environment caused by the chaos of the pandemic (Liu, C. H. *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the lack of routine, disruption of organic and lively interactions has had adverse effects on mental health and was said to have the potential to negatively impact the communication and networking skills of the youth. The study observed that among the three phases, the adverse effects on mental health and psychological well-being was affected the most in phases 1 & 2 which brought on unprecedented sources of stress, anxiety & depression (Fegert, J. M. *et al.*, 2020).

Findings by numerous researchers demonstrates that the online alternatives adopted by numerous educational institutions worldwide limited the interactive learning and the environment of mutual growth among students between the age groups of 7-17 (Chaturvedi, K. *et al.*, 2021; Liu, C. H. *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, it was found that the motivational factors which influenced the students' learning and academic prowess were ineffective in the online learning platforms. A survey conducted by (Chaturvedi *et al.*, 2021) indicated that the inefficient time management by the youngsters which in turn, impacted their food cycles, fitness habits, social interactions and sleep schedules. These aforementioned factors shed light on the adversities that the students were forced to cope up with such as the anxiety and stress of being isolated in addition to the existing academic stress (Chaturvedi, K. *et al.*, 2021).

The Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Consortium conducted a survey during May-July 2020 across nine public research universities, involving 30,725 undergraduate students and 15,346 graduate and professional students. The findings indicated significant negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of these students. Using screening tools like PHQ-2 and GAD-2, the survey revealed that 35% of undergraduates and 32% of graduate and professional students showed signs of major depressive disorder, while 39% screened positive for generalized anxiety disorder. Notably, these rates were notably higher among specific groups such as low-income students, students of colour, women, non-binary individuals, transgender students and those serving as caregivers. The study also highlighted that students who struggled to adapt to remote learning

experienced higher rates of major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder. Moreover, compared to previous years, the pandemic has led to a considerable increase in mental health disorders among students, with major depressive disorder prevalence being twice as high among graduate and professional students in 2020 compared to 2019 and generalized anxiety disorder being 1.5 times more prevalent than in 2019.

Authors collectively thus, suggested that there exists a need for psychological support and assistance from adolescent psychiatrists, family & peers and the vast society as a whole to enable the youngsters to normalise speaking out about their problems and seeking help for the same rather than suppressing their vulnerabilities that have been triggered by the worldwide outrage of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **The Influence of Technology & Social Media**

Impact of technology in learning

(Lattie *et al.*, 2019) showcase the challenges that technology puts forth in addressing youth mental health in addition to the opportunities it entails. The integration of technology and academics is advantageous in the context that it offers unparalleled access to extensive information on numerous subject matters and enhances the holistic learning experiences of the students. While students are equipped with various Learning Management Systems (LMS) which enable smooth & flexible learning through organised and structured educational resources, seamless communication with faculties and the development of digital literacy skills which are integral for the modern workforce, the excessive screen time spent by students leads to physical health issues and the constant uninterrupted connectivity via online platforms supported by technology also leads to psychological problems such as distracted learning and symptoms of isolation & anxiety. There exists a wide-range of online platforms and tools be it social media, gaming and streaming platforms which distract and reduce the concentration & attention span of the young minds who are normalising instant gratification at alarming rates. In addition to the abovementioned issues which hinder the learning experiences, the issues pertaining to cybersecurity, data privacy and the dire spread of misinformation via online media channels rises concerns for not only the well-being of the youth but the need for security considerations as well. As institutions strive to harness the power of integrated technology for

educational purposes, it is integral to promote digital well-being and responsibility. In addition to this, it is imperative to implement a balanced approach towards the technological integration such that the students' lives aren't severely affected (Lattie, E. G. *et al.*, 2019; Harrer, M. *e al.*, 2019).

### **The Impact of Social Media**

In the modern digital landscape, the use of social media as a stress reliever and an immediate source of relaxation have become common, studies suggest. Although a significant majority of these social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp and more are used as social networking and communication channels, the ease of sharing content and media facilitates the engagement rates of these platforms (Chaturvedi, K. *et al.*, 2021). Platforms such as TikTok & Instagram now serve the purpose of setting trends and creating a unified sense of thinking regarding a topic. Children of ages 12 & above are given access to these apps and are conveniently nudged into the group behaviour that exists online be it fashion-related, the latest trends in physical fitness & beauty or anything else. Multi-media channel houses like Meta leverage the right search engine optimisation tools such that the attention of a user is controlled effectively. It can be synthesised that the *Bottomless Soup Theory* suggested by Wansink, B., Painter, J., & North, J. in 2004 is similar to the engaging strategies implemented by the big social media players like Instagram & TikTok who virtually create an endless chain of content to control their users' attention by promoting and suggesting the posts that will be liked by a particular user based on their preferences. Documentaries such as *The Social Dilemma* & *The Great Hack* provide real-time insights from the minds who were part of the team that created these widely successful social media platforms and their inputs regarding the mechanism on which these apps work is truly alarming.

The American Journal of Epidemiology conducted a 5,000-person survey in 2017 which found that higher social media use is correlated with self-reported declines in mental & physical health as well as life satisfaction (Fegert, J. M. *et al.*, 2020; Lattie, E. G. *et al.*, 2019). Numerous studies and researches have suggested that the comparison culture and trend patterns that are enabled by these platforms and users have caused severe body-image and self-perception issues among the young users. In addition to this, there have been

numerous reports that suggest that there has been an increase in anxiety, depression and other personality disorders in children worldwide among the age groups of 12-20. These factors and reasoning highlight the need for appropriate interventions in children & young adults of this age group. Social media is ultimately the double-edged sword that brings forth both positive and negative effects (Lee, Y. *et al.*, 2022).

### **The Effect of Social Dynamics on Youth Mental Health**

The most notable and visibly observable scenario wherein the effect of social and family dynamics was evident was the Covid-19 pandemic which forced everyone to limit their live interactions with their families only. Due to the alarming increases in mortality rates, the fear of losing someone who belonged to a risk group increased. These fears in turn, led to a rise in anxious habits and nervous behaviour among individuals given the uncertain times. In addition to the psychological effect of the pandemic, the economic and financial burden that some families had to face posed a threat on the parents' mental health due to the decline in income, regular firing cultures in the corporate setup and more. These factors led to suicidal and substance-abuse disorders among adults which heavily influenced the dynamic between a parent and a child creating a snowball effect in a family setup, disrupting the mental health and well-being of every member (Fegert, J. M. *et al.*, 2020).

The changes in the modern relationships, dynamics and increase in divorce & separation rates impact the mental health of the children who are caught in the cross-fire. Studies have shown that the increase in young adults seeking psychological support could be linked to the evident rise of divorces in families.

Furthermore, the competitive nature present in the academic front was intensified by family and peer expectations causing the students to undergo severe stress and pressure which led to unfavourable circumstances. Additionally, the reserved and non-interactive behaviour among troubled teens gave rise to numerous cases of suppressed suffering which in turn, impacted the suicide rates among teens and young adults.

In 2021 alone, around 13,089 students died by committing suicide causing the suicide rates among students in India to significantly rise. This is a cause for concern and action. The quality of counsel made available to students on campus



must thus, be made more efficient such that the suicidal tendency among students decreases. Families must also take effective measures to avoid disastrous ends.

## FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Post the Covid-19 pandemic, the feelings of anxiety, depression and isolation were a common condition among the general public but, the changes in the physical environment and lack of emotional support and help exacerbated the effect of the pandemic on the young adult population. This study was successful in identifying the numerous factors contributing to the mental health issues among youth and the role of the dynamic elements of contemporary society. Social media platforms have been a significant influence on youth mental health and have impacted the self-esteem and perception of the youngsters. The changes in family structure and shifts in social dynamics have led to an unstable psychological environment constituting isolation & disconnection. The academic pressures and competitive culture have resulted in an outcome-based culture which has increased stress levels, anxiety and related issues among students in addition to the alarming suicide rates which highlight the severity of this issue.

The various experiments and research studies considered in this paper support and highlight the need for effective mental health support services for youth. This includes therapy & counselling centres in academic setups such as schools & universities as well as effective communication channels present in the personal environment. The latest technologies and social media platforms are although created with positive intentions, have resulted in negative ways and affected the state of mental health of the young generation.

Limiting the screen-time and engagement on social media platforms, creating an atmosphere of support & openness and facilitating an environment of growth and development are the solutions to tackle the problem of increasing mental health issues among youth.

## CONCLUSION

The sphere of youth mental health has undergone significant transformation as of recent times given the numerous multi-faceted factors such as social dynamics, societal shifts, the advancement and rise of digital media and technology. The consequential changes that emerged as a result of these changes reflect the evident increase in the rapid rise of

mental health issues in the younger population of the world. The unrealistic standards & expectations of the society, comparison culture and the alarming influence that social media has on the younger audience and their perception contributes to the feelings of disconnection, inadequacy and dissatisfaction. Changes in the family dynamics, complex relationships which do not foster openness and instead reflect judgement & criticism have hindered their ability to effectively communicate their emotions, seek help & guidance. In addition to this the rise in divorce rates, changing parenting styles and a culture that lacks connectivity, emotional bond leaves the youth feeling isolated, pressured and neglected. The extensive focus of our society on academic accomplishments and intelligence have created an immensely competitive environment hampering overall growth & development. The pressure to excel academically exerted by families, peers and others have created an outcome-based system of gratification, recognition and appreciation. Such factors have unfortunately driven numerous students to extreme measures like suicide.

Through a comprehensive analysis, this study critically examined the factors influencing youth mental health, demonstrated their effect and subsequent results due to the same. The rapid increase in mental health issues such as anxiety, depressions, stress and the alarming rise in suicide rates of the younger population are matters that have to be dealt with sensitively and cautiously. The primary survey conducted for this research demonstrates the impact of social media, peers & family and academic pressure as well as the need for functional counselling services and emotional support. It is imperative all the stakeholders to understand the complex interplay of the dynamic factors influencing youth mental health and address these issues collectively through collaborative efforts to minimise if not eradicate the psychological issues faced by our youth.

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