

# STRESS AMONG PAKISTANI YOUTH

## CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

### Outline

#### 1 Introduction:

Stress is a growing phenomenon among Pakistani youth, caused by unrealistic expectations, academic pressure, career uncertainty, a sedentary lifestyle, brainrot, bureaucratic red tape, and lack of mental health awareness, leading to self-harm, social withdrawal, deteriorated relationships, decreased productivity, chronic diseases, and physical health problems.

#### 2 Causes of stress among Pakistani youth:

a) Unrealistic expectations of parents

- i) Lack of autonomy in career choices
- ii) Gender based expectations

b) Excessive academic pressure

- i) Educational disparities
- ii) Heavy workload
- iii) Favouritism by teachers

c) Growing career uncertainty

- i) Political instability
- ii) Concentrated job market
- iii) Evolving job market
- iv) Increasing rejection rate of visas

d) Adopting sedentary lifestyle

- i) Work from home opportunities
- ii) Over reliance on technology
- iii) Lack of real life interactions

e) Brainrot due to social media

- i) Consumerism culture
- ii) FOMO - fear of missing out
- iii) Inspirations of easy money
- iv) Comparing with unrealistic beauty standards

f) Bureaucratic Red Tape causing hurdles

- i) Excessive documentations
- ii) Oldschool manual records keeping
- iii) Complex procedures for applications

g) Lack of mental health awareness

- i) Stress considered taboo
- ii) Limited accessibility to mental health aids
- iii) Fear of judgement

### 3 Consequences of stress in Pakistani youth:

#### a) Increased risk of self harm

- i) Suicides
- ii) Substance abuse
- iii) Smoking
- iv) Reckless driving

#### b) Withdrawal from social interaction

- i) Social awkwardness
- ii) Isolation

#### c) Deteriorating relationships

- i) Widening of communication gap
- ii) Lack of quality time
- iii) Insecurity and jealousy

#### d) Decreasing productivity

- i) Impact on education and work life
- ii) Inability to make decisions
- iii) Loss of passion and interests

#### e) Chronic diseases and physical health problems

### 4 Remedies to cultivate prosperous youth

### 5 Conclusion

## The Essay

"The youth are not useless - they are used less. The youth are not careless - they are cared less."

- Swami Chinmayananda

The youth of any country are an invaluable asset, and Pakistan, being the fifth-largest country in terms of population world, has 68 percent of its population comprising of youth. In this way Pakistan is rich in youthful potential. Unfortunately, stress is a growing phenomenon among Pakistani youth, caused by unrealistic expectations, academic pressures, career uncertainty, sedentary lifestyle, brainrot, bureaucratic hurdles, and lack of mental health awareness, leading to damaging consequences such as self-harm, social withdrawal, deteriorated relationships, decreased productivity, chronic diseases, and physical health problems. This essay explores the intricate relationship between causes and consequences of stress in youth. It is of utmost importance to reflect on the need for mental well-being of youth to

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ensure a progressive and prosperous Pakistan, with mentally healthy youth at the forefront to serve the country.

The first major cause of stress among Pakistani youth is the unrealistic expectations of their parents. In Pakistani local culture, parents often pressure their children to choose orthodox professions like law, medicine or engineering, undermining the fact that every individual has a different set of abilities and aspirations. For instance, professions related to the arts are often considered unacceptable by parents, leading to a limited list of careers to choose from. This forces youth to pursue careers they are not inherently inclined towards. This conflict between career and passion creates a lasting strain on an individual's personality. Moreover, gender-based expectations by parents are also a leading cause of depression. In patriarchal societies, young girls, as they reach adulthood are forced into marriages. This results in the shattered aspirations and dreams and contributes significantly to a stressful future life of the individuals. Furthermore, in conservative families, girls are

not allowed to marry by the person of their choice. It is considered an immoral act. This creates the marital life, a mere sacrifice and fulfilment of parent's wish, and leads to a unhappy and gloomy future which transcends to the future generations.

Academic pressure is another major cause of excessive stress and depression among youth. Education system in Pakistan does not provide equal knowledge and nurturing to students. There is a widespread disparity among educational institutions. When a student from a backward area try to compete with students from urban areas for university admission, it takes him do to extra efforts as compared to his counterparts from private institutions. Moreover, if such students from backwards areas secure admissions in universities, they have to bear a cultural shock. And to add to that universities are more focused on theoretical knowledge and overburdening them with assignments. This results in disconnects from extracurricular activities and contribute in mental exhaustion of the youth. Furthermore, prevailing culture of favouritism among teachers is also a prominent cause of

stressful academic experience for students.

The lack of impartial behaviour from teachers often creates hurdles for students to excel academically.

One of the major causes of stress, which is significant in current domestic scenario of Pakistan is career uncertainty. This career uncertainty is fueled by political instability. In the current environment of political polarization, constitutional crisis, extremism and lack of effective governance mechanism, there is no growth in industrial sector, which is a major job providing sector. Moreover, businesses are hesitant to invest in Pakistan under this chaotic atmosphere. This results in job market concentration and higher competition over limited number of jobs. In this competition, only graduates of universities with strong industrial ties win further exacerbating disparities among youth over social classes and backgrounds. Apart from this, another reason for stress is the evolving nature of jobs fueled by incorporation of ~~art~~ artificial intelligence and robotics into the businesses. Youth graduated from Pakistani universities often find difficult to match the pace of ever evolving world. Furthermore, those who aspire for abroad

are facing strict visa policies of Western countries and Middle East countries are preparing young professionals from India over Pakistan, due to strong diplomatic ties between Gulf countries and India. All these factors contribute to the career related stress among the youth.

Another major factor contributing to the stressful life of young people is their increasing sedentary lifestyle. With the evolution in working conditions post COVID-19, companies are hiring employees remotely to cut their cost. This results in an inactive and isolated working environment. Moreover, over reliance on technology from freelancing to online shopping, leads a socially disconnected lifestyle. This results in changed social behaviours of individuals often leading to social anxiety and awkwardness. Any crowded place or social gatherings become stressful and mentally draining for such individuals. Furthermore, globalization has made the world more interconnected. People working from Pakistan for foreign clients, often have to compromise their sleeping schedules and adjust them according to the clients time zone. This practice causes disturbed sleep cycle and



ultimately leads to mental exhaustion.

Another significant factor behind stressful youth is brainrot caused by social media usage. Social media algorithms are designed to promote consumerism. Moreover, rising trends of vloggers and influencers create an unnecessary fear of missing out in youth. Young people who consume such content get inspiration from the extravagant lifestyles of such content creators, which instill in them a feeling of unaccomplishment in life. Youth starts preferring easy ways to earn money, abandoning their education which leads them to a life full of competition, where they are ready to do anything to generate content often attracting public criticism. This dopamine attachment with youtube money traps them into a vicious cycle where they are always surrounded by controversies. On the other hand, people watching their perfectly curated family life, vacations, extravagant weddings get depressed by comparing it to their own life. Furthermore, instagram influencers promote curated beauty standards and fashion trends, neglecting the diversity in skin color, body weight and cultural backgrounds. This

results in lack of self-esteem and confidence to own one's own physical features and also create a standard for young people to search for partners resembling Instagram models. These unrealistic aspirations lead to stress in youth.

Additionally, bureaucratic red tape in Pakistani universities and public offices induces extra frustration in youth who are passionate about their goals and committed to saving every bit of their time. Excessive documentation and ~~at~~ attestation requirements with long waiting times further exacerbates the challenges faced by young individuals. Beside that, insufficient and inefficient staff in public offices tests the patience of young people to the fullest. The generation gap between the officers and youth makes communication difficult, as the former consider the latter impatient and the latter label the former as old-school. Moreover, dependency on manual record-keeping delays application processing. However, due to globalization and internet access, the youth are aware of the digital procedures followed in developed countries. This comparison often fuels their aspiration to move abroad, which itself is a complex and stressful process.

Last but not the least, lack of mental health awareness especially in Pakistan, is another cause of stress and anxiety among youth. Talking about stress and depression is considered taboo. Society disregards concepts like stress and depression due to cultural ~~norms~~ norms and traditions, often associating them with spirituality. Parents and teachers frequently advise youth to focus on spirituality without addressing the core issues they are struggling with. Moreover, the lack of emphasis on mental health in education institutions fuels this growing stress pandemic. Additionally, people seeking mental health therapy are often ridiculed in public and considered weak. This irresponsible and immoral societal behaviour instills a fear of judgement in the youth. The lack of empathy towards individuals ~~stress~~ struggling with stress erodes the very fabric of a peaceful and compassionate society, exacerbating the vicious cycle of frustration.

All these causes of stress lead to potentially dangerous consequences. The first and most severe result of stress is an ~~increased~~ increased risk of self-harm. Individuals suffering from depression often adopt

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self-harming behaviours as a coping mechanisms. This prompts individuals to develop suicidal thoughts, which often manifest under intense psychological strain. According to a report, the rate of suicides in Pakistan was 9.8 per 100,000 individuals in 2022, which is an alarming rate in a country comprising of 68% youth population. Furthermore, substance abuse is also an increasing issue among young individuals. As per UN report, 35% of Pakistani youth have been involved in drugs at least once in their life. Beside this, stress often leads to smoking habits and reckless driving, which poses a great existential threat.

Another significant consequence of stress among youth is social withdrawal and self-isolation. Individuals going through severe psychological strain tends to avoid social interactions. This behaviour often results in social awkwardness and impact the whole personality of the individual. Moreover, isolation exacerbates the risk of self-harming tendencies and an increased risk of substance abuse. Furthermore, social withdrawal and isolation deteriorate the natural coping mechanism, trapping the individual in an unending traumatic cycle.

On a collective level, stress and frustration lead to deteriorating relationships with parents, siblings, and spouse. Self-isolation caused by stress, often results in widening of communication gap. Individuals struggling with depression often get irritated over minor inconvenience in life and tend to become furious more often. Moreover, this wide communication gap and misunderstandings push them away to spend quality time with their families and friends. Furthermore, stressed individuals are more prone to insecurity and jealousy in relationships, which leads to frequent confrontations over petty issues and often results in divorce. Similarly, individuals going through severe psychological strain often get jealous ~~from~~ by others seeing other people living a happy life. This erodes the very core of the prosperous society.

Additionally, stress and anxiety, causes decreased productivity in academic and professional spheres. Individual struggling with inner distress and disturbances, find it difficult to match the fast pace of life. For instance, stress leads to weak memory, loss of concentration, and

compromised analytical skills. These ~~very~~ basic skills are the foundations of both education and work life. Moreover, stress takes away from individuals, their decision making ability. Youth often find themselves struggling between choices and inability to stand by their decisions firmly. Furthermore, loss of passion and interest in life leads to a ~~mundane~~ mundane and gloomy life, full of excuses and unfulfilled desires.

Last but not the least, stress exacerbates the risk of chronic diseases and physical health problems. For instance, individuals struggling with continuous strain of frustration are more prone to diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular issues and other such medical complications. Research indicates that diabetes is a common among Pakistani individuals aged 18 to 35, encompassing both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Furthermore, stress results in deteriorated physical health. Individuals often lack motivation to maintain physical health and to follow a healthy lifestyle. These practices cause physical health conditions such as ~~weakness~~ weakness, hair loss, dark circles and disturbed sleep cycles.

To curb these alarming consequences exacerbated by stress and frustration,

there is a dire need to promote mental health awareness at societal level. Schools are the foundation of individual growth. Therefore, schools should have mental health counsellors to mitigate the risk of raising a frustrated generation. Besides this policy making should ~~be~~ must focus on easing hurdles for youth at academic and professional levels. Parents should be well aware of their children mental stress and should deal with them according to the generation needs of their children. Collective efforts and realization is the most effective remedy to cultivate a prosperous society.

In summary, Pakistani youth is suffering from mental stress, frustration and anxiety, caused by various factors ranging from social atmosphere to governance inefficiencies, which push these young individuals to perilous consequences. These consequences highlight the irresponsibility of our society towards the youth, which is considered an asset for any nation. To utilize this asset, collective efforts are required. As Dr. J.P. Vaswani said, "A good way to overcome stress is to help others out of theirs"