

The Role of Cultural and social norms and their impact on the Mental Wellbeing of the Youth in India

Introduction

The cultural norms and customs that are deeply embedded in the Indian society shape the Indian youth's perceptions, interactions, behavior, and ultimately their mental well-being. This research paper aims to delve into social norms like family expectations, educational pressure, and the stigma surrounding mental health and their effect on the Indian youth.

Thesis

Probing into the complex interplay between traditional Indian customs and norms and the Indian youth's mental well-being.

Body

Many years ago in India, it was thought that mental disease resulted from a supernatural force or from being possessed by evil spirits which disturbed the human mind. In contemporary society, this idea is still widely accepted. People who think that mental illness has supernatural causes turn to religious institutions as alternatives to psychiatric and psychological care which can decline their mental wellbeing further.

Our mental health may be impacted by how we are expected to behave in our culture [1]. In Indian culture, it is common for people to be expected to prioritize the needs of their family over their own. This could result in a sense of self-sacrifice that can be harmful for their mental health. It might be difficult for those who always put others before themselves to take care of themselves, which can lead to resentment or burnout.

Some customs like those centered on family expectations and educational pressure norms, may be detrimental to mental health. For example, a child that wants to study the arts is forced by their parents to pursue conventional career options which could lead to feelings like stress, anxiety, or mental health disorders like depression. On the positive side, strong family bonds can provide a sense of belonging and emotional security. Additionally, mindfulness and yoga can also act as coping mechanisms and promote emotional resilience among the youth.

Only 7.3% of young people in India *acknowledge* having a mental disease, and even fewer seek treatment [2], making public stigma a significant contributor to the underreported prevalence of mental problems in India. In addition, young people are less likely than adults to seek help for mental health issues due to common concerns about lack of confidentiality, peer pressure, a desire to be independent, a lack of knowledge about mental health issues, and a lack of awareness about services related to mental health.

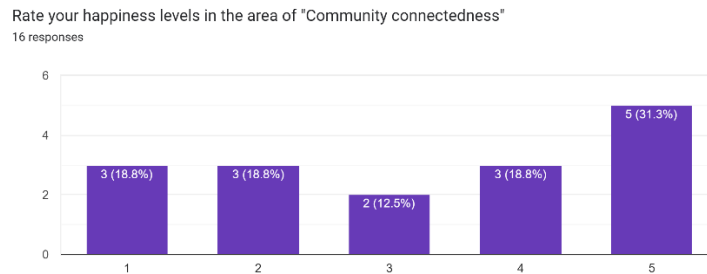
According to a study, the Indian youth would either punish or imprison those who have mental illnesses out of fear of being harmed [3]. They are also more prone to behave strangely and shamefully toward someone who is having an epileptic attack, as evidenced by techniques like making the individual smell an onion or a shoe. This shows the mindset and attitude of the youth in India towards mental health and how they would deal with such incidents.

Case study 1

To investigate not only the happiness levels of the youth in India regarding different topics related to mental well-being but also to understand the attitudes of the youth in India regarding mental health. The survey [4] includes questions on the happiness levels of individuals about topics such as personal relationships, community connectedness, life achievements, self-esteem, and two yes or no questions. The survey asks the individuals to rate their happiness levels on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest.)

For the first question on the happiness levels in personal relationships, there is an undecided answer, with a similar response of around 3-4 for everyone.

For the second question of the happiness levels in community connectedness, most answers recorded point to the rank of 5, which is the lowest rank. This could be due to the introduction of social media as a vital force in our world today. Social media being something that was created to enhance social connectivity has now led to an isolated living schedule.

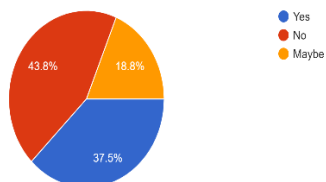


For the third question on the happiness levels surrounding life achievement, we have a majority from both the 2nd and 5th rank, which shows a very wide range of answers and shows that this specific topic could be more of a personal or family issue but should be still discussed at the negative end.

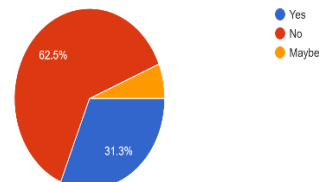
For the fourth question on the happiness levels for self-esteem, most people have chosen the 3rd and 5th rank which is at the lower end of the pyramid. This ties in with the second question about social media and its effects on society.

And for the question "Do you think that having a mental disorder or having bad mental health is a negative thing?" we have 53.8% saying no and the rest agreeing or saying maybe. As for the last question, "Do you think a person having a mental health disorder lacks willpower or is a weak person?", 46.2% of people say no and the rest agree or say maybe.

Do you think a person having a mental health disorder lacks willpower or is a weak person?
16 responses



Do you think that having a mental disorder or having bad mental health is a negative thing?
16 responses



Through the last 2 questions, we can analyze that while some individuals have a positive answer to the question, others may still give an influenced opinion and as noticed, quite a few people still depend upon society's perception of mental health and what it means.

Case study 2

To further understand the effects of social customs and norms on the mental well-being of India's youth, I analyzed 'Taare Zameen Par', a very popular and inspiring Bollywood movie.

This movie depicts the academic and societal pressure a child must go through. This also shows the Indian mindset on success and education. We learn from the movie that the young boy is called "lazy and dumb" because he is not up to the Indian standards of a "good child". However, his talent for art is completely overlooked in front of the failure he faces in studying. Thus, we see the very traditional way of parenting.

We also see a part of the movie where again, the traditional Indian mindset on mental disorders prevails. The boy's father calls his behavior a mental disorder and dismisses it as an excuse for laziness. This again gives us an example of how the boy was treated because of the lack of knowledge that the Indian public has about mental health and how it is such an important thing to be educated about.

We also notice that he has a learning disability which nobody notices due to the lack of understanding about such disorders and the stigma surrounding them. However, in the end, he gets enough support from the people around him which helps him grow further in his life.

Discussion/Conclusion

Through two case studies, we have examined the role of cultural and social norms and their effects on the mental health of young people in India. This has helped us understand the views of young people in India regarding mental health and to recognize the traditional parenting style and toxic traits of Indian culture that have an impact on the mental health of young people in India. In conclusion, developing a healthier, more resilient, and happier generation in India requires encouraging young people to cherish their cultural heritage while opposing damaging traditions that impair their mental wellbeing.

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