

SUPPORTING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IN THE MODERN ERA

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Abstract

Youth mental health has emerged as a critical public health concern in today's rapidly evolving society. This paper examines the challenges facing youth mental wellbeing in the modern era and proposes comprehensive support strategies. Through analysis of contemporary research and intervention frameworks, the study identifies key factors contributing to declining mental health among young people, including digital media exposure, academic pressure, social isolation, and decreased face-to-face interaction. The research highlights the importance of multi-level approaches incorporating school-based programs, family engagement, technology-aided interventions, and policy reform. Findings demonstrate that integrated support systems which combine traditional therapeutic methods with innovative digital tools show promise in addressing youth mental health challenges. This paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge on effective youth mental health promotion and intervention strategies suitable for the unique pressures of the modern era.

Keywords: Youth development; Mental health support; Digital wellbeing; School-based intervention; Modern stressors.

1. Introduction

The mental health of young people has become an increasingly pressing concern globally, with research indicating alarming trends in depression, anxiety, and other psychological disorders among youth populations. The World Health Organization reports that approximately 20% of the world's children and adolescents have mental health conditions, with suicide ranking as the fourth leading cause of death among 15-19 year-olds (Ma et al., 2021). These statistics highlight the urgent need for effective mental health support systems tailored to the unique challenges of modern youth.

The contemporary landscape presents unprecedented challenges for young people's mental wellbeing. The proliferation of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed social interactions, learning environments, and leisure activities (Heffer et al., 2019). While these technologies offer numerous benefits, research suggests they may also contribute to increased stress, anxiety, and social comparison among youth (O'Reilly et al., 2019). Additionally, academic pressures have intensified globally, with young people facing heightened expectations regarding educational achievement and career preparation (Pascoe et al., 2020).

Societal factors such as economic uncertainty, climate anxiety, and most recently, the global COVID-19 pandemic have further complicated the mental health landscape for youth. The pandemic in particular has exacerbated existing mental health challenges through disruptions to education, social isolation, and increased family stressors (Loades et al., 2020). These

compounding factors necessitate innovative approaches to supporting youth mental health that acknowledge the complexity of the modern environment.

This paper examines the multifaceted challenges facing youth mental health in the contemporary era and explores evidence-based strategies for providing effective support. By synthesizing current research and identifying promising intervention approaches, this study aims to contribute to the development of comprehensive support systems that address the unique mental health needs of modern youth.

2. Methods

1. Size of Dataset

A comprehensive literature review was conducted using multiple databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Search terms included "youth mental health," "adolescent psychological wellbeing," "digital technology and mental health," "school-based mental health interventions," and "modern stressors." Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2023, with priority given to systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and large-scale studies. In total, 87 articles meeting these criteria were identified and analyzed for this study.

Secondary data from global mental health surveys was also incorporated, including the WHO World Mental Health International College Student Initiative and the UNICEF State of the World's Children report focusing on mental health. These data sources provided global context and highlighted regional variations in youth mental health challenges and support systems.

To supplement published research, qualitative data was gathered through structured interviews with 25 mental health professionals specializing in youth services across diverse settings including schools, community centers, and telehealth platforms. This primary research component was approved by the institutional review board, with all participants providing informed consent.

The effectiveness of various intervention approaches was evaluated using the following formula for intervention impact:

$$II = \frac{(MH_{post} - MH_{pre})}{SD_{pre}} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

where II represents intervention impact, MH_{post} is the post-intervention mental health score, MH_{pre} is the pre-intervention mental health score, and SD_{pre} is the standard deviation of pre-intervention scores.

The relative effectiveness of digital versus traditional interventions was calculated using:

$$RE = \frac{II_{digital}}{II_{traditional}} \times 100 \quad (2)$$

where RE represents relative effectiveness, II_digital is the impact index of digital interventions, and II_traditional is the impact index of traditional face-to-face interventions.

2. Analysis Framework

The study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis of intervention outcomes with qualitative thematic analysis of interview data. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 27.0, with descriptive statistics generated to identify patterns in intervention effectiveness across different population segments and implementation contexts.

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts was conducted using NVivo 12 software, following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework. This process involved familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final analysis. Inter-rater reliability was established through dual coding of 20% of interview transcripts, with a Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.83 indicating strong agreement.

The integrated analysis framework allowed for triangulation of findings from multiple data sources, strengthening the validity of conclusions regarding effective approaches to supporting youth mental health in modern contexts.

Table 1. summarizes the characteristics of the studies included in the analysis:

STUDY TYPE	NUMBER	POPULATION AGE RANGE	SAMPLE SIZE RANGE
<i>Randomized Control Trials</i>	23	12-25	<i>65-2,400</i>
<i>Longitudinal Studies</i>	15	10-24	<i>450-12,000</i>
<i>Cross-sectional Surveys</i>	32	13-21	<i>700-45,000</i>
<i>Qualitative Studies</i>	17	14-22	<i>18-120</i>

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Key Factors Affecting Youth Mental Health

Analysis of the literature revealed four primary categories of factors significantly impacting youth mental health in the modern era: digital media exposure, academic pressure, social environment changes, and broader societal factors. Figure 1 illustrates the relative contribution of these factors as reported across studies.

Digital technology usage emerged as a complex factor with both positive and negative associations with mental health outcomes. Research indicates that time spent on social media platforms correlates with increased anxiety and depression symptoms among adolescents, particularly when usage exceeds 3 hours daily (Twenge et al., 2020). However, this relationship is mediated by the nature of engagement, with passive consumption showing stronger negative associations than active, creative uses of technology.

Academic pressure was identified as a significant stressor, with studies from multiple countries noting increasing rates of anxiety disorders linked to academic performance expectations. The data revealed concerning trends in sleep deprivation, with 68% of high school students reporting insufficient sleep due to academic workload (Pascoe et al., 2020).

The changing social environment, characterized by decreased face-to-face interaction and increased digital communication, was associated with feelings of social isolation among

youth. Interview data with mental health professionals highlighted particular concerns about the development of social skills and emotional regulation capabilities in environments where digital communication predominates.

Economic uncertainty, climate anxiety, and pandemic-related disruptions were identified as significant societal factors affecting youth mental health. These broader contextual factors created a backdrop of chronic stress that exacerbated individual vulnerabilities.

3.2 Effectiveness of Intervention Approaches

The analysis of intervention studies revealed varying effectiveness across different support approaches. School-based interventions demonstrated significant positive outcomes, particularly those incorporating universal screening, skills-based curricula, and accessible on-site counseling services. Programs emphasizing mindfulness and social-emotional learning showed mean effect sizes of 0.38 for reducing anxiety symptoms and 0.29 for depressive symptoms.

Digital mental health interventions, including apps, online therapy, and digital psychoeducation platforms, showed promising results, particularly for reaching youth who face barriers to traditional services. These interventions demonstrated comparable effectiveness to face-to-face services for mild to moderate conditions when designed with appropriate engagement features and clinical oversight.

Family-focused interventions emerged as critically important, with parent education programs and family therapy approaches showing significant benefits for youth mental health outcomes. The data indicated that parental digital literacy and involvement in youth technology use were associated with more positive mental health outcomes for adolescents.

Integrated care models connecting school-based services, primary healthcare, and specialized mental health providers showed the strongest outcomes across studies. These coordinated approaches facilitated earlier identification of mental health concerns and more seamless access to appropriate levels of care.

3.3 Implementation Challenges and Solutions

Despite evidence supporting various intervention approaches, implementation challenges were consistently identified across studies. Common barriers included funding limitations, workforce shortages in youth mental health services, stigma surrounding mental health, and difficulties engaging diverse youth populations.

Successful implementation strategies identified in the literature included stakeholder co-design approaches, stepped care models that match intervention intensity to need, cultural adaptation of evidence-based practices, and sustainable funding mechanisms that blend public and private resources.

Digital divide issues emerged as a significant concern, with disparities in access to technology-based interventions potentially exacerbating existing inequalities in mental health support. Studies implementing hybrid approaches that combine digital and in-person options showed promise in addressing these access disparities.

4. Conclusions

This study highlights the complex landscape of youth mental health in the modern era and identifies evidence-based strategies for providing effective support. The findings underscore the importance of multi-level approaches that address individual, family, school, community, and policy factors influencing youth mental health outcomes.

Digital technologies present both challenges and opportunities for youth mental wellbeing, requiring nuanced approaches that mitigate potential harms while leveraging benefits for mental health support. School-based interventions remain cornerstone strategies, particularly when integrated with family support and community resources.

Future directions should focus on developing sustainable implementation models that can function across diverse settings and populations, addressing workforce development needs in youth mental health, and continuing research on the evolving impact of digital environments on youth development. By building comprehensive support systems responsive to modern realities, we can better address the mental health needs of young people navigating an increasingly complex world.

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