

Resilience and Adaptability among Generation Z: Navigating Mental Health Challenges in Times of Uncertainty

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Abstract

Youths are the growth engine for any nation. This study observes the mental health of Generation Z, about how young people use resilience and coping skills to deal with difficult and uncertain situations. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research looks at common stress factors such as academic pressure, financial problems, and substantial use of digital means, and emotional challenges that became stronger during the COVID-19 pandemic. Total 200 respondents within the age group of 18-26 from various institutions in Pune city were examined. The results show that, though many Gen Z individuals experience anxiety, stress, and loneliness, on other hand also shows strong resilience through peer support, self-care habits, emotional awareness, and willingness to seek help. The findings highlight adaptability, social connections, and positive use of technology as important protective factors that support recovery. The study concludes that improving mental health services and adding resilience-based programs in schools and communities is important to help Generation Z succeed during uncertain times.

Keywords: *Mental health, resilience, adaptability, Generation Z, coping strategies, psychological well-being, uncertainty*

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1. Introduction:

India is the country of young people. Generation Z is growing up in a fast-changing, highly connected world. They are characterized by rapid technological advancement, global interconnectedness, economic uncertainty, and frequent social disruptions. These conditions have significantly influenced their psychological well-being and coping mechanisms. The increasing prevalence of mental health concerns such as anxiety, stress, depression, and emotional exhaustion among Generation Z has attracted the attention of researchers, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Despite facing numerous challenges, many members of this generation have demonstrated remarkable resilience by utilizing digital resources, peer support networks, and adaptive coping strategies to manage adversity and maintain psychological well-being (Twenge et al., 2019). Many students report feeling overwhelmed by difficult exams, uncertain job prospects, and the need to succeed both in school and socially. The COVID-19 pandemic made things even harder, with long isolation, online classes, and fear of illness, highlighting how vulnerable this generation can be in uncertain times. Generation Z is also known for being resilient and adaptable. Despite many challenges, many young people show they can adjust, recover, and grow stronger. Many factors affect Generation Z's mental health, including social, economic, cultural, and technological influences. Friendships play a key role, as many young people talk to friends about their

problems more than to family. However, peer pressure and comparing themselves to others can lead to stress and lower self-esteem. Financial worries and rising living costs can make them anxious about the future. Changes in family life and expectations can either help or add stress. Using smartphones and social media also has both positive and negative effects.

Social media strongly affects Generation Z's mental health. It helps them connect, learn, and express themselves. For example, students can access mental health resources, join support groups, and share their experiences. However, spending too much time on social media can lead to problems like cyberbullying, comparing oneself to others, and fear of missing out (FOMO). Resilience is the ability to handle stress, get through difficult times, and recover from setbacks. Adaptability means adjusting to new situations and changes. Generation Z often shows resilience by seeking help, learning new skills, and staying hopeful even during hard times. Many students today are more open to discussing mental health and getting counselling than previous generations. They also use digital tools like meditation apps, online therapy, and self-help resources to support their well-being. Healthy habits like regular exercise, enough sleep, and balanced use of technology also help people cope better. This study examines how common mental health challenges are for Generation Z and how much stress they experience during uncertain times. It aims to identify what affects their mental well-being and how they show resilience and adaptability. The study also looks at how social media and digital use can make them both more vulnerable and better able to cope. Finally, it suggests practical ways to build resilience, improve coping skills, and create support systems to help Generation Z stay mentally healthy in a changing world.

2. Rationale of Study:

The concept of adaptability has become increasingly important in understanding how Generation Z responds to uncertain environments, including public health crises, economic fluctuations, educational disruptions, and social changes. Adaptability enables young individuals to adjust their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in response to changing circumstances, thereby supporting mental health and long-term personal development. Research suggests that resilience and adaptability serve as protective factors that enhance emotional regulation, reduce vulnerability to psychological distress, and promote positive life outcomes among young adults. Understanding these attributes is essential for developing effective interventions and support systems that empower Generation Z to navigate uncertainty while fostering sustainable mental well-being (Southwick et al., 2023).

3. Statement of the Problem

Generation Z is growing up in a fast-changing world where uncertainty is common. Even though people talk more openly about mental health, studies show that Gen Z is experiencing more psychological distress. Academic pressure, financial worries, excessive time online, social comparison, and disrupted social lives during events like the COVID-19 pandemic have worsened these problems. Still, there is not enough research on how Gen Z builds resilience and adapts to these challenges. More studies are needed to understand how they cope with adversity and what helps them maintain their well-being during uncertainty.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To examine how common are the mental health conditions amongst Generation Z and how much psychological stress they face in uncertain situations
- To identify the social, economic, cultural, and technological factors affect Generation Z's mental health, and look at how they show resilience and adaptability when facing these challenges
- To assess how social media, digital use, and fast-changing global events affect both the vulnerability and coping skills of Generation Z

- To explore ways to build resilience, coping strategies, and support systems that help Generation Z handle uncertainty and protect their mental health

5. Literature Review

The World Health Organisation (2022) reported that almost one in seven adolescents worldwide has a diagnosable mental health condition. However, programs that build resilience help these young people recover and adjust better. WHO also notes that early training in resilience, stronger peer relationships, and easy access to counselling can prevent long-term mental health problems and help youth adapt more effectively. Resilience strongly predicts subjective well-being and academic persistence among university students, suggesting that resilience acts as a buffer against academic stress and uncertainty. The study emphasises that cognitive flexibility and supportive mentoring foster stronger adaptive coping, particularly during periods of systemic disruption, such as remote-learning transitions.

The American Psychological Association (2023) reports that resilience-building interventions, including peer-led mental health programs, cognitive-behavioural tools, and school-based support initiatives, significantly improve coping capacity and emotion regulation among youth.

Singh & Raina (2023) found that resilience and mindfulness programs in Indian colleges help students become more emotionally stable and less anxious. Their research shows that colleges should play an active role in building resilience rather than leaving it to students alone. Recent studies show that Generation Z faces both strengths and vulnerabilities in their mental health. Research indicates that there is a definite increase in the levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness among young people (Steen et al., 2022; Lv et al., 2022). At the same time, new findings highlight how many young people are building resilience and coping skills that help them recover from challenges and succeed in uncertain times.

Recent research brings to notice that Generation Z's mental health includes both vulnerability and strength. Research shows that, though there is a higher rate of anxiety, depression, and loneliness among Generation Z (Caddell, 2022; Rizvi & Nabi, 2021), they have developed resilience and coping strategies that help them overcome difficulties and adapt to change. The McKinsey Health Institute (2022) states that Gen Z strengthens their emotional resilience through peer groups and networks. Schroeder (2020) adds that digital platforms, though not without risks, offer valuable ways for young people to connect socially and support mental health causes.

Lastovkova et al. (2017) show that being adaptable at work and learning new skills help young employees handle stress better and stay motivated. This suggests that resilience is important not just for emotional health but also for professional growth. A global UNICEF survey (2022) shows that Generation Z actively seeks mental health resources and participates in advocacy, indicating they help shape their own support systems. Chandler-Wilde (2020) also points out that Gen Z's willingness to talk about mental health helps break down intergenerational stigma and build stronger communities.

The Lancet (2021) reports that resilience grows stronger through social connections, meaningful activities, and a sense of purpose. Gen Z builds these qualities through activism, entrepreneurship, and working together online. These studies show that Gen Z's resilience is not just a reaction to problems but is built on purpose, structure, and social support, making it an important topic for today's psychological research. Twenge (2019) points out that even though digital stress is common, Gen Z is skilled at advocating for themselves and understands mental health well. This helps them seek out psychological services and join support networks. The National Institute of Mental Health (2022) also finds that community-based mental health programs and peer support help build resilience by creating a sense of belonging.

6. Research Gap

Most existing research focuses on the increase in mental health disorders, digital addiction, anxiety, and emotional instability among Generation Z. Although these studies are important, they primarily examine problems and pay insufficient attention to the resilience, adaptability, and coping strengths shown by this group. There is still not enough research that combines both risk and protective factors to understand how Gen Z can thrive in unstable times. This study aims to address this gap by examining coping patterns, adaptive strategies, and support systems that help promote positive mental health outcomes.

7. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Resilience Theory, which sees resilience as the ability to adapt and recover from challenges, stress, or disruption. The theory focuses on both internal traits, such as self-regulation, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving, and external supports, such as peer relationships, family, institutions, and digital mental health resources. The study also draws on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which examines how people assess stress and use coping strategies to shape psychological outcomes. Together, these theories help explain how Generation Z responds to stress and adapts to change.

8. Data Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (N=200)	Percentage
Age	18–20	80	40%
	21–23	70	35%
	24–26	50	25%
Gender	Male	92	46%
	Female	100	50%
	Others	8	4%
Location	Urban	110	55%
	Rural	50	25%
	Semi-Urban	40	20%

The demographic profile of the respondents indicates that the majority belonged to the 18–20 age group (40%), followed by 21–23 years (35%), while 25% were aged 24–26 years. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with females constituting 50% of the sample and males accounting for 46%, whereas 4% identified as others. Regarding location, a majority of respondents were from urban areas (55%), reflecting stronger representation from cities. Rural participants comprised 25% of the sample, while 20% belonged to semi-urban regions.

Section A: Mental Health Awareness & Well-being

Question	Findings
Awareness of Mental Health	Yes – 180 (90%), No – 20 (10%)
Current Mental Health Rating	Poor – 10 (5%), Average – 50 (25%), Good – 80 (40%), Very Good – 40 (20%), Excellent – 20 (10%)

Section B: Stress & Influencing Factors

Primary Sources of Stress (Multiple-choice Responses)

Source of Stress	Respondents	Percentage
Academic Pressure	130	65%
Financial Issues	115	57.5%
Work Pressure	60	30%
Health Issues	45	22.5%
Family Issues	75	37.5%
Loneliness	85	42.5%
Relationship Issues	70	35%
Social Media	120	60%

Daily Social Media Usage

Time	Frequency
1 hour	18 (9%)
2-3 hours	70 (35%)
4-5 hours	60 (30%)
More than 5 hours	52 (26%)

Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

Positive	Negative	Neutral
54 (27%)	106 (53%)	40 (20%)

Peer Pressure on Well-being

Yes	No
118 (59%)	82 (41%)

Section C: Resilience & Coping Strategies

Confidence in Sharing Mental Health Concerns

Friends	Family	Counselor	No One
110 (55%)	50 (25%)	25 (12.5%)	15 (7.5%)

Common Coping Strategies

Method	Response Count
Talking to friends	120 (60%)
Self-care	105 (52.5%)
Physical Exercise	75 (37.5%)
Meditation	60 (30%)
Hobbies	85 (42.5%)
Sleep	92 (46%)
Professional support	22 (11%)

Self-Reported Resilience Level

Level	Frequency
Very Low	6 (3%)
Low	24 (12%)
Moderate	90 (45%)
High	60 (30%)
Very High	20 (10%)

Feeling Stronger After Overcoming Challenges

Yes	No	Not Sure
150 (75%)	15 (7.5%)	35 (17.5%)

9. Findings

- Most respondents (40%) were aged 18-20 years, followed by 21–23 years (35%) and 24–26 years (25%). The difference between male (46%) and female (50%) respondents is not significant, with 4% identifying as another gender. The majority of respondents (55%) were from urban areas, 25% from rural areas, and only 20% from semi-urban areas.
- Most respondents (90%) were aware of what mental health means. About their mental health status, most rated themselves as average to good (65%), and only 5% said their mental health was poor. The majority of respondents 65% are experiencing stress due to academic pressure, 60% due to heavy social media use, and 57.5% due to financial problems. 42.5% of the respondent’s stressor is loneliness and other common stressors are family or relationship issues.
- About 35% of respondents spend 2 to 3 hours on social media each day. Another 30% use it for 4 to 5 hours, while 26% spend more than 5 hours daily. Only 9% keep their usage to around an hour. More than half of the respondents (53%) said social media negatively affects their mental health, 27% said it positively affects their mental health, and 20% were neutral.
- The majority (59%) of the respondents feels the peer pressure is an influencing stressor, 41% respondents do not get affected by peer pressure. More than half (55%) of respondents prefer talking to friends when facing emotional problems, while others rely on family or professionals.
- Most people (60%) prefer talking to friends, suggesting they rely on support from their peers. 52.5% turn to self-care, 42.5% to hobbies, 46% to sleep, and 37.5% to physical exercise, suggesting they prefer to cope through healthy routines. Meditation is somewhat popular amongst 30%, showing some interest in mindfulness. Professional support is used by the least 11%, which could mean there is stigma, limited access, or people simply prefer to handle things on their own.
- 75% of respondents believe they are moderately to highly resilient, meaning they can bounce back from difficulties. Also, 75% said that going through hard times has made them stronger, showing personal growth and adaptability. This indicates that challenges do not break them; instead, they help them learn and improve.

10. Suggestions

1. Individual-Level Strategies (Self & Personal Development): Many students already use helpful coping strategies, so it is important to encourage these habits. Promote self-care like proper sleep, exercise, hobbies, and mindfulness. Build skills like emotional control, adaptability, and problem-solving. Encourage balanced and mindful use of social media.

2. Peer and Social Support Systems: Because most students like to talk with friends, it is important to strengthen peer support. Start peer mentoring programs in college. Create buddy systems for new students to share their emotions and feelings. Help students learn basic emotional support and listening skills through regular counselling sessions. Organise team activities to reduce loneliness and build connections.

3. **Family Involvement:** Support from family plays a key role in student well-being. Conduct awareness programs on youth mental health for parents. Encourage open and supportive communication at home.
4. **Institutional-Level Interventions:** Colleges and other institutions can help lower stress and support students' well-being. Provide flexible deadlines and reduce academic pressure. Include mental health topics in the curriculum. Conduct stress management workshops at the commencement of each session. Offer counselling and online support services at the institute once/twice a week. Promote activities like yoga, sports, and recreation as a part of the curriculum.
5. **Socio-Economic Support Measures:** Financial and social challenges can also impact mental health. Provide financial literacy programs. Offer scholarships and part-time job opportunities. Create inclusive environments to reduce loneliness.
6. **Context-Specific Approaches:** Students have different needs, so support should be tailored to each situation. Urban: focus on digital stress and competition. Rural: improve awareness and access to services. Semi-urban: use a mix of both approaches.
7. **Policy-Level Recommendations:** There is also a need for broader support. Include youth mental health in education and health policies. Encourage partnerships between public and private sectors. Promote research linked to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

11. Conclusion

The study finds that today's young people show both vulnerability and strength in meaningful ways. The study found that many Gen Z members deal with mental health challenges such as academic stress, social media pressure, financial worries, and loneliness. Still, most are aware of their mental health and rate their well-being as average or good. This means that even with these challenges, they can manage daily life. A key concern from the study is that most participants spend several hours each day on social media, and over half say it harms their mental health. Peer pressure and academic expectations add to their stress, making these challenges even more complex. Many choose to talk to friends for support instead of professionals, which reflects strong social connections but may also mean there is stigma or other barriers to seeking professional help. The main finding is the strong resilience shown by Generation Z. Most believe they can bounce back from hard times, and many see challenges as opportunities to grow. They often use healthy coping methods like self-care, hobbies, getting enough sleep, and exercise to manage stress. The study suggests that building resilience takes effort at many levels. Individual actions need support from friends, family, schools, and policies. Schools can help by reducing academic pressure, raising mental health awareness, and offering easy-to-access counselling. With the right support, awareness, and policies aligned with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), their resilience can grow even stronger, helping them turn challenges into opportunities for personal growth and positive change in society.

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