

## Mental Health Awareness Across Generations: A Review of the Rise of Emotional Expression among Indian Youth

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### ABSTRACT

Mental health awareness among Indian youth has witnessed a gradual rise in emotional expression, signaling a generational shift in attitudes and openness. This review synthesizes research on mental health awareness, stigma, and emotional expression across generations in India. Findings reveal increasing awareness and emotional expression in youth contrasted with persistent stigma and suppression norms among older generations. Institutional gaps in support and the role of socio-cultural factors, including media and education, are discussed. Recommendations highlight the need for culturally sensitive mental health education and greater institutional support to sustain this positive trend and bridge generational divides.

**Keywords:** *Mental Health Awareness, Indian Youth, Generational Differences, Emotional Expression, Stigma, Mental Health Education*

Mental health awareness is crucial for holistic well-being, yet in India, cultural and generational factors have historically limited open discussion of mental health issues. Traditionally, Indian society has emphasized emotional restraint, especially among older generations, creating barriers for youth to express emotions related to mental health (Raval et al., 2012). However, recent shifts indicate a rise in emotional expression and awareness among Indian youth, influenced by education, social media, and globalization (Singh, 2021; Mehrotra, 2020). This review explores the evolution of mental health awareness across generations in India, with a focus on the increasing openness among youth and ongoing challenges due to stigma and institutional gaps.

### METHODOLOGY

A literature review was conducted by selecting five key research articles from databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and JSTOR, focusing on mental health awareness, stigma, and emotional expression among Indian youth across generations. The selected papers included empirical studies, systematic reviews, and cross-cultural comparisons published between 2012 and 2021. Themes related to generational differences, stigma, emotional expression, and institutional support were extracted and synthesized.

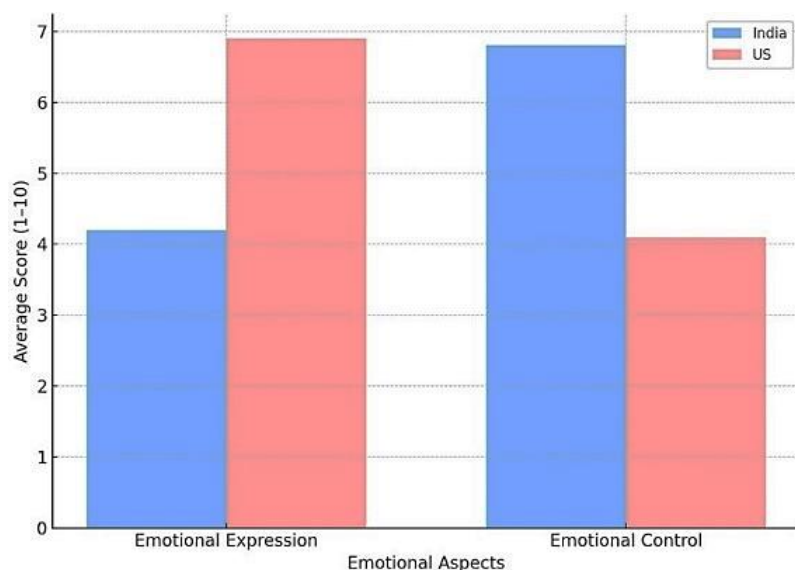
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## THEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Rise of Emotional Expression in Indian Youth

Research indicates that Indian youth today are more willing to express emotions and seek help for mental health issues than previous generations, reflecting a cultural shift (Mehrotra, 2020; Singh, 2021). Factors contributing to this include increased mental health education, exposure to global dialogues via social media, and changing societal norms. However, emotional expression remains regulated by cultural expectations, particularly regarding gender and family dynamics (Raval et al., 2012).



**Figure 1: Comparison of Emotional Expression and Control Scores Between Indian and U.S. Children.**

Source: Adapted from Raval et al. (2012)

Figure 1 compares emotional expression and control scores among school-age children in India and the United States. As reported by Raval et al. (2012), Indian children tend to score lower in emotional expression but higher in emotional control, while the opposite is true for U.S. children. These differences reflect cultural norms around emotion regulation and help explain why Indian youth may struggle more with open emotional expression, particularly in mental health contexts.

### 2. Generational Differences in Mental Health Beliefs

Older generations tend to view mental health problems with stigma, often associating them with weakness or moral failure, leading to suppression of emotional expression (Singh, 2021). This generational gap results in conflicts within families where youth attempt to be more open, but elders adhere to traditional norms of emotional restraint. These differences impact help-seeking behavior and emotional well-being.

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**Table 1: Contrasting Mental Health Beliefs Between Indian Youth and Older Generations.**

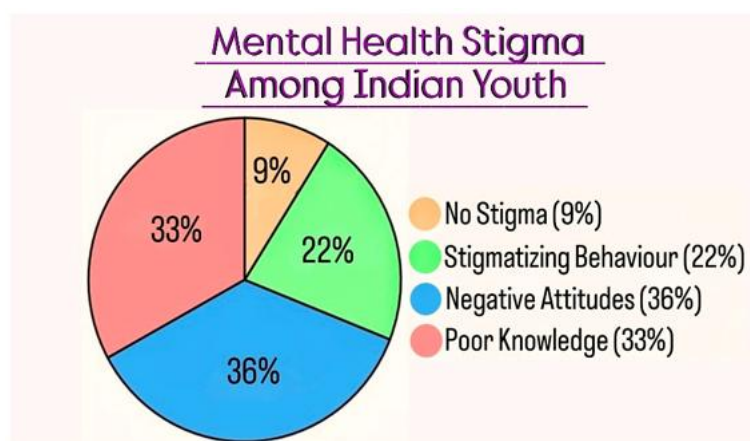
Source: Adapted from Singh (2021)

BELIEF / ATTITUDE	YOUNGER GENERATION	OLDER GENERATION
Mental illness is a medical issue	Agree	Somewhat Disagree
Seeking help is acceptable	Strongly Agree	Neutral
Emotional openness is healthy	Agree	Disagree
Mental illness brings shame	Disagree	Agree
Therapy is beneficial	Strongly Agree	Neutral

Table 1 presents a comparison of beliefs held by younger and older generations regarding mental health. Youth generally view mental illness as a medical condition and show strong support for therapy and emotional openness. In contrast, older generations tend to express neutrality or disagreement on these matters and are more likely to associate mental illness with shame. This generational divide often creates challenges for youth who wish to express their emotions freely within traditional family structures.

### 3. Stigma and Persistent Misconceptions

Despite growing awareness, stigma remains a significant barrier among Indian youth, with approximately one-third holding poor knowledge and one-fifth demonstrating stigmatizing attitudes or behaviors (Gaiha et al., 2020). Common misconceptions include beliefs that mental illnesses are incurable or associated only with severe disorders such as schizophrenia (Srivastava et al., 2016). These attitudes reduce help-seeking and emotional openness, particularly in rural areas.



**Figure 2: Distribution of Mental Health Stigma Components Among Indian Youth.**

Source: Adapted from Gaiha et al. (2020)

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Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of mental health stigma among Indian youth. According to findings by Gaiha et al. (2020), 33% of youth demonstrate poor knowledge of mental health, 36% show negative attitudes, and 22% engage in stigmatizing behavior. Only 9% were found to hold no stigma. This highlights the pressing need for targeted awareness programs to reduce misconceptions and promote emotional openness.

**Table 2: Common Myths and Corresponding Facts about Mental Health in India.**

Source: Adapted from Srivastava et al. (2016)

### Mental Health Myths

- Mental illness is incurable
- People with mental illness are dangerous
- Mental illness is a sign of weakness
- Mental illness is caused by bad karma

### Mental Health Facts

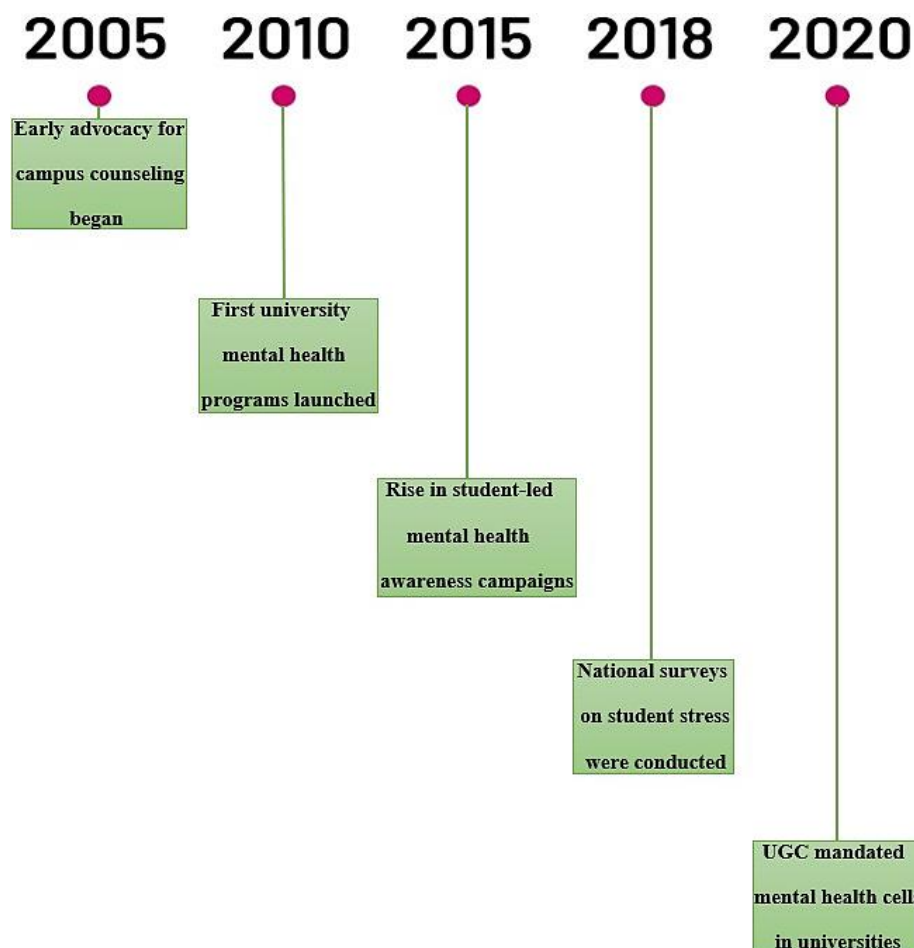
- Many mental illnesses are treatable
- Most people with mental illness are not dangerous
- Mental illness is a medical condition
- Mental illness is not a punishment or bad karma

Table 2 outlines several common myths about mental health alongside evidence-based facts. Misconceptions such as “mental illness is incurable” or “a sign of weakness” continue to fuel stigma, especially in conservative and rural areas. Srivastava et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of correcting these beliefs through public education campaigns, especially those targeting youth, to foster emotional openness and understanding.

### 4. Institutional Gaps and Opportunities

Higher education institutions in India face challenges in providing adequate mental health support, with limited counseling resources relative to the student population (Mehrotra, 2020). Awareness campaigns integrated into educational institutions have shown promise in reducing stigma and encouraging emotional expression (Gaiha et al., 2020). However, systemic investment and culturally relevant content remain insufficient.

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**Figure 3: Timeline of Key Developments in Youth Mental Health Support Within Indian Higher Education.**

Source: Adapted from Mehrotra (2020)

Figure 3 highlights important milestones in the development of mental health infrastructure in Indian higher education. Beginning with early advocacy efforts in 2005 and culminating in the University Grants Commission (UGC) mandate for mental health cells in 2020, the timeline reflects growing recognition of student mental health needs. Mehrotra (2020) stresses that despite progress, service availability and outreach still lag behind demand, especially in non-metropolitan regions.

### **DISCUSSION**

The reviewed literature highlights a clear trend: Indian youth are increasingly embracing emotional expression and mental health awareness, reflecting generational and cultural transitions. This shift is influenced by globalization, digital media, and changing social values. Nonetheless, the persistence of stigma, especially among older generations, underscores the need for ongoing efforts to educate and foster empathy. Institutional strengthening is critical to support this momentum, ensuring accessible mental health services and culturally sensitive programs.

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### *Future Directions*

- There is a need for in-depth exploration of how digital platforms affect the way Indian youth express and discuss mental health issues.
- Development and evaluation of intergenerational dialogue programs to bridge cultural gaps.
- Expansion of mental health resources in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.
- Longitudinal studies on the outcomes of increased emotional expression on youth well-being.

### **CONCLUSION**

Mental health awareness and emotional expression among Indian youth are rising, marking a significant cultural shift from traditional norms. Addressing persistent stigma and institutional shortcomings is vital to sustain this progress. By fostering open dialogue and providing robust support systems, India can better equip its youth to navigate mental health challenges, promoting resilience and well-being across generations.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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