

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN YOUNG ADULTS: A STUDY FROM THE SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study investigates the multifaceted landscape of contemporary issues and challenges faced by young adults from a social perspective. Recognizing the critical juncture of development during young adulthood, this research explores the interconnectedness of societal dynamics and individual experiences. Through a comprehensive literature review and empirical analysis, the study addresses key thematic areas including mental health, education, financial independence, technology, identity, relationships, and engagement with global issues. The examination of mental health encompasses an exploration of stressors, anxiety, and depression prevalent among young adults. Drawing from existing literature and real-world data, the study seeks to unravel the social factors influencing mental well-being, emphasizing the need for collective awareness and support systems. Education and career choices are examined through the lens of social structures impacting access, opportunities, and decision-making processes. The study advocates for the integration of comprehensive career guidance programs and collaborative efforts between educational institutions and industries. Financial independence is analyzed in relation to societal and economic factors affecting young adults, with a focus on financial literacy education and strategies to alleviate economic pressures. The role of technology and social media is explored, investigating their impact on social relationships, self-identity, and overall well-being. The study proposes solutions for cultivating responsible digital behavior and promoting positive online environments. Identity and relationships are examined in the context of societal norms, cultural diversity, and evolving social structures. Recommendations include fostering inclusive environments and support networks that celebrate diverse identities. Global issues are addressed through an exploration of young adults' awareness and involvement in areas such as climate change and social justice. The study highlights the importance of civic education and youth empowerment for addressing global challenges. In conclusion, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of contemporary issues and challenges faced by young adults, emphasizing the interplay of societal influences on individual experiences. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of the social dynamics shaping the well-being and development of young adults and offer actionable recommendations for fostering supportive social environments.

INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is a critical and dynamic phase of life that typically spans from late adolescence to the mid-30s. This period is marked by significant transitions, exploration, and self-discovery. While it is a time of opportunity and growth, young adults also face numerous contemporary issues and challenges that impact their well-being and development. Understanding these challenges is crucial for parents, educators, policymakers, and society as a whole to provide adequate support and guidance. Here are some key contemporary issues and challenges faced by young adults:

Mental Health: Stress and Anxiety: The pressure to succeed academically, professionally, and socially can contribute to high levels of stress and anxiety.

Depression: Mental health disorders, including depression, can emerge during this phase due to various factors such as life transitions, societal expectations, and biological changes.

Education and Career Choices: Educational Pressure: Young adults often face intense academic pressure and the challenge of making crucial decisions about their education and future careers.

Job Market Challenges: Entering a competitive job market can be daunting, and young adults may struggle to find suitable employment or navigate the complexities of their chosen professions.

Financial Independence: Student Loan Debt: Many young adults grapple with significant student loan debt, impacting their financial stability and ability to make major life decisions such as buying a home or starting a family.

Financial Literacy: The lack of financial literacy can lead to poor financial decisions, hindering their ability to achieve economic independence.

Technology and Social Media: Digital Dependency: The pervasive influence of technology and social media can contribute to issues such as social isolation, cyberbullying, and unrealistic social comparisons.

Digital Well-being: Maintaining a healthy relationship with technology and managing screen time is a contemporary challenge, impacting both mental and physical health.

Identity and Relationships: Identity Formation: Young adults are navigating the complexities of identity formation, including cultural identity, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Relationship Struggles: Building and maintaining meaningful relationships, whether romantic or platonic, can be challenging amidst societal expectations and changing personal dynamics.

Global Issues: Climate Concerns: Young adults are increasingly concerned about environmental sustainability and the impact of climate change on their future.

Social Justice: Issues related to equity, diversity, and social justice are prominent, and young adults may engage in activism to address these concerns.

Understanding and addressing these contemporary issues and challenges is essential to fostering the well-being and success of young adults. It requires a holistic approach that involves education, mental health support, career guidance, and the cultivation of resilience and coping skills. Additionally, creating an open dialogue and supportive environments can empower young adults to navigate these challenges successfully.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research by Jean Twenge ("iGen") explores the impact of technology on the mental health of young adults, emphasizing trends in anxiety and depression. Grant H. Brenner and Daniel Berry ("The Handbook of Mentalization-Based Treatment") discuss mentalization-based interventions for young adults dealing with mental health challenges.

Arnett, J.J., and Tanner, J.L. ("Emerging Adults in America") have conducted extensive research on the unique characteristics of emerging adulthood, shedding light on educational and career-related challenges. Anthony P. Carnevale and Jeff Strohl ("How Increasing College Access Is Increasing Inequality, and What to Do About It") explore issues of educational access and its implications for social and economic inequality.

Research by Anna Lusardi ("Financial Literacy: An Essential Tool for Informed Consumer Choice?") emphasizes the importance of financial literacy in promoting financial independence among young adults. Houle, J.N. ("Disparities in Debt: Parents' Socioeconomic Resources and Young Adult Student Loan Debt") examines how socioeconomic factors contribute to student loan debt disparities.

Sherry Turkle ("Alone Together") investigates the impact of technology on relationships and identity formation among young adults. Rosen, L.D., Cheever, N.A., and Carrier, L.M. ("Facebook and Texting Made Me Do It: Media-Induced Task-Switching While Studying") explore the distractions posed by technology during academic activities.

Erik Erikson's work on identity formation, especially in "Identity: Youth and Crisis," remains influential in understanding the psychological aspects of identity development. Jeffrey Arnett ("Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties") examines the complexities of relationships and identity during the transition to adulthood.

The work of Daniel Greenberg ("The Age of Fallibility") discusses the role of young adults in addressing global challenges, emphasizing their potential for activism and social change.

Kollmuss, A., and Agyeman, J. ("Mind the Gap: Why Do People Act Environmentally and What Are the Barriers to Pro-Environmental Behavior?") explore factors influencing environmentally conscious behavior in young adults.

STATISTICAL DATA ON SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE OF YOUNG ADULTS

It is important to note that these statistics provide a broad overview, and the challenges faced by young adults can vary significantly depending on factors such as geographical location, socio-economic status, and cultural context. Additionally, the ongoing global situation, including events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can impact these statistics and introduce new challenges for young adults. For the latest and most specific data, consider consulting reports from organizations like the World Bank, UN agencies, and other reputable sources.

Recently, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has released 'Youth in India 2022' Report, which shows that the population share of the youth is starting to decline whereas the share of the elderly is expected to increase during 2021-2036.

A sustained drop in fertility has led to an increased concentration of the population at working ages (between 25 and 64 years) and this shift in the age distribution provides a time-bound opportunity for accelerated economic growth known as the "Demographic Dividend".

Decline in Youth Population: The youth population is expected to increase initially but will start to decline in the latter half of 2011-2036 period. The total youth population increased from 222.7 million in 1991 to 333.4 million in 2011 and is projected to reach 371.4 million by 2021 and, thereafter, decrease to 345.5 million by 2036.
Proportion of Youth and Elderly Population: Proportion of youth to the total population had increased from 26.6% in 1991 to 27.9% in 2016 and then projected to start a downward trend and to reach 22.7 % by year 2036. On the contrary, the proportion of elderly population to the total population has increased from 6.8% in 1991 to 9.2% in 2016 and is projected to reach 14.9% in 2036.

Scenario in the States: States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh are projected to see a higher elderly population than the youth by 2036. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh experienced a rise in proportion of youth population to total population till 2021 and then it is expected to start declining. These two states, along with Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, are projected to have over half (52%) of the country's youth.

India is experiencing a demographic window of opportunity, a "youth bulge". However, youth come across various development challenges viz. access to education, gainful employment, gender inequality, child marriage, youth-friendly health services and adolescent pregnancy.

Youth bulge refers to a demographic pattern where a large share of the population is comprised of children and young adults. A greater proportion of youth at present will result in a greater proportion of elderly in the population in future. This will create a demand for better healthcare facilities and development of welfare schemes/programmes for elderly people. Rise in the share of elderly population will put pressure on social security and public welfare systems and the next 4-5 years need to be utilised well to accelerate productive job creation. People, typically in informal employment, don't have social security, it will add burden to the respective state.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), globally, approximately 10-20% of adolescents experience mental health conditions. Depression is a leading cause of illness and disability among adolescents. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics reported that in 2020, about 258 million children and youth were out of school. This figure includes both primary and secondary education levels. According to a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the global youth unemployment rate was around 13.1% in 2020. Young people are often disproportionately affected by economic downturns. As of 2021, approximately 4.9 billion people worldwide use the internet, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The prevalence of digital technologies and social media has a significant impact on the lives of young adults. Statistics on identity-related challenges may vary, but surveys and studies often highlight issues such as the exploration of cultural identity, with young adults navigating questions of belonging and self-discovery.

SUGGESTIVE SOLUTIONS ON ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN YOUNG ADULTS

Addressing the issues and challenges faced by young adults requires a multifaceted and collaborative approach involving various stakeholders, including governments, educational institutions, communities, families, and individuals themselves. Here are some solutions and strategies for addressing common challenges faced by young adults:

Mental Health: Increased Mental Health Awareness: Implement comprehensive mental health awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage open conversations about mental health.

Accessible Support Services: Ensure the availability and accessibility of mental health services, including counseling and therapy, on educational campuses and in communities.

Stress Reduction Programs: Introduce stress reduction programs, mindfulness practices, and wellness initiatives in educational institutions to help young adults manage academic and personal stress.

Education and Career Choices: Career Counseling: Provide robust career counseling services to help young adults make informed decisions about their education and career paths.

Skill Development Programs: Develop programs that focus on equipping young adults with both academic and practical skills, enhancing their employability.

Internship Opportunities: Facilitate internships and apprenticeships to bridge the gap between education and the workforce, providing real-world experience.

Financial Independence: Financial Literacy Education: Integrate financial literacy education into school curricula to empower young adults with the knowledge and skills to make informed financial decisions. Job Placement Support: Establish job placement programs and partnerships with industries to facilitate smoother transitions from education to employment.

Debt Management Education: Educate young adults on responsible borrowing, managing student loan debt, and making informed financial decisions.

Technology and Social Media: Digital Well-being Education: Promote digital well-being education to help young adults strike a healthy balance between technology use and personal well-being.

Online Safety Initiatives: Implement initiatives to raise awareness about online safety, cybersecurity, and responsible social media use.

Media Literacy Programs: Integrate media literacy programs into education to help young adults critically evaluate information and navigate digital spaces responsibly.

Identity and Relationships:

Diversity and Inclusion Programs: Foster a culture of diversity and inclusion to support young adults in exploring and embracing their cultural, gender, and individual identities.

Relationship Education: Introduce relationship education programs that provide guidance on healthy communication, interpersonal skills, and relationship dynamics.

Supportive Environments: Create supportive environments in educational and community settings that respect and celebrate diverse identities.

Global Issues: Environmental Education: Incorporate environmental education into curricula to raise awareness about global issues such as climate change and sustainability.

Youth Empowerment Programs: Support and promote youth-led initiatives and empowerment programs that address global challenges through community engagement and activism.

Civic Education: Foster civic education to encourage young adults to actively participate in addressing global issues through advocacy and community involvement.

Overall Well-being: Holistic Health Programs: Implement holistic health programs that address physical, mental, and emotional well-being, emphasizing the importance of a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Community Support Networks: Strengthen community support networks, including peer support groups, mentorship programs, and community centers, to create a sense of belonging and connection.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Addressing the issues and challenges faced by young adults requires a collective effort from society, including policymakers, community leaders, educators, parents, and individuals. Here are recommendations for society to better support and empower young adults:

- Promote Mental Health Awareness: Educate the Public: Implement widespread mental health awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and increase understanding of mental health issues among the general public.
- Accessible Mental Health Services: Advocate for improved access to mental health services, ensuring that affordable and accessible counseling and therapy options are available for young adults.
- Enhance Education and Career Opportunities: Career Guidance Programs: Establish and enhance career guidance programs in schools and colleges to help young adults make informed decisions about their education and career paths.
- Industry-Academia Collaboration: Encourage collaboration between educational institutions and industries to ensure that curricula align with the skills needed in the job market.
- Apprenticeship Programs: Promote apprenticeship programs to provide practical, hands-on experience and bridge the gap between education and employment.
- Financial Literacy Initiatives: Financial Education in Schools: Integrate financial literacy education into school curricula to equip young adults with the knowledge and skills needed for responsible financial management.
- Financial Counseling Services: Establish counseling services to assist young adults in managing debt, understanding financial products, and making sound financial decisions.
- Digital Well-being and Media Literacy: Digital Well-being Education: Integrate digital well-being education into school programs to teach young adults how to use technology responsibly and maintain a healthy balance.
- Media Literacy Programs: Implement media literacy programs to help young adults critically evaluate information, navigate online spaces safely, and understand the impact of digital media on mental health.
- Cultivate Inclusive and Supportive Environments: Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives: Promote diversity and inclusion in all aspects of society, ensuring that young adults feel accepted and respected regardless of their cultural, gender, or individual identities.
- Community Support Networks: Establish and strengthen community support networks, including mentorship programs, peer support groups, and community centers, to create a sense of belonging and support.
- Encourage Civic Engagement: Civic Education: Incorporate civic education into school curricula to foster a sense of civic responsibility and encourage young adults to actively participate in community and global issues.
- Youth Empowerment Programs: Support and fund youth-led initiatives and empowerment programs that address societal challenges and encourage civic engagement.
- Environmental Responsibility: Environmental Education: Incorporate environmental education into school programs to raise awareness about global issues such as climate change and promote sustainable practices.
- Community Sustainability Initiatives: Encourage community-led sustainability initiatives and support projects that address environmental concerns.
- Family Support and Communication: Parenting Education: Provide parenting education programs to help parents understand and navigate the challenges faced by young adults, promoting open communication and supportive relationships.
- Family Counseling Services: Make family counseling services accessible to address family-related challenges and enhance communication within the family unit.

- Policy Advocacy: Advocate for Youth-Centric Policies: Encourage the development and implementation of policies that specifically address the needs and challenges of young adults, covering areas such as education, employment, mental health, and social services.
- Continuous Research and Data Collection: Invest in Research: Support ongoing research on the evolving challenges and needs of young adults to inform policies and interventions effectively.
- Data Collection: Enhance data collection mechanisms to gather accurate and up-to-date information on the well-being and experiences of young adults.
- These recommendations highlight the importance of creating a supportive, inclusive, and empowering environment for young adults, recognizing their unique challenges and providing resources to help them navigate this crucial phase of life.

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