



New Trends
in Psychology

An Overview of Generation Z's Mental Health

Brigitte Popa¹

Abstract: The mental health of Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, has become a central concern in modern psychology. This age group is facing a multitude of risk factors that impact their psychological well-being. This article provides an overview of the primary mental health disorders affecting today's youth, including anxiety, depression, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The exploration of these conditions is grounded in an understanding of the unique external and internal pressures faced by Generation Z, such as economic uncertainty, rapid social changes, and educational challenges. The objective of this paper is to elucidate how these three mental health disorders impact both daily functioning and the personal and professional development of young people, as well as to identify effective resources and support strategies to reduce symptomatology and promote resilience. Furthermore, the importance of mental health education and early intervention is highlighted, as these play a crucial role in preventing the chronicity of these conditions and supporting a generation capable of reaching its full potential.

Keywords: mental health; generation Z; anxiety; depression; ADHD

¹ Student, Faculty of Behavioural and Applied Sciences, Danubius International University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., 800654 Galati, Romania, Corresponding author: afterschool.ace@gmail.com.



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors.
Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY NC) license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

1. Introduction

Generation Z, also known as “digital natives”, encompasses individuals born roughly between 1997 and 2012, characterized by their high adaptability to a rapidly evolving digital world (Twenge, 2017). This generation has been shaped by a complex socio-cultural context, marked by increased exposure to digital media, economic uncertainties, and rapid global changes, which have molded their perspectives on life and personal choices (Pew Research Center, 2019). Despite having extensive access to information and resources, the prevalence of mental health disorders among this generation has significantly increased in recent years, highlighting the need for heightened attention in the field of mental health. Among the most common disorders among this generation are anxiety, depression, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Anxiety, characterized by constant feelings of worry and tension, profoundly affects young people’s ability to adapt and function daily, and its prevalence has substantially increased over the past decade, particularly among adolescents (Bandelow & Michaelis, 2015). Depression, an affliction characterized by persistent feelings of sadness and a loss of interest in daily activities, is also commonly found among Generation Z, impacting both self-esteem and physical health (WHO, 2017). ADHD, a neurodevelopmental disorder manifested by problems with focus, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, is increasingly prevalent among young people, significantly impacting both academic performance and social relationships (APA, 2013).

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), Generation Z individuals exhibit a higher propensity to report mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, compared to previous generations. A 2022 survey of 1055 adults from this generation revealed that one in four participants experienced more bad days than good days in a month.

As such, it can be asserted that anxiety and depression are the most prevalent mental health conditions among Generation Z, with nine out of ten individuals being diagnosed with anxiety and eight out of ten suffering from depression. Generation Z is also more open to discussing mental health; a third of them post about their mental state on social media and seek therapy, being willing to personally cover the costs of psychological care. However, despite being more comfortable in expressing their mental health concerns, young people from Generation Z face alarming rates of

anxiety, depression, and other health issues, underscoring the need for increased attention and effective support solutions.

2. Generation Z and the Current Socio-Cultural Context

Generation Z, also known as “digital natives”, comprises individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012, a period characterized by rapid and complex global changes. Unlike previous generations, they have grown up in a digital era and have been exposed to technology, information, and online interactions from a young age, significantly influencing their emotional and social development. Studies suggest that Generation Z individuals are more aware of social issues and mental health and tend to adopt an open attitude toward identity, personal values, and overall well-being (Twenge, 2017).

Socio-economic pressures. Generation Z has developed in an uncertain economic climate, marked by the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have amplified anxiety about financial and professional stability. Many young people have experienced, both directly and indirectly, financial difficulties due to the impact of these economic pressures on their families, contributing to increased levels of stress and uncertainty about their future (OECD, 2020).

Technological changes. As the first “digital natives,” Generation Z has had continuous access to the internet and social media, which has influenced both positively and negatively their social and emotional development. Studies show that constant exposure to the online environment can lead to anxiety and feelings of inadequacy, especially through frequent social comparisons (Twenge et al., 2019).

Climate change. Generation Z has been deeply affected by environmental issues, often experiencing “eco-anxiety” related to the uncertain future of the planet. Aware of the global ecological crisis, many young people feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility for environmental protection (Clayton, 2020).

Uncertainty about the future. The increasingly competitive job market and rapid technological changes have heightened the professional uncertainty of Generation Z. The need to adapt to new market demands, such as digitalization, has put significant pressure on young people, increasing stress levels related to career and stability (ILO, 2021).

3. Most Common Mental Health Disorders among Generation Z

The mental health of Generation Z has been profoundly influenced by the specific socio-cultural and economic conditions of this era. Anxiety, depression, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are three of the most commonly reported mental health disorders among young people in this generation. Each of these conditions presents unique manifestations and factors that contribute to their increased prevalence.

Anxiety is one of the most widespread mental health disorders among Generation Z, characterized by persistent states of excessive worry, tension, and restlessness. These young people face a wide range of factors that contribute to the intensification of anxiety, such as economic uncertainties, educational pressures, and the fear of building a career in an unpredictable professional environment. Constant exposure to social media plays a significant role in increasing anxiety, as young people are often subjected to social comparisons and the pressure to present an idealized image of their own lives.

Studies show that anxiety can significantly affect young people's daily functioning, from their ability to concentrate and academic performance to their personal relationships. It can also lead to physical symptoms such as muscle tension, difficulty breathing, and insomnia, worsening the overall well-being of Generation Z individuals (APA, 2021).

Depression is another common condition among Generation Z, characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, apathy, and a loss of interest in daily activities. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z young people seem to be more affected by feelings of isolation and social pressures, partly due to exposure to social media and constant comparisons to others.

Social isolation, amplified by the pandemic and limitations on face-to-face interactions, has exacerbated symptoms of depression among young people. Depression has a profound impact on daily life, affecting the ability to establish meaningful relationships and perform in academic settings. Common symptoms include lack of energy, low self-esteem, and, in severe cases, suicidal thoughts. Data shows that depression is present in approximately 8 out of 10 young people diagnosed with a mental disorder, thus highlighting the need for specialized intervention and support (NIMH, 2022).

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurobehavioral disorder manifested by difficulties with concentration, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Young people from Generation Z diagnosed with ADHD often experience difficulties organizing their activities, focusing their attention, and maintaining a consistent pace in academic and social tasks.

The behavioral disorder ADHD significantly influences academic performance, especially in structured school environments where sustained attention and adherence to strict rules are required. In addition to the impact on academic activities, ADHD also affects interpersonal relationships, as young people may have difficulty maintaining stable and positive interactions. In a context where academic and social pressures are increasing, ADHD represents a major obstacle in adapting to the demands of Generation Z (CDC, 2022).

Recent statistics highlight a worrying frequency of mental health problems among Generation Z, confirming that this group is one of the most affected in terms of mental disorders. According to a 2022 survey by the American Psychological Association (APA), approximately 25% of young people from Generation Z reported having more “bad” days than “good” days in a month, a significant indicator of their well-being. Of this group, 90% mentioned suffering from anxiety, and 80% stated that they are struggling with depression, suggesting that these two conditions are among the most common and have a profound impact on daily life.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the percentage of young people diagnosed with anxiety and depression disorders has increased significantly in the last decade. For example, NIMH data shows that the prevalence of anxiety disorders among young people aged 18 to 25 is over 30% higher compared to previous generations, indicating an alarming increase in this condition. Additionally, a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that depression rates have increased by 63% among high school and college students in the last 10 years, a statistic that reflects the amplification of social and academic pressures.

ADHD is also increasingly diagnosed among Generation Z, being identified in approximately 13% of young people between the ages of 18 and 25, according to CDC data (2022). This disorder significantly affects the academic and social life of those diagnosed, impacting the ability to concentrate, organize tasks, and establish stable relationships. The increase in ADHD diagnoses among Generation Z can be explained both by a greater awareness of symptoms and increased access to

diagnosis, as well as by the rapid changes in the educational and professional environment, which require constant attention and adaptation.

3.1. Contributing Factors to the Vulnerability of Generation Z

The vulnerability of Generation Z has been fueled by a range of social, economic, and educational factors that have exerted constant pressure on young people.

A perspective on the vulnerability of Generation Z brings into discussion a crucial factor - the role of the family and its stability in the development of mental health and social behavior. The lack of family involvement in children's education and emotional development has contributed to their increased vulnerability. The growing number of broken families, along with the absence of a stable and secure home environment, often leaves young people without consistent emotional support and clear guidelines for behavior.

The absence of healthy social norms and values transmitted by the family can lead to difficulties in social integration and increased sensitivity to social and economic pressures. In this context, Generation Z is more likely to seek emotional support from other sources, such as the online environment, and has become more vulnerable to external influences. This situation highlights the need for educational and support programs that can, to some extent, compensate for the lack of a stable family environment and provide young people with the resources needed to develop in a psychologically and socially healthy manner.

Generation Z faces high expectations regarding academic and professional success, expectations for which they have not been prepared. The current educational environment imposes high academic performance and intense involvement in extracurricular activities to ensure competitiveness in the job market. Constant pressure to achieve excellence can increase the risk of anxiety and depression, while generating fears of failure and low self-esteem (APA, 2021).

Access to information and the stigmatization of mental health. Generation Z has unprecedented access to information, especially through digital technology and social networks. While this increased access has led to a greater awareness of mental health issues, it can also have negative effects. Constant exposure to information about mental health, diagnosis, and symptoms can exacerbate anxiety about one's own well-being. At the same time, the stigma associated with mental health remains

a significant barrier, preventing many young people from seeking help for fear of being judged or marginalized (NIMH, 2022).

3.2. Resources for Supporting Mental Health

For Generation Z individuals, psychological interventions tailored to their specific needs can make a significant difference in managing mental health conditions. Among the therapeutic techniques successfully used are cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps young people recognize and change their negative thought patterns, and mindfulness-based therapy, which promotes stress reduction by focusing on the present moment and managing anxiety. In addition, group therapies and solution-focused brief therapy have also proven useful for Generation Z youth, providing them with a space to share common experiences and develop coping skills (APA, 2021).

Mental health education plays a vital role in reducing stigma and encouraging young people to seek help when they are struggling. Educational programs in schools and universities, which include open discussions about mental health, early signs of disorders, and coping strategies, contribute to creating a supportive and open environment. By improving access to information and resources, these programs can reduce the fear and shame associated with seeking help and encourage young people to take steps to maintain their psychological well-being (NAMI, 2021).

Generation Z is very familiar with using technology, and digital resources play a crucial role in supporting mental health. Online platforms, such as mental health apps, provide young people with access to self-assessment tools, mindfulness exercises, and stress management techniques. Additionally, virtual support communities, such as discussion groups and online forums, provide a space where young people can share their experiences and find support in an anonymous and safe manner. These resources offer quick and convenient access to support, being particularly useful for young people who are more reluctant to access traditional mental health services (WHO, 2021).

4. Conclusion

Generation Z is facing an unprecedented mental health crisis, marked by an alarming increase in anxiety, depression, and other emotional disorders. Social, academic, and

technological pressures are placing immense strain on the mental health of Generation Z. To build a healthier and more resilient future, it is essential to invest in prevention programs, promote a culture of mental health in schools and communities, and provide young people with access to quality mental health services. Through a multidisciplinary approach and the collaboration of all stakeholders—parents, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers—we can help Generation Z overcome their challenges and develop their full potential. By investing in prevention, education, and support programs, we can help Generation Z overcome their challenges and build a brighter future.

It is our responsibility to create an environment where young people feel safe to talk about their problems and receive the help they need.

References

- *** (2019). Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues, but Stands Out in Voting Behavior. *Pew Research Center*.
- *** (2020). How Generation Z is Changing the Face of Mental Health Care. *National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)*.
- *** (2021). The Impact of COVID-19 on Gen Z's Mental Health: A Closer Look at Mental Health Needs and Challenges. *WHO Regional Office for Europe*. Retrieved from <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/gender/news/news/2021/3/covid-19-and-mental-health-of-generation-z>.
- Hilt, L. M. (2019). *Depression in Girls and Women Across the Lifespan*. Academic Press.
- Klement, K. & Leung, L. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of adolescents: A systematic review. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 68*(2), 221-232.
- Kottler, J. & Montgomery, M. J. (2019). *Generation Z: A Century in the Making*. Routledge.
- Lenhart, A.; Anderson, M. & Perrin, A. (2018). Teens, social media & technology use 2018. *Pew Research Center*.
- Przybylski, A. K. & Weinstein, N. (2013). The association between adolescent use of social media and psychological well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(6), 2428-2436.
- Riehm, K. E.; Holingue, C.; Smail, E. J.; Kapteyn, A.; Bennett, D.; Thrul, J. & Kalb, L. G. (2021). The association of social media use with psychological distress among young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 277*, 45-51.
- Twenge, J. M. & Campbell, W. K. (2018). Has the smartphone destroyed a generation? *The Atlantic, 321*(5), 44-61.
- Twenge, J. M. (2017). *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*. New York: Atria Books.