

Changing Dimensions of Mental Health in Contemporary Society

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ABSTRACT

Mental health problems have gained significant attention in contemporary society as a result of rapid social, economic and technological changes. In the modern world, individuals face numerous challenges such as academic pressure, workplace demands, financial instability, societal expectations and unhealthy lifestyle patterns. At the same time, enduring stigma associated with mental illness often prevents individuals from seeking timely help and discourages open discussion. As a result, many people suffer from psychological distress silently, which negatively affects their overall mental wellbeing. Stress generated by modern life, along with lifestyle imbalance including lack of physical exercise, irregular sleep patterns, poor eating habits and excessive dependence on digital devices, further intensifies mental health problems. Understanding these issues is crucial for fostering mental wellbeing and improving overall quality of life. This paper seeks to examine mental health problems in contemporary society with special focus on stigma, stress and lifestyle imbalance. Using a descriptive research design based on secondary sources, the study identifies major challenges and their impact on individuals as well as society. The paper emphasizes the need for awareness, early intervention, supportive surroundings and constructive social attitudes to address mental health problems effectively.

Keywords: *mental health problems, contemporary society, stigma, stress, lifestyle imbalance*

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall health and wellbeing, influencing how individuals think, feel, behave and relate to others in everyday life. Sound mental health enables people to manage stress effectively, maintain productive work habits, build healthy relationships and contribute meaningfully to society (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019). In contemporary society, mental health problems have become increasingly prevalent due to rapid social, economic, cultural and technological changes that shape daily living.

Modern life is often characterized by intense competition, high academic and professional demands, employment insecurity, financial strain and fast-paced lifestyles. Students frequently encounter academic pressure, examination-related anxiety and career uncertainty, while working adults face job-related stress, workload demands and difficulties in maintaining work–life balance. Continuous exposure to such stressors may result in psychological problems including anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion and burnout (American Psychological Association [APA], 2021; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). However,

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Changing Dimensions of Mental Health in Contemporary Society

early signs of mental distress are often overlooked, as stress is commonly perceived as a normal feature of modern life.

Social stigma surrounding mental health further compounds the problem. In many societies, mental illness continues to be associated with weakness, shame, or personal inadequacy. Individuals experiencing mental health problems may fear discrimination, negative labelling, or social rejection, which discourages them from seeking professional help (Corrigan, 2004). Stigma not only limits access to mental healthcare but also contributes to delayed diagnosis and ineffective treatment outcomes (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013).

Lifestyle imbalance is another significant factor affecting mental health in contemporary society. Sedentary routines, insufficient physical exercise, irregular sleep schedules, unhealthy dietary habits and excessive engagement with digital devices have become increasingly common. Research suggests that such lifestyle patterns negatively influence emotional regulation, attention and psychological wellbeing (WHO, 2019). Moreover, excessive use of smartphones and social media has been associated with heightened stress, anxiety, loneliness and reduced face-to-face social interaction (Twenge, 2017).

Understanding mental health problems in contemporary society is therefore essential for fostering awareness, minimizing stigma, and promoting timely intervention. A comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of mental health challenges can support individuals, families, educational institutions and policymakers in adopting effective preventive and supportive measures. This paper seeks to examine mental health problems in contemporary society with a particular focus on stigma, stress and lifestyle imbalance, highlighting the need for informed, supportive and inclusive approaches to mental wellbeing.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mental health has gained significant attention in recent years due to the increasing prevalence of psychological problems across different age groups. Several scholars and international organizations have examined mental health issues in relation to stigma, stress and lifestyle imbalance in contemporary society.

1. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), conditions such as depression and anxiety are increasing worldwide and are among the leading causes of disability. The report highlights that rapid social change, economic uncertainty, unemployment, poverty and lack of social support systems significantly contribute to the growing burden of mental health problems. The WHO also emphasized the need for mental health promotion and prevention strategies to address these challenges effectively.
2. Social stigma has been consistently identified as a major obstacle to mental healthcare. Corrigan (2004) explained that stigma leads to discrimination, social exclusion and negative stereotypes toward individuals with mental illness. Due to fear of being judged or labelled, many people avoid seeking professional help, which delays diagnosis and treatment. This hesitation often results in worsening mental health conditions and reduced quality of life.
3. Expanding on the concept of stigma, Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, and Link (2013) introduced the idea of structural stigma, which refers to societal-level policies, norms and institutional practices that limit opportunities and resources for individuals with

Changing Dimensions of Mental Health in Contemporary Society

mental illness. Their research demonstrated that people living in highly stigmatizing environments experience higher levels of psychological distress and poorer mental health outcomes, even when individual-level factors are controlled.

4. Supporting this view, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2021) reported that chronic stress is closely associated with mental health problems such as anxiety disorders, depression, burnout and sleep disturbances. The report emphasized that students, working professionals and caregivers are particularly vulnerable to prolonged stress due to academic pressure, workload, financial responsibilities and work–life imbalance.
5. Lifestyle imbalance has also been recognized as a major risk factor for mental health problems. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) identified unhealthy lifestyle behaviours, including physical inactivity, irregular sleep patterns, poor diet, and substance use, as significant contributors to mental disorders. Such behaviours negatively affect emotional regulation, concentration and overall psychological wellbeing.
6. In the context of digitalization, Twenge (2017) found a strong relationship between excessive use of digital devices and increased levels of stress, loneliness, anxiety and depression, especially among adolescents and young adults. Her study suggested that excessive screen time reduces face-to-face social interactions and disrupts sleep patterns, both of which are crucial for maintaining mental health.
7. From a healthcare perspective, Patel et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of integrating mental health services into community and primary healthcare systems. Their work argued that such integration can reduce stigma, improve access to care and ensure early identification and treatment of mental health problems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.
8. Mental health has also been viewed from a positive psychology perspective. Keyes (2002) proposed that mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness but also the presence of positive emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. His mental health continuum model highlights the importance of promoting flourishing and resilience alongside treating mental disorders.
9. Focusing on developing societies, Murthy (2017) highlighted challenges such as lack of awareness, cultural misconceptions, stigma, limited mental health infrastructure and rapid lifestyle changes as major contributors to mental health problems. The study emphasized that social transformation and modernization have significantly altered traditional support systems, increasing vulnerability to mental health issues.
10. Stress is another significant contributor to mental health problems. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described stress as a result of an imbalance between environmental demands and an individual's ability to cope with those demands. Their transactional model of stress suggests that when people perceive life situations as overwhelming and lack adequate coping resources, they are more likely to experience anxiety, depression and emotional exhaustion.

The reviewed literature clearly indicates that mental health problems in contemporary society are influenced by a complex interaction of stigma, stress and lifestyle imbalance. The studies collectively stress the need for awareness, supportive environments, healthy lifestyle practices and accessible mental healthcare services to improve mental wellbeing.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive research design based on secondary sources of data. A descriptive research approach is appropriate when the objective of the study is to describe existing conditions, identify patterns and develop an understanding of a social phenomenon without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2014). Since the focus of this paper is to understand mental health problems in contemporary society, secondary data provide a reliable and comprehensive foundation for analysis. Data for the study were collected from a wide range of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed research journals, government publications, and reports published by international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Psychological Association (APA). These sources offer credible, evidence-based information on mental health issues, stigma, stress and lifestyle imbalance (WHO, 2019; WHO, 2022). In addition, scholarly articles and research papers accessed through credible academic databases and online platforms were reviewed to ensure the inclusion of recent and relevant studies. Secondary data analysis is particularly useful in mental health research, as it allows researchers to synthesize existing knowledge and examine issues from a broader societal perspective (Kothari, 2019). The collected information was systematically reviewed and analysed using content analysis. Key themes related to stigma, stress, lifestyle imbalance and their impact on mental wellbeing were identified and organized. This method helped in comparing findings across different studies and understanding common trends and challenges associated with mental health problems in contemporary society (Bowen, 2009).

The chosen methodology is suitable for achieving the objectives of the study, as it provides a holistic understanding of mental health challenges and highlights areas requiring attention for future research and policy intervention.

FINDINGS

The findings of the present study are organized in accordance with the stated objectives to provide a clear and systematic understanding of mental health problems in contemporary society.

1. *Understanding mental health problems in contemporary society*

In relation to the first objective, the study reveals that mental health problems in contemporary society extend far beyond severe psychiatric disorders and include a wide range of common psychological conditions such as stress, anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, loneliness and burnout. These problems affect individuals' cognitive processes, emotional stability, behaviour, interpersonal relationships and overall ability to function effectively in daily life. Mental health, therefore, plays a crucial role in determining both personal wellbeing and social adjustment. The findings indicate that rapid social transformation, technological advancement, urbanization and changing family structures have significantly contributed to the increasing prevalence of mental health problems. Modern life is characterized by intense competition, academic pressure, job insecurity, financial stress and constant exposure to digital media, which often create feelings of inadequacy, fear and emotional overload. These pressures are experienced by individuals across all age groups, including children, adolescents, adults and the elderly, making mental health a universal concern rather than an individual issue. Furthermore, the study highlights that mental health problems are closely linked to reduced quality of life, poor academic and work performance and weakened social relationships. When mental health is compromised, individuals may

struggle with concentration, decision-making, motivation and emotional regulation. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), mental health conditions are among the leading causes of disability worldwide, emphasizing their seriousness and widespread impact in contemporary society.

2. *Major Factors Contributing to Mental Health Problems*

Addressing the second objective, the study identifies stigma, stress and lifestyle imbalance as the major factors contributing to mental health problems in contemporary society. These factors interact with one another and collectively increase the vulnerability of individuals to psychological distress. Social stigma continues to be one of the most serious obstacles to mental wellbeing. Mental illness is often misunderstood and wrongly associated with personal weakness, incompetence or failure. As a result, individuals experiencing psychological distress may feel ashamed or fearful of being judged by family, peers or society. This fear discourages open discussion about mental health problems and significantly delays help-seeking behaviour. Corrigan (2004) emphasized that stigma leads to discrimination and social exclusion, while Hatzenbuehler et al. (2013) explained that structural and social stigma worsen mental health outcomes by limiting access to care, social support and opportunities. Consequently, untreated mental health problems tend to intensify over time. Stress is another central factor contributing to mental health problems. In contemporary society, individuals face constant pressure from academic demands, workplace competition, financial instability, family responsibilities and social expectations. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress arises when individuals perceive that life demands exceed their coping abilities. Prolonged exposure to such stress without effective coping strategies leads to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, depression and burnout. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2021) reported that chronic stress negatively affects both mental and physical health, reducing productivity, motivation and overall life satisfaction. Lifestyle imbalance further aggravates mental health problems. Modern lifestyles are often characterized by physical inactivity, irregular sleep patterns, unhealthy dietary habits and excessive use of digital devices. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) identified unhealthy lifestyle practices as major risk factors for mental health disorders. Excessive screen time and digital overload, particularly through social media, have been linked to increased feelings of loneliness, stress and anxiety (Twenge, 2017). Lack of exercise and poor sleep disrupt emotional regulation and increase vulnerability to psychological distress.

3. *Impact of Mental Health Problems on Individuals and Society*

In relation to the third objective, the study reveals that mental health problems have far-reaching consequences for both individuals and society. At the individual level, mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and chronic stress negatively affect emotional stability, thinking ability and daily functioning. Individuals experiencing poor mental health often struggle with concentration, memory, decision-making and emotional control, which directly impacts their academic performance, work efficiency and personal relationships (APA, 2021). Persistent psychological distress also lowers self-confidence and motivation, making it difficult for individuals to cope with everyday challenges. Mental health problems are closely linked with physical health issues as well. Prolonged stress and emotional distress can lead to sleep disorders, fatigue, weakened immune systems, headaches and other psychosomatic illnesses (WHO, 2022). Individuals may withdraw from social interactions, leading to loneliness, isolation and strained family relationships. Keyes (2002) emphasized that mental health is not merely the absence of illness but the presence of positive functioning; when mental wellbeing is compromised, individuals are unable to achieve personal satisfaction and

Changing Dimensions of Mental Health in Contemporary Society

emotional balance. At the societal level, the impact of mental health problems is equally serious. In educational settings, poor mental health among students leads to low academic achievement, increased absenteeism, dropout rates and reduced engagement in learning. In workplaces, mental health problems contribute to reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, presenteeism, job dissatisfaction and burnout (APA, 2021). The World Health Organization (2022) reported that depression and anxiety are among the leading causes of disability worldwide, resulting in significant economic losses due to decreased work efficiency and increased healthcare expenditure. Moreover, untreated mental health problems can give rise to broader social challenges such as unemployment, poverty, substance abuse and social exclusion. Stigma and lack of awareness often prevent early diagnosis and timely treatment, thereby increasing the long-term burden on families, communities and healthcare systems (Corrigan, 2004; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013). In developing societies, these challenges are further intensified due to limited mental healthcare resources and changing lifestyles (Murthy, 2017).

4. Importance of Awareness and Supportive Measures to Improve Mental Wellbeing

In relation to the fourth objective, the study highlights the crucial role of awareness and supportive measures in improving mental wellbeing and reducing the burden of mental health problems in contemporary society. Awareness helps individuals recognize early signs of mental health problems, understand that such conditions are common and treatable and seek timely professional help. Increased mental health literacy reduces misconceptions and negative beliefs, thereby challenging stigma and encouraging open discussion about mental health issues (Corrigan, 2004; WHO, 2022). Supportive measures at the family level play a significant role in promoting mental wellbeing. Families that provide emotional support, understanding and acceptance create a safe environment in which individuals feel comfortable expressing their psychological concerns. Positive family relationships act as protective factors that reduce stress and enhance emotional resilience, particularly among children, adolescents and the elderly (Murthy, 2017). When family members are informed about mental health, they are better equipped to identify early symptoms and facilitate access to appropriate care. At the community and institutional level, schools, colleges and workplaces have an important responsibility in promoting mental health awareness and support. Educational institutions that integrate mental health education, counselling services and stress-management programs help students develop coping skills and emotional strength. Similarly, workplaces that promote work-life balance, provide mental health resources and encourage open communication contribute to reduced stress and burnout among employees (APA, 2021). Access to professional mental healthcare services is another essential supportive measure. Integrating mental health services into primary and community healthcare systems improves accessibility and reduces treatment gaps, particularly in developing societies (Patel et al., 2018). The World Health Organization (2019) emphasized that community-based mental health care and preventive interventions are effective in promoting mental wellbeing and reducing long-term social and economic costs.

The findings suggest that awareness and supportive measures are key to addressing mental health problems effectively. Reducing stigma, strengthening family and social support systems, promoting mental health education and ensuring accessible healthcare services can significantly improve mental wellbeing. A comprehensive and collaborative approach involving individuals, families, institutions and policymakers is essential for creating a mentally healthy and resilient society.

CONCLUSION

Understanding mental health problems in contemporary society is crucial for the development of a healthy, balanced and productive population. In an era marked by rapid social change, increasing competition, technological advancement and lifestyle transitions, mental health challenges have become more widespread and complex. Issues such as stigma, stress and lifestyle imbalance continue to significantly affect mental wellbeing across all age groups, influencing emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, academic performance and work productivity. Despite growing awareness and discussions around mental health, stigma remains a powerful barrier that prevents many individuals from seeking timely professional help. Fear of social judgment, discrimination and misunderstanding often leads individuals to hide their mental health concerns, resulting in delayed treatment and worsening conditions. This highlights the urgent need for sustained efforts to normalize conversations around mental health and promote acceptance within society. Stress related to academic pressure, employment demands, financial responsibilities and social expectations has emerged as a major contributor to mental health problems. When combined with unhealthy lifestyle practices such as physical inactivity, poor sleep, unhealthy diet and excessive use of digital devices, stress further intensifies mental health challenges. Therefore, promoting balanced lifestyles and effective stress-management strategies is essential for improving mental wellbeing.

Addressing mental health problems requires a coordinated and collective approach. Individuals must be encouraged to prioritize self-care and seek support when needed, while families and educational institutions should provide emotionally supportive environments. Healthcare systems and policymakers play a vital role in ensuring accessible, affordable and inclusive mental health services. Promoting mental health education, reducing stigma through awareness programs, and strengthening support systems can significantly enhance mental wellbeing and improve overall quality of life in contemporary society.

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Changing Dimensions of Mental Health in Contemporary Society

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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