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The adolescent at the home

The Crisis of Youth Mental Health in India

- Adolescence in India is no longer a carefree stage but a period marked by **academic stress, social-media scrutiny, and emotional isolation**.
- India is facing a **silent mental-health crisis**, with youth being disproportionately affected.
- According to the **National Crime Records Bureau**, over **40,000 student suicides** have occurred in the past five years.
- Despite the alarming figures, **mental health remains a neglected area** in the public health agenda.
- The **National Mental Health Survey (2016)** revealed that **1 in 10 adolescents** in India suffers from a mental health disorder.
- However, **India allocates less than 0.5%** of its health budget to mental health—a grossly inadequate investment given the scale of the crisis.
- With over **250 million people below age 20**, this issue demands **urgent and systemic attention**.

COVID-19 and the Deepening Crisis

- The pandemic **exacerbated emotional distress** among youth by closing schools, cutting off social interaction, and shifting students to digital platforms.
- While online learning offered flexibility, it also led to **increased isolation, peer comparison, and performance anxiety**.
- Teenagers faced **greater emotional vulnerability** as routines were disrupted and family stress increased during lockdowns.
- Cultural content like the Netflix series “**Adolescence and Anxiety**” has helped reflect some of the real struggles faced by young people in this time.

Digital Culture and Toxic Masculinity

- An **insidious aspect of online life** is the rise of **influencers promoting toxic masculinity**, characterized by dominance, suppression of emotion, and aggression.



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- These messages **teach boys to hide vulnerability** and avoid seeking help, while fostering environments of misogyny.
- There is a need to **disrupt these narratives**, encouraging emotional honesty over emotional suppression.
- Conversations must be normalized around **mental health, empathy, resilience, and self-awareness**.

Call for Systemic and Cultural Reform

- The solution to this crisis lies in **comprehensive reforms**:
 - **Integrating mental health support into schools.**
 - Making **preventive counselling and emotional education** a standard part of the curriculum.
 - **Teaching digital literacy and emotional intelligence**, helping students navigate the internet and social media mindfully.
- Schools must be empowered not just as centers of academic learning, but as **spaces that foster psychological safety and support**.

Reforming Masculinity Narratives

- Tackling **toxic masculinity** must be a **national priority**, not just in policy but also in curriculum and cultural discourse.
- **Healthier models of masculinity** can lead to better mental health outcomes for boys and men.
- Addressing this challenge will require **public messaging, curriculum reform, and the support of role models** from politics, media, and culture.

Addressing Structural Gaps and Funding

- **Mental health infrastructure** is critically underfunded and poorly accessible, especially in **underserved areas**.
- Investing in this area should be seen as a **core healthcare reform**, not an optional or peripheral issue.
- A **lack of funding** is not just a bureaucratic gap—it is a **life-threatening obstacle** for many young people needing help.

Tackling Stigma and Role of Families

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- Conversations about mental health must begin **at home**, with caregivers and parents recognizing that **emotional health is as important as physical health**.
- Children should be encouraged to **speak openly about emotions** and caregivers should be trained to recognize warning signs.
- **Empathy-based environments** can help children feel safe and understood, especially when facing psychological struggles.

The Power of Public Role Models and Destigmatization

- **Public figures—politicians, celebrities, and influencers—**have a crucial role in **destigmatizing mental health**.
- When influential people speak about their mental health journeys, it sends a message that **seeking help is strength, not weakness**.
- This can encourage young people to come forward and seek support, knowing that **vulnerability is valid and shared**.

Conclusion: Mental Health as a National Imperative

- India's youth are the **future of the nation**, and neglecting their mental health will have **long-term social and economic consequences**.
- The government must **prioritize systemic changes**, including funding, institutional reforms, and cultural shifts.
- Without addressing the **emotional and psychological needs** of its youth, India cannot fully realize its demographic dividend.
- The article ends with a powerful reminder: mental health is **not a luxury**, but a **lifeline**, and **empathy, awareness, and dignity must guide our response**.

Source: Indian Express (Page 10)

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