



Understanding the Mental Health Landscape of Today's Youth: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract: *The mental health landscape for today's youth is increasingly complex, shaped by a confluence of individual, familial, and societal factors. In India, where over 250 million young people aged 15-24 reside, mental health challenges such as anxiety disorders, depression, and substance abuse are alarmingly prevalent, with these conditions accounting for nearly 90% of cases as per the National Mental Health Survey of India (2015-16). This study aims to systematically analyze the multifaceted challenges faced by youth, including academic pressure, identity and self-expression issues, and adverse family dynamics. This study explores the mental health landscape of youth aged 12–20 in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, focusing on the prevalence of challenges such as anxiety (42%), depression (29%), and substance abuse (16%). Key factors influencing mental health include academic pressure, with 86% experiencing it to varying degrees, and social media, affecting 86% either occasionally or frequently. Despite 50% of respondents being aware of mental health resources, only 17% have accessed them, hindered by barriers such as high costs (33%), lack of awareness (24%), stigma (22%), and limited access to services (21%). The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to bridge gaps in resource utilization, promote awareness, and address structural barriers to improve youth mental well-being comprehensively.*

Keywords: *Youth Mental Health, Anxiety, Depression, Substance Abuse, Academic Pressure, Identity and Self-Expression.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

India is home to more than 250 million young people aged 15–24 years or a fifth of the global population of young people. The term 'young people' includes two sub-groups: 'older adolescents' aged 15–19 years and 'young adults' aged 19–24 years.

Mental health and well-being during adolescence and young adulthood need specific emphasis as the developmental experiences set a foundation for later life's physical, emotional, educational, social, and financial achievements. As three-fourths of all mental health conditions (disorders that affect mood, thinking and behaviour) manifesting throughout a lifetime begin by the mid-twenties, it is important to address youth mental health and well-being systematically so that individuals with an indicated greater need for psychosocial support and professional help are identified early, appropriately, adequately, and efficiently.

Young people's Mental health and well-being are impacted by their personalities, immediate surroundings such as families, and societal and educational institutions, which are further influenced by broader socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors.



Depression, anxiety disorders, and substance use disorders account for nearly 90% of the cases.” (National Mental Health Survey of India, 2015-16).

Gulliver et al. (2010) investigated the barriers to accessing mental health services among young people and identified stigma, lack of awareness, and financial constraints as the primary obstacles. Their study revealed that societal attitudes toward mental illness often discourage youth from seeking help, even when they are aware of the resources available. Moreover, the lack of affordable services and proximity to mental health facilities were found to further hinder access. These findings parallel the current study, which also highlighted stigma (22%), high costs (33%), and a lack of nearby services (21%) as significant barriers. The research emphasizes the need for targeted efforts to reduce stigma and improve the accessibility and affordability of mental health care.

2. Research Objectives

This study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- To Understand the Prevalence of Mental Health Challenges Among Youth
- To Analyze the Impact of Academic Pressure on Mental Well-Being
- To Assess the Role of Social Media in Affecting Youth Mental Health
- To Evaluate Awareness and Accessibility of Mental Health Resources
- To Identify Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services

3. Methods and Materials

Locale of Study

The research was conducted in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, the city was chosen intentionally to provide a targeted setting for the research.

Sampling Procedure:

Sample Selection

A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants who met specific criteria, such as being aged 12 to 20 years and having lived experiences or insights into mental health challenges. This non-random method allowed for the inclusion of individuals whose perspectives were crucial to addressing the study's research questions.

Distribution of Sample:

The sample consisted of 100 adolescents (50 boys and 50 girls), strategically drawn to ensure representation from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative Data Collection

- **Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews:** Exact 30 individuals participate in interviews exploring their experiences with mental health challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of available support resources. This method allows for detailed, personalized insights.

Online Surveys

- **Short Online Survey:** A broader perspective was gained through a concise survey targeting youth. It collected initial insight into mental health challenges and associated problems.
- **Structured Open-Ended Questionnaires:** Background information was gathered through translated and targeted questionnaires, ensuring accessibility of all respondents.

Ethical Considerations: Informed Consent: The study was fully explained to the participants before they participated in the survey and their consent was sought for the related work.



4. Result and discussion :

Table 1. Prevalence of Mental Health Challenges

Challenges	Percentage (%)
Anxiety Prevalence	42.0
Depression Prevalence	29.0
Substance abuse Prevalence	16.0

Table 1. shows the prevalence of key mental health challenges among youth. Anxiety is the most reported condition, affecting 42 per cent of respondents, followed by depression at 29 per cent. Substance abuse, while less common, is still significant, impacting 16 per cent of the young population. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address these pervasive issues.

Table 2. Academic Pressure Distribution

Academic level pressure	Percentage (%)
Often	31.0
Sometime	29.0
Always	26.0
Rarely	10.0
Never	4.0

Table 2 highlights the distribution of academic pressure among students, with 31 per cent experiencing it often, 29 per cent sometimes, and 26 per cent always experiencing the pressure, indicating a significant prevalence of stress. Only 10 per cent report rarely feeling pressured, and 4 per cent never, underscoring the pervasive nature of academic demands.

Table 3. Social Media Impact

Social media impact	Percentage (%)
Occasionally	65.0
Frequently	21.0
No	14.0

Table 3 illustrates social media's influence. 65 per cent of respondents experience its impact occasionally and 21 per cent frequently, indicating its notable role in daily life. Only 14 per cent reported no impact, suggesting limited detachment from its effects.

Table 4. Awareness and Access to Resources

Category	Percentage (%)
Aware resource – yes	50.0
Aware resource – no	50.0
Accessed resource – yes	17.0
Accessed resource – no	83.0

Table 4 reveals an equal split in resource awareness, with 50 per cent of respondents being aware and 50 per cent unaware. However, only 17 per cent have accessed these resources, while 83 per cent have not, highlighting a gap between awareness and actual utilization.

Table 5. Barriers to Accessing Resources

Barrier	Percentage (%)
High costs	33.0



Lack of awareness	24.0
Stigma	22.0
Lack of nearby services	21.0

Table 5 identifies key barriers to accessing resources, with high costs being the most significant 33 per cent, followed by lack of awareness 24 per cent, stigma 22 per cent, and lack of nearby services 21 per cent. These findings highlight the multifaceted challenges in resource accessibility.

5. Discussion :

This study highlights the significant mental health challenges faced by youth, with anxiety (42%), depression (29%), and substance abuse (16%) emerging as major concerns. Academic pressure was a pervasive factor, with (86%) of respondents reporting stress, reflecting the demanding nature of the educational environment. The role of social media was also notable, with (86%) of participants indicating its influence, underscoring the dual-edged nature of digital platforms as sources of both connection and stress. These findings emphasize the urgent need for supportive interventions in educational settings and awareness programs to promote balanced social media use.

A critical gap was observed between awareness (50%) and access (17%) to mental health resources, hindered by barriers such as high costs (33%), lack of awareness (24%), stigma (22%), and service unavailability (21%). These challenges highlight systemic issues in resource accessibility and utilization. Addressing these barriers requires collaborative efforts to reduce stigma, subsidize services, and expand mental health infrastructure, particularly in underserved areas. Such measures are vital to ensuring that mental health support is both available and accessible to those in need.

6. Conclusion :

The study underscores the urgency of addressing youth mental health challenges through targeted and systematic interventions. Anxiety, depression, and substance abuse significantly impact this demographic, exacerbated by academic pressure, social media influence, and barriers to resource utilization. Educational institutions, policymakers, and mental health professionals must collaborate to implement comprehensive strategies that promote awareness, reduce stigma, and ensure the accessibility of affordable mental health services.

A proactive approach involving school-based interventions, community programs, and digital mental health solutions can bridge existing gaps and foster resilience among young people. Prioritizing mental health at the societal level is critical to nurturing a generation capable of achieving their full potential in an increasingly complex world.

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