



Mental health awareness Among Teens and the Role of Social Media in India

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ABSTRACT:

Mental health challenges have made a mark among teenagers in India, with ailments like depression and anxiety affecting a vast number. Per a study conducted by NIMHANS, a whopping 73 % of teenagers in India have mental woes that grew manifold with the coming of COVID-19. As such, social media has an ambivalent role in this context, being a contributor to mental health problems while raising awareness. India's teenage population is regularly exposed to social media, spending an amount of 3-4 hours daily on platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp. Though social media can serve as an avenue for self-expression and socializing, excessive use has been shown to correlate with more general anxiety, depression, and low self-worth. The outcomes of such phenomena as social comparison, cyberbullying, and social media addiction are detrimental to the mental health of teenagers. Nonetheless, social media acted as a vehicle for amplifying mental health awareness, with initiatives like #NotAlone deciding to facilitate open and honest discussions on one's emotional struggles. More online counsel and mental health resources are now available, extremely crucial in a country where conventional paths towards mental health care are scarce. None can ignore this dual-edged sword! What remains to be done is to take a thoughtful and balanced approach. Parents, educators, and policymakers can play a huge role to engage in social media awareness centered around parenting and digital literacy. At the same time, schools can introduce mental health education. Lawmakers must ensure safer online environments, as stakeholders help navigate teen minds through social media-dunes for better mental health and wellness.

KEYWORDS: Mental Health, Social Media, Teenagers, Instagram

INTRODUCTION:

As of recent times, mental health has become one of the most important aspects of well-being. Teenagers are perhaps the most susceptible category of people due to their stage of development that puts them at a high risk for facing a broad variety of emotional and psychological problems. The current world, particularly India has witnessed increased awareness on the issues of mental disorders caused by teenagers. This increased awareness has brought to the forefront the need to understand what contributes to adolescents' mental health. And one of the most significant factors that have come into prominence in this regard is social media. Social media has gradually become such an indispensable part of teenagers' lives today, providing connections and an opportunity to express themselves, but at the same time poses dangers which affect mental health. In order to understand the conjoint link between mental health awareness among the young generation and the role of social media, we need to go through some statistical trends and research findings of recent years.

India itself accounts for one-third of the global adolescent population with more than 253 million in the age group of 10-19 years. The average mental health of this population has been a matter of great concern for the whole world, as research has stated that Indian teenagers have been increasing their battle against mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and stress. According to NIMHANS in 2019, there is a figure of roughly 7.3% of India's teenagers who suffer from mental health issues. Most among them were found to be suffering from depression and anxiety.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these factors, thus elevating the reported number of cases of mental health problems among teenagers. A 2021 UNICEF and Gallup survey across 21 countries, including India, found that a fifth of young people said they felt depressed or had little interest in doing things. The same survey brings it forward that Indian teenager faced more stress and anxiety in the time of lock down due to academic pressure, family issues, and lack of socializing. It further brought the digital platform more into the center of teenagers' lives. Additionally, the pandemic increased the influence of social media on the mental health of teenagers even more. Being an inherent part of most Indian teens, social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok-which was extremely popular until 2020-became the most prominent. Based on the report from Statista, it was projected that up to 80% of Indian teenagers owned smartphones in 2021. Most of them spent at least 3 to 4 hours a day using social media. Despite all these advantages, heavy reliance on social media is a double-edged sword as it affords the opportunities for self-expression, learning, and exposing their peers to one another, but it also poses difficult challenges in the context of aspects related to self-esteem, body image, and cyberbullying.

From research, adolescence is a high victim group in the worst-case implication of social media against teenagers' mental wellbeing. A 2020 Indian Journal of Psychiatry study established a link between the overuse of social media and symptoms of anxiety and depression among Indian adolescents. In fact, the study found that when adolescents spent more than three hours a day on social media, they reported more feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem than did their peers who spent less time online. Exposure to very idealized images and lifestyles on the social media sites may even give unrealistic expectations, making the teenagers' self-view distorted. Despite having drawbacks, social media has also helped Indian teenagers create awareness about mental health issues. Mental health awareness is promoted by almost all of the social media platforms and their influencers to discuss anxiety, depression, and more importantly, self-care in open forums. Many of these initiatives and campaigns, such as World Mental Health Day, begun by influencers and organizations, have been taken largely across the platforms like Instagram and YouTube, thereby making it easier to reduce the stigma attached to mental health disorders.

There was a case of the #NotAlone campaign trending on social media back in India while during this pandemic, urging people to open up about their struggles with mental health. Such movements have helped normalize discussions around mental health, enabling teenagers to recognize their struggles and seek support. According to a 2022 Centre for the Study of Developing Societies study, nearly 60% of Indian teenagers reported that social media made them more aware of mental health issues and the importance of seeking help. Even online counseling and support groups via social media can offer teenagers a safe, anonymous place to converse about their problems. Mobile applications or chatbots providing psychological support also make it easy for them to find help. It's invaluable in India, where mental health services are often understaffed, especially in rural areas. According to NIMHANS' 2021 report, the ratio of mental health professionals to the population is as low as 1:10,000, which is why online sources are a much-needed supplement in addition to clinical mental health care.

Social media has enabled awareness and support, but it cannot be denied that such platforms have affected mental health negatively. The phenomenon of comparative disadvantage and anxiety has been commonplace among adolescents as they inevitably compare themselves to the portrayed, filtered lives of others through social media. The phenomenon of "social comparison" occurs very significantly among adolescents as they are in the process of developing their self-identity and are quite sensitive to social feedback. Cyberbullying is another serious problem that has been associated with social media use among teenagers. A report by Child Rights and You published in 2020 shows that 9 out of 10 teens experienced some form of cyberbullying, starting from abusive comments to threats and harassment. All these have seriously adverse effects on the mental health of a teenager, increasing their anxiety and depression, and in extreme cases, it leads to suicidal thoughts. This nature of anonymity in social media exacerbates the situation, and victims become unable to seek help and identify their tormentors. Social media design encourages addiction through mechanisms such as endless scrolling and auto-notifications, which can eventually cause disturbances in sleep patterns and decrease the amount of time spent interacting face-to-face among teenagers. A 2021 article published in the Journal of Adolescence presented research about the social media usage time of adolescent Indians and its relationship with sleep quality, stress levels, anxiety, and depression. Findings showed that those using more than five hours on social media reported lower qualities of sleep and greater levels of stress than those who rarely use it. The permanent availability and FOMO may heighten the likelihood of experiencing stress and pressure from others.

Against this backdrop, it is high time for Indian parents, educators, and policymakers to strike an appropriate balance to tackle the wide impact of social media on teenagers' mental health. It may not be possible to remove social media from the lives of adolescents but efforts towards responsible usage and digital literacy can be made by stakeholders. Educating teens on the dangers social media poses and ensuring that they communicate their anxieties or problems when they arise can help to cope with the adverse effects. Schools play a crucial role by teaching mental health in their school program to educate students, giving them stress management strategies on how to deal with pressure from social media. Teachers should also be trained to detect symptoms of mental issues and cyberbullying so that intervention is done promptly. According to a 2022 survey by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, schools that inducted mental health awareness programs found that bullying and anxiety cases in students declined by up to 30%. Policymakers will also play their part in shaping a safer digital environment for teenagers. The National Mental Health Programme can be extended to include digital mental health and its provisioning to teenagers as well as parents. Even stronger regulatory measures on the social media platforms to reduce the diffusion of hate messages and enhanced user privacy would contribute to a safer online environment for adolescents.

The relation with awareness of mental health issues in teenagers and the impact of social media is multifaceted and multi-directional. Being an increasingly powerful tool in bringing about awareness and conveying support, it also presents some serious risks to the minds of adolescents in India. This issue calls for a concerted effort by parents, educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers. With the same social media in balanced use and enhanced awareness about mental health, an environment can be created in which the teenagers will thrive both offline and online. For this goal-orientated approach toward the youth of India, this relationship needs to be understood more profoundly.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

1. Mental Health Interventions Among Adolescents in India: A Scoping Review

This study by Mehra et al. (2022) aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of mental health interventions for adolescents in India. The review identified 11 interventions over a decade, categorized into school-based, community-based, and digital programs. School-based interventions were the most effective, showing improvements in depression, anxiety, and stress management. Efforts in the community prevented substance use and violence, and digital interventions improved psychological functioning. The research reported a gap in rigorously tested programs and called for greater emphasis on study of interventions with relevance to the Indian context.

2. The PRIDE Program: A Lay Counsellor-Delivered, Problem-Solving Intervention

Michelson et al. (2020) tested, using a randomized controlled trial, an intervention of problem-solving through lay counselors in Indian low-income schools. 250 students with increased mental health symptoms were tested. The intervention showed a significant reduction in mental health distress compared to standard care with effects persisting over 12 weeks. The intervention, however, helped most those with milder symptoms. As encouraging as its findings were, the study drew attention to the use of longer-term follow-up and large implementation.

3. Leveraging Single-Session Interventions for Adolescent Mental Health in India

Wasil et al. (2020) tested the efficacy of computer-based, self-guided mental health interventions in Indian secondary schools. The interventions, created by expert consultation and pilot-tested in Goa, were designed to enhance adolescent mental well-being. Participants rated the content as engaging and helpful, suggesting the potential for such programs. Although promising, the study recommended randomized controlled trials to determine efficacy and generalizability to other test schools.

4. COVID-19 and India's Adolescent Mental Health

Patra and Patro (2020) discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of Indian teenagers. The lockdowns created heightened loneliness, stress, and anxiety as a result of pressure at school, home problems, and social seclusion. The paper recommended training frontline workers, parents, and educators to detect red flags in mental health. The paper also noted the role of digital mental health services to address teenagers in times of crises.

5. Child Marriage and Adolescent Girls' Mental Health: A Longitudinal Study

Aggarwal et al. (2023) examined the association between child marriage and mental health in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The authors tracked 2,425 girls aged 12-19 years and found that poor mental health predicted early marriage. Girls with high distress levels at baseline were 61% more likely to be married early. The results indicated that mental health needs to be incorporated into child marriage prevention interventions to benefit vulnerable girls.

6. Sustained Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness of a Lay Counsellor-Delivered Intervention

Malik et al. (2021) investigated the long-term effect and cost-effectiveness of the PRIDE problem-solving intervention. Symptom severity for participants remained lower than that of the control group at 12 months. The intervention cost \$4 per unit reduction in symptom scale, rendering it an acceptable low-resource setting option. It was concluded that scaling up this intervention had the potential to close the gap in mental health treatment among adolescents.

7. Screening Adolescent Girls in Gujarat for Common Mental Health Issues

Mangal et al. (2020) also studied mental health problems among school-going adolescent girls in Gujarat. Applying the GHQ-12 screening instrument, they identified 45.2% of the participants as showing signs of mental distress. The risk factors were low maternal education, working mothers, physical inactivity, and excessive use of social media. Regular mental health screening in schools and social media risk awareness campaigns were suggested in the study.

8. Development of a Multi-Problem Mental Health Intervention With a Stepped Care Approach

Chorpita et al. (2020) outlined the development of a transdiagnostic intervention for Indian adolescents. This intervention combined low-intensity problem-solving therapy with high-intensity cognitive-behavioral therapy. Developed by expert consultation and local adaptation, the strategy allowed for tailored mental health care according to symptom severity. While promising, the study did not have data on clinical effectiveness and needed further trials.

9. Prevalence and Predictors of Mental Health Disorders Among Slum-Dwelling Adolescents in Lucknow

Chauhan and Dhar (2020) evaluated mental disorder prevalence among urban slum adolescents in Lucknow. A 14.7% prevalence of mental disorders was reported, with anxiety being the most prevalent (6.7%). The risk factors were female gender, illiteracy, big family size, and nuclear family backgrounds. The study emphasized the necessity of specific mental health interventions among marginalized populations.

10. Stigma for Mental Health Issues among Indian Young People: Systematic Review

Gaiha et al. (2020) conducted a review of 14 studies on stigma of mental health among Indian youth. They identified moderate to high stigma, in the form of negative attitudes, stereotypes, and social distance desires. Low awareness of mental health was the most significant contributing factor. The review recommended education campaigns, youth programs, and policy reforms to decrease stigma and promote help-seeking behavior.

11. Mental Illness Issues and Effect on Young Minds During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Nathiya et al. (2020) carried out a cross-sectional online survey of 1,000 Indian youth between the ages of 15-30 to evaluate the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research identified high levels of depression (30.5%), anxiety (22.4%), and stress (10.8%), with females and individuals who had COVID-19 symptoms showing higher levels of distress. The research highlighted how increased social media use during the lockdown exacerbated mental health issues. However, the study was limited to social media users, indicating potential selection bias. The authors recommended longitudinal research to understand long-term effects and targeted mental health interventions for at-risk youth.

12. Impact of Social Media on the Mental Health of Adolescents

Kaur et al. (2022) studied the two-sided impact of social media on the mental health of Indian adolescents. While social media sites such as Instagram and WhatsApp enabled connection, self-expression, and peer support, overuse resulted in higher risks of anxiety, depression, cyberbullying, and sleep problems. The research highlighted that social media addiction has a high correlation with adverse mental health consequences. Though thought-provoking, the study considered only India and did not conduct long-term impact evaluations. The authors recommended establishing guidelines for the balanced use of social media and further studying its psychological implications.

13. Contribution of Social Media to Increased Agricultural Development Among Youth Farmers

Singh et al. (2021) examined the impact of social media on agricultural activity among youth farmers in India. The research established that 27% of the participants had reported growing acreage for crops as a result of data accessed via social media. Digital media was fundamental to knowledge-sharing, enhancing agricultural productivity, and promoting produce. Nevertheless, the sample might not have been fully representative of every Indian farmer. The research advocated for further study in order to maximize social media application in the agricultural industry as well as enhancing digital literacy levels among rural youths.

14. Influence of Media on Society

Agarwal et al. (2022) examined the overall effect of media, especially social media, on Indian society. The research debated how online platforms define cultural values, drive tourism, and impact education. One of the key findings was the influence of social media in propagating Western cultural influences and transforming social norms in India. Although the paper presented an overall summary, there was no empirical evidence. The authors recommended more research on certain media effects, like misinformation and online addiction, to learn more about social changes.

15. Social Media and Adolescent Well-Being in the Global South

Ghai et al. (2022) comprehensively reviewed research on social media's influence on adolescent well-being in developing nations, including India. The review identified mixed effects—social media facilitated peer support and online learning, but also cyberbullying, body image issues, and mental illnesses. Cultural and economic variables determined the significant impact of social media on adolescents in the Global South. The review emphasized the necessity for more context-specific studies since most current research is conducted on Western populations.

16. Indian Students' Attitude towards Use of Social Media in E-Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic

Sobaih et al. (2022) discussed Indian students' attitudes towards the usage of social media for learning through the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample of 388 students showed through the survey that YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram were widely employed for learning on the internet. Although social media increased participation and sharing of information, students expressed distractions and compromised productivity. The research involved students with online access, who may not constitute all learners fully. The writers suggested incorporating social media into proper e-learning portals for improved student results

17. "Millennial India": Global Digital Politics in Context

Udupa et al. (2020) investigated the way social media has revolutionized political participation by Indian youth. The article had contended that online platforms have given rise to new ways of activism and self-expression but have also entrenched the existing social cleavages. The research examined how social media impacted political rhetoric, especially in elections and social movements. But it was a theoretical exercise and not an empirical research. The authors had recommended more research on the long-term impact of online activism on Indian political culture.

18. The Role of Social Media among Children and Adolescents: Possible Risks

Bozzola et al. (2022) carried out a scoping review of 40 studies that analyzed the dangers of social media use among children and adolescents. The research revealed some of the concerns, such as addiction, cyberbullying, exposure to obscene content, and adverse effects on mental health and sleep. Even though informative, the review was not India-specific. The authors suggested education programs to ensure safe social media usage among youth and parents.

19. Stigma Associated with Mental Health Problems Among Young People in India: A Systematic Review

Gaiha et al. (2020) meta-analyzed evidence for stigma of mental health in Indian youth and reviewed 20 studies. Stigma was a significant deterrent to mental health care, and most youth felt stigmatized by negative stereotypes and social rejection. Paradoxically, social media contributed to stigma by spreading false information but also served as a medium for awareness drives for mental health. The research advocated for culturally adapted anti-stigma programs in India.

20. Social Media Impact on EFL Yemeni Students in Indian Universities During COVID-19

Altam (2020) investigated how Yemeni students in Indian universities employed social media for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media enhanced language proficiency and cross-cultural understanding, according to the findings. The use of a small population and international students for the study meant that its implications were not expansive. The study advised incorporating social media into formal language programs for improved learning.

21. Mental Health Literacy among Children and Adolescents in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Systematic Review

Renwick et al. (2024) carried out a systematic review reviewing mental health literacy among adolescents and children in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The study revealed that levels of knowledge of mental health illnesses and support services were low overall. Stigma and cultural values were major inhibiting factors preventing adolescents from access to help. The research underscored the importance of culturally modified interventions to enhance mental health literacy. Nevertheless, the research was undermined by the shortage of high-standard studies in numerous LMICs, such as India.

22. Stigma Related to Mental Health Issues in Young People in India: A Systematic Review

Gaiha et al. (2020) conducted a review of 20 mental health stigma studies among young people in India. The studies revealed that stigma was prevalent, which caused social isolation and not seeking professional help. Social media emerged as both a hindrance and an aid from the review—misinformation fueled stigma, but platforms also allowed awareness campaigns. The authors suggested multi-level stigma reduction interventions like mental health education and policy modification to promote help-seeking behavior in adolescents.

23. Mental Health Interventions in Indian Adolescents: A Scoping Review

Mehra et al. (2022) evaluated the efficacy of mental health interventions among adolescents in India. The review found 11 interventions, ranging from school-based to community-based and digital interventions. School-based programs showed the most promise, reducing depression, anxiety, and stress management. Nevertheless, the research observed a shortage of rigorously tested interventions. The authors highlighted a need for more research on mental health programs specifically tailored for Indian adolescents.

24. The PRIDE Program: A Lay Counsellor-Delivered, Problem-Solving Intervention for Adolescents

Michelson et al. (2020) implemented a randomized controlled trial to assess the PRIDE program, a problem-solving intervention program for adolescents in low-income Indian schools. The trial had 250 students and reported significant symptom reduction in mental health compared to the usual care. The intervention was facilitated by lay counselors, and it is cost-effective in low-resource environments. The trial suggested scaling up this intervention while also determining its long-term effectiveness in improving adolescent mental health.

25. Mental Health Literacy in Pakistan: A Narrative Review

Begum et al. (2020) conducted a review of literature on mental health literacy in Pakistan, making comparisons with the situation in India. Misconceptions regarding mental illnesses were prevalent, even among medical professionals, according to the study. Poor awareness and stigma prevented adolescents from seeking help. The review emphasized the need for countrywide mental health education campaigns and the inclusion of mental health literacy programs in school curricula. Although informative, the research was based mainly on Pakistan, calling for equivalent research in the Indian setting.

26. Experimental Evaluation of a School-Based Mental Health Literacy Program in Southeast Asia

Nguyen et al. (2020) evaluated a school-based mental health literacy program implemented in Vietnam and Cambodia. The quasi-experimental study assessed students' knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking intentions before and after the intervention. Results showed significant improvements in mental health literacy, particularly in Cambodia. However, the study lacked a control group, limiting its ability to establish causality. The authors recommended further research on the long-term effectiveness of such programs in different cultural contexts.

27. Adolescent Menstrual Health Literacy Across Income Groups: A Narrative Review

Holmes et al. (2021) examined menstrual health literacy in adolescents from low-, middle-, and high-income countries. Poor menstrual health literacy was linked to poor mental health outcomes and stigma, the research discovered. The research pointed to the necessity of holistic health education interventions addressing both mental and physical health. Although the research was helpful, it concentrated more on trends worldwide than specifically on India.

28. Health Literacy Interventions in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Review

Meherali et al. (2020) reviewed the efficacy of health literacy interventions in LMICs. The review indicated that culturally adapted and community-based programs were most effective in enhancing health knowledge and behaviors. The research indicated that embedding mental health literacy within larger health education programs may be effective for adolescents. It, however, stressed that high-quality evaluation was necessary to ascertain the long-term effects of the interventions.

29. Development of a Transdiagnostic Psychological Intervention for Indian Adolescents

Michelson et al. (2020) outlined the development of a low-intensity, transdiagnostic intervention for anxiety, depression, and conduct problems in Indian adolescents. The intervention was developed via expert consultation and stakeholder input to ensure cultural appropriateness. Although promising, its efficacy had not yet been tested. The study urged randomized controlled trials to determine its effect on adolescent mental health.

30. Health Literacy in Schools: A Systematic Review of Interventions for Disadvantaged Adolescents

Smith et al. (2021) synthesized school-based health literacy programs for disadvantaged youth in various health contexts. Multi-component interventions with both mental and physical health components were the most effective, according to the study. Although the result had implications for Indian adolescents, the research focused mainly on interventions globally. More culturally tailored health literacy programs for low-income adolescents were suggested by the authors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

To study the “MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG TEENS IN INDIA”. The research methodology involved is a comprehensive literature review of existing research on mental health and its impact. The articles were evaluated based on their relevance and quality of evidence to the question, online questionnaire was developed by using google forms. The prepared links were sent to the parents of teenagers through WhatsApp for an online survey. The link of the survey was email verified to avoid multiple responses from parents. The data collected from the survey was used for further analysis:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY APPLIED:

This research was done through a Google form survey where the respondents were parents who have kids belonging to the age group of 13-19 years.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

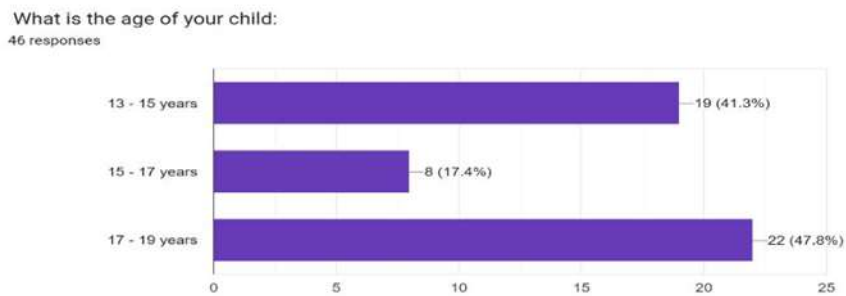


Table 1: Shows the age wise classification of respondents selected for the study. With maximum of respondents having kids belonging to the age of 17-19 years of age, followed by 13-15 years of age and then by 15-17 years of age.

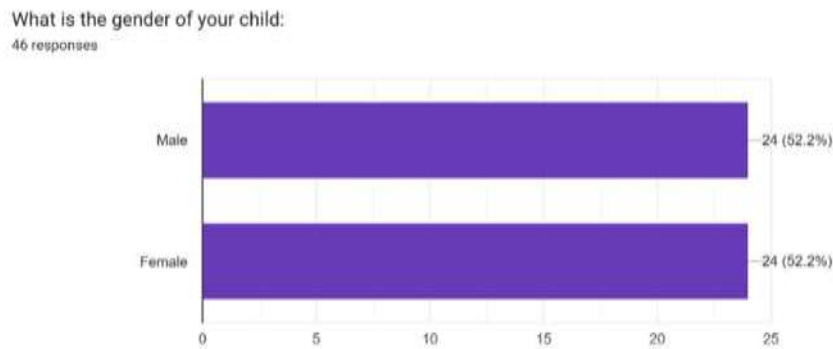


Table 2: reveals the gender wise classification of the respondents selected for the study.



Table 3: shows that almost 39% of respondents don't discuss about mental health with their child.

Are you aware of the potential risks of self-harm or suicide-related content on social media?

46 responses

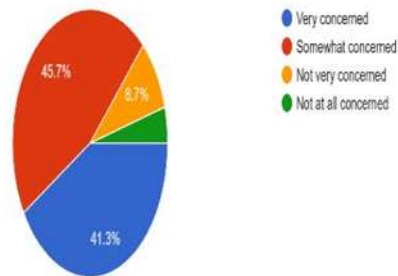


Table 4: shows that nearly 90% of respondents are aware about the potential risks of self-harm content on social media.

Do you believe social media platforms contribute to increased anxiety or depression in teenagers?

46 responses

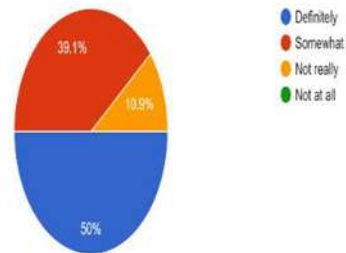


Table 5: reveals that 50% of the respondents contribute to increased anxiety or depression in teenagers.

Have you observed any changes in your child's behavior or mood that you attribute to social media use?

46 responses

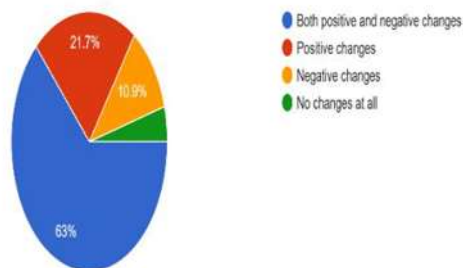


Table 6: reveals that nearly 63% of the respondents feels that social media changes child's behaviour or mood.

Do you believe schools in India provide adequate mental health support and education for teenagers?
46 responses

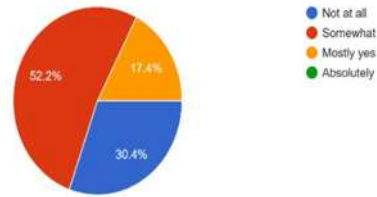


Table 7: shows that 52% of respondents feels that schools in India provide adequate mental health support and education followed by 31% of respondents believe that its not provided.

Have you ever sought professional mental health support for your child?
45 responses

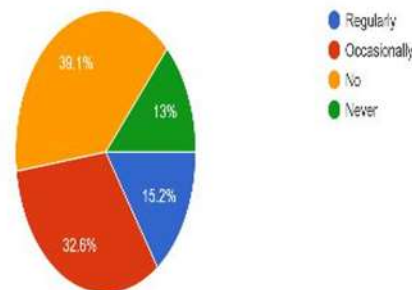


Table 8: reveals that nearly 50% of respondents never thought about professional mental health support for their child.

FINDINGS:

- Parental Awareness and Discussions-** The research indicates that many parents rarely engage in conversations about mental health with their teenagers. A lack of awareness about common issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress prevent open discussions at home. In many cases, parents either underestimate the severity of these conditions or believe that their children can overcome them without external support. This gap in communication leaves teenagers without the necessary guidance and emotional support they need to navigate their mental well-being.
- Perception of Mental Health Issues-** Mental health issues among teenagers are often misunderstood by parents, with some viewing them as temporary phases rather than serious concerns. The stigma surrounding mental health further discourages families from addressing these topics openly. Many parents hold the belief that seeking help is unnecessary or that discussing such issues might encourage negative thinking. This perception not only isolates teenagers but also prevents them from seeking the help they need at a critical stage in their development.
- Role of social media-** social media has emerged as a double-edged sword in shaping teenage mental health. On one hand, it provides access to supportive communities and mental health resources, allowing teenagers to learn more about their struggles. On the other hand, it exposes them to cyberbullying, unrealistic beauty standards, and constant social comparisons, all of which contribute to increased stress and anxiety. The research suggests that many teenagers turn to social media as their primary source of mental health information rather than seeking guidance from parents or professionals.
- Need for Awareness Programs-** The findings highlight the urgent need for awareness programs aimed at educating parents on the importance of mental health discussions with their children. Schools and community organizations should take an active role in promoting mental health literacy, ensuring that both teenagers and their families have access to reliable information. By fostering an environment where mental health is openly discussed and understood, these programs can help bridge the communication gap between parents and teenagers, leading to better emotional support at home.
- Seeking Professional Help-** Despite the increasing prevalence of mental health concerns among teenagers, many parents hesitate to seek professional help due to social stigma and misconceptions about therapy. Those who acknowledge the need for support often struggle with accessibility and affordability of mental health services. The reluctance to engage with professional resources leaves teenagers without proper intervention, worsening their mental health over time. Encouraging a cultural shift toward accepting therapy and counselling as normal aspects of well-being is essential in addressing this issue.

RESEARCH GAP:

Even with mounting consciousness, the mental health challenge among Indian youth is still less addressed because various systemic and social challenges exist. Some of these challenges and gaps in mental health consciousness and reach are discussed here. Mental issues are viewed by many as an indication of being weak or even a family honour issue. Indian parents and teachers tend to focus more on academic success at the expense of emotional well-being, which ignores teenage mental health. Teenagers are reluctant to seek help owing to stigma and fear of judgments from their peers, families, or society. Most Indian schools do not have a well-defined mental health curriculum, resulting in students having no idea about mental health and coping skills. Teachers lack the training needed to recognize mental illnesses, which causes intervention to occur late. Schools prioritize academic achievement over emotional well-being, elevating stress and anxiety levels among students. India lacks mental health professionals, with a mere 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 individuals (WHO, 2022). The absence of counsellors in schools results in students having little or no access to immediate psychological support. Rural regions are even worse off, with few mental health facilities and trained professionals. Despite the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017, where mental health is included as a basic right, the implementation is poor. Government initiatives such as the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) are present, but there is not enough funding and implementation. Mental health digital initiatives are not scaled properly, making it difficult for teens to access them. Social media helps to spread awareness, but along with it, misinformation regarding mental health treatments and self-diagnosis is also spread. Influencer-based content sometimes encourages unhealthy coping strategies over evidence-based interventions. Social media creates unrealistic beauty and success ideals, resulting in anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression. Mental health services in private facilities are costly, and therapy is thus out of reach for most middle-class and poor families. Government hospitals and clinics providing free or low-cost mental health services are usually overcrowded and underfunded. Parents are not aware of the signs and symptoms of mental health, attributing their children's challenges to mood swings or being immature. In traditional homes, it is not acceptable to talk about feelings, with adolescents left without any support network. Cyberbullying, online harassment, and social media obsession lead to stress and anxiety, but parents and teachers do not know how to handle them. Cyberbullying victims frequently do not have adequate avenues to report and access mental health counselling.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Solving the mental health awareness problems and providing care to Indian teenagers involves addressing problems from various directions by involving schools, government, online platforms, and society. The following solutions and recommendations shall be able to bridge the gap. Colleges and schools must organize mental health awareness programs and open forums to get students to open about their problems without fear of judgment. Celebrities, influencers, and public figures must keep raising awareness about mental health to shatter social stigmas. Organize workshops for parents to make them aware of how to identify mental health symptoms and offer emotional support to their children. Promote open parent-teen communication regarding mental health problems at home. Include mental health education, stress management, and emotional intelligence in school curriculums from an early age. Incorporate psychological well-being as part of life skills education along with academics. Educate teachers and school staff to identify early warning signs of anxiety, depression, and stress among students. Implement school counselling services with at least one trained psychologist for every school. Invest in training more mental health professionals, especially for rural and school areas. Provide incentives for working in underserved areas. Increase online mental health services, bringing therapy and counselling within reach via government-supported apps or platforms. Schools and universities may collaborate with mental health organizations to provide free or subsidized virtual counselling sessions. Increase funding to execute mental health services in schools, colleges, and public health institutions. Integrate digital mental health literacy programs in government programs. Enhance and enhance 24/7 helplines exclusively for teenagers suffering from stress, depression, or cyberbullying. Better reach existing helplines through social media awareness campaigns. Educate students in schools on healthy social media use, internet safety, and effective screen time management. Get teens to observe "digital detox" days to minimize excessive social media usage. Impose harsher cyberbullying regulations and content filtering on social media websites. Implement mental health awareness notifications and support links for distressed users on tech platforms. Increase affordable psychological and therapy support services at government hospitals and clinics. Collaborate with NGOs and private mental health institutions to offer subsidized counselling services. Maintain in-school mental health professionals to conduct free counselling sessions. Provide regular mental health checkups for children to detect early warning signs of distress. Conduct parental workshops to educate families to detect signs of distress and assist their teenagers. Promote a healthy home environment where adolescents feel secure talking about emotional issues. Engage NGOs and community organizations in conducting awareness campaigns regarding teen mental health. Local youth clubs and groups can conduct peer-support programs for teens with mental health problems. Enforce the IT Act more strongly to shield teenagers from cyberbullying and harassment. Initiate school and college campaigns to make students aware of reporting cyberbullying incidents. Ensure that social media platforms have more robust reporting mechanisms for cyberbullying and mental health issues. Encourage content creators to tell positive mental health stories.

GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES:

The government of India, educational institutions, and private organizations have made various efforts to tackle mental health awareness, particularly among adolescents. Nevertheless, there is still a need for improvement. Some of the major government and institutional initiatives towards addressing mental health concerns and raising awareness are discussed below. The NMHP was instituted to deliver mental health care services that are available and affordable at all locations throughout India. It emphasizes making mental health care services an integral part of primary healthcare and capacity building among medical professionals for identifying and treating mental illness. The District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) (1996) seeks to promote mental health care in rural populations by posting mental health professionals in the districts. DMHP consists of public awareness campaigns, early identification

of mental health conditions, and community-based counselling. The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, grants the right to mental care to all citizens and decriminalizes suicide. It ensures people with mental conditions get treatment on a non-discriminatory basis. It makes it obligatory for hospitals to have mental professionals on staff and affordable treatment accessible. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched Kiran, a 24/7 national helpline (1800-599-0019) for people experiencing mental health emergencies, including adolescents. It offers psychological counselling, distress management, and counselling in several Indian languages. The Ministry of Education launched the Manodarpan initiative under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan to take care of the mental health and well-being of students. It provides a mental health helpline, self-help materials, and web-based counselling services for college and school students. Schools are urged to incorporate mental wellness programs to help students emotionally. India became one of the world's first countries to have a national-level suicide prevention strategy. The plan entails decreasing the suicide rate by improving mental health care, training community health workers, and controlling social media content regarding self-harm. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights mental health awareness and emotional well-being at school. Numerous CBSE and ICSE schools have implemented mental health education, mindfulness sessions, and stress management workshops. There are some private and public schools that have in-house psychologists and counsellors now. Universities such as Delhi University, IITs, and IIMs have mental health cells where students can be provided with help for coping with academic stress and emotional stress. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has sent out guidelines to schools to train teachers to recognize mental health problems in students. Schools are also doing mental health first-aid training to empower teachers to address students' mental issues. The Live Love Laugh Foundation (initiated by Deepika Padukone) conducts nationwide mental health campaigns and offers free resources for adolescents. Snehi provides guidance counselling for students at schools and facilitates mental health awareness in rural India. Vandrevala Foundation operates a 24/7 helpline providing free mental well-being support for students and youths. EdTech websites such as Byju's, Unacademy, and Coursera have begun to provide mental wellness support for learners through meditation sessions and stress relief workshops. Corporate organizations such as TCS and Infosys have implemented employee mental wellness programs that indirectly impact adolescents whose parents work in these corporations. The IITs, AIIMS, and IIMs institutions have introduced peer support schemes and free counselling centres to assist the students in reducing academic stress. Campaigns such as #NotAlone, #ItsOkToTalk, and #EndTheStigma on Twitter and Instagram inspire conversations about mental health. YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn platforms offer mental health webinars with a psychologist and a celebrity. Free telemedicine consultations are provided by government-supported mental health apps such as e-Sanjeevani. Private apps such as Wysa, Mindhouse, and YourDOST provide expert and AI-based mental health assistance to adolescents.

CONCLUSION:

Teenagers' mental health awareness in India has become a major concern over the past few years, particularly with the growing power of social media. While social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp create an arena for self-expression and awareness campaigns, they also account for growing instances of anxiety, depression, cyberbullying, and social comparison. Studies show that excessive use of social media adversely affects teenagers' mental health, and thus it is essential to balance its advantages and disadvantages. Despite initiatives taken by the government, schools, and mental health organizations, areas of disability in accessibility, affordability, and social stigma around mental health care still exist. Initiatives such as the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP), Manodarpan, and the Mental Healthcare Act (2017) have ensured that support is made available, yet the lack of mental health professionals and consciousness in rural areas persists. Efforts by NGOs and online forums have bridged the gap partially, but efforts need to be more organized. It needs an effort by everyone involved, namely parents, educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. There should be an incorporation of mental health education at schools, stricter digital safety legislations need to be enforced by policymakers, and parents need to promote responsible usage of social media. By encouraging healthy online spaces and open conversations, India can forge a resilient digital generation in which young people know they are confident enough to request help and guard their own wellness. An honest and balanced model is necessary if social media can be made useful for awareness but not distressing.

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