

# Youth from India Conflicting Area Suffering from Mental Health Issues

Sijing Feng

University of California, Davis, California, United States

sijfeng@ucdavis.edu

**Abstract.** Nowadays, more and more youth are suffering from mental health issues all over the world. Based on an online literature review, the author found out that there are limited journals talking about low and middle-income countries, especially the relationship between conflicting areas and youth psychological issues. With that said, this essay aims to find the relationship between youth suffering from mental health problem and India conflicting areas. It further analyzes both direct and indirect causes to the problem of mental health in the youth in India. In the suggestion section, the author also provides with several solutions at different levels. The aim of providing these solutions is try to solve or mitigate the problem of youth in conflicting areas suffering from mental health problems, also highlighting the importance of peace, trying to build a better living environment for human being.

**Keywords:** India, conflicting areas, youth, mental health.

## 1. Introduction

Based on WHO (2021), 14.3% of the youth in the world (aged between the age of 10 and 19) have a psychological condition, corresponding to 13% of the global burden of illness in this age group; Suicide is one of the top four major causes to fatalities among people within 15 to 29 years old [1]. Based on the report from CDC (2023), in 2021, about 60% of female students reported continuous emotions of melancholy or hopelessness in the previous year, and nearly 25% considered suicide [2]. The situation is more rigorous in developing countries. Youngsters from low and middle-income nations are more seemingly to be considered as criminals by the general public because of stereotype, which could lead to stigmatized and the feeling of being marginalized [3].

The data mentioned above suggest that youth mental health problems have become increasingly prevalent, particularly in developing countries where mental health services are inadequate. The harsh conditions faced by many young individuals in these regions, such as poverty, violence, and social instability, exacerbate the vulnerability to mental health issues. To address this pressing concern, it is crucial to prioritize prevention and intervention efforts. With a simple search online, the author found out that in ten years' time, there are less articles or journals focusing on mental health of youth from low and middle-income countries compare with youth from developed countries. There are even fewer articles talking about mental health conditions of youth living in war or conflicting countries. Moreover, limited scholarship talks about policies or programs that could sufficiently solve, or even ease, the problems of youth mental health. Majority of the research either does not mention the effectiveness or feedback of the action or comes to the conclusion that the action was not as active. With all those in mind, this makes it essential to analyze reasons behind and create effective preventions and interventions for youth from developing nations.

Existing research is the main sources used in this essay. Experiments and cases from the existing scholarship would be use as supplement and supporting evidence in this essay. After introducing the sever condition of youth mental health all over the world and in low and middle-income countries, this essay aims to analysis current issues in addressing mental illness in young people in India conflicting areas, then proposes effective suggestions to decrease mental health issues among youth in India by taking into account existing policies and programs under several aspects. Finally, the paper implements a conclusion summarizing all the main points discussed in this essay.

## 2. The Mental Health Issue in India

India, a huge developing country with 1.4 billion of the population; It is also a vibrant country with the median age of 28.2 years old [4]. However, the country is suffering from huge mental health issues, especially young people. Psychiatric diseases impact 6.5% of the population in India, including 23.3% of school-aged children and adolescents. [5]. Approximately 10% of teenagers aged 10 to 19 years old have a clinically diagnosable mental condition [6]. Moreover, India has the greatest rate of young suicide in the world, and suicide is the major cause of death in this demographic [5].

Based on the research online, the author concludes that the causes of psychological problems in young people can be roughly divided into three categories: academic stress, war related, and Covid-19. Based on an investigation of an India high school, among all the 190 students, 63.5% of the students reported suffering from stress because of academic issues, 66% of the students reported suffering from pressure because of excessive parental expectations, and 81.6% of the student report suffering from depression because of examinations [7]. Individuals who had experienced war are also potential population for mental health problems. Study shows that 38.5% of the participants had been observed depression symptoms and 20.4% had been observed for PTSD [8]. Based on an interview with an India college student who had gone through Covid, she said she felt she had lost of social connection because of online study, she also felt anxious and stressed when noticing people around her had diagnose With Covid [9]. However, this essay would focus on analysis youth living in conflicting areas.

India faces numerous conflicting areas characterized by diverse issues and grievances. The Kashmir war with Pakistan for territorial control has lasted for a long time. The Naxalite-Maoist insurgency in central and eastern India uses violent action to address land rights and rural poverty. In several northern states, communal confrontations between religious groups exacerbate tensions. Other states, like Assam, Manipur, Punjab, and Chhattisgarh, are experiencing regional conflicts fueled by aspirations for identity, resource distribution, and autonomy.

“In the war, there is no price for runner.” There are always profound and far-reaching negative consequences brought by wars. One of the most devastating effects is the loss of loved ones. As families grieve the loss of troops and civilians trapped in the crossfire, they feel unimaginable anguish and pain. Think about the children that lost their family during wars: they are particularly vulnerable victims of war. Losing parents, siblings, or witnessing their families torn apart would all lead to long-term psychological issues like clinical depression or PTSD. Moreover, war often forces families to flee their homes, becoming refugees in quest of protection. Displacement affects family structures by separating extended family members and breaking the bonds of kinship which makes it difficult for children to develop a sense of security and belonging. Additionally, wars could also bring economic hardship to the family. Families struggle to meet basic needs, facing increased stress and uncertainty about their future. Children feeling low in self-esteem, anxiety, and lonely because of poverty.

## 3. Direct and Indirect Causes for the Issue of Mental Health

The devastating effects of war can influence youth mental health significantly. Directly, war could force individual experience violence, trauma, and displacement, leading to psychological stress; indirectly, war could lead to financial hardship, loss of loved ones, and lack of resources, limited access to education and healthcare, further exacerbating the mental health challenges faced by the youth caught in the midst of conflict. This section would analysis how war would directly and indirectly influence youth mental health.

One of the direct and devastating results of war is the loss of family. The whole process could trigger or even cause youth mental health problems. When individual know that their family may suffer from disaster, the unknown starts them off in a state of great fear or apprehension. When they received confirmation that they have lost their family, people would lead them into overwhelming grief and emotional depression. Those short-term impact could lead to mental problems like insecure, depression, or anxiety. Loss of family members could also lead to long-terms effects. Data has

showed that children from single-parent family significant higher risk of committing suicide compare with households with both parents. Children from single-parent families may live in the shadow of a single-parent family. They may suppress their emotions for a long time and face life negatively. Also, the people around them may have marginalized them, resulting in them having no friends. Lack of communication with people can cause young people to close themselves off and eventually lead to mental health issues. Moreover, because of having only one adult workforce in the family, many single-parent families may also suffer from financial hardships. To support the family and provide with his/her children with better resources, the parent is forced to work longer hours. However, this could lead to having not enough time to take care and spend time with their children so that they neglect their children's feelings. This ultimately leads to the child's dissatisfaction with their parents, their own surroundings, and thus their society.

War could lead to family poverty which is also a trigger of youth mental health problem. War could lead to the loss of lives which this person could be the main or the only financial resource for the family; War could also lead to destroy of lands and infrastructure; people could lose their jobs because of that. The number one employment industry in India is agriculture. War can lead to the destruction of a large number of farmlands. Crops in the fields do not generate income for the farmers and families fall into financial difficulties. Poverty is one of the reasons that could lead to youth mental health problem. Report from Canadian Ministry of Children and Youth services suggested that children or youth from family not experience poverty is three times less likely having mental health issues compare with children and youth living in poverty. Also, youth living in wealthy families are less likely to have conduct disorders, depression, or attention-deficit disorders [10]. A straightforward example from everyday life can help clarify this phenomenon. Consider the typical conflicts that arise among young boys in middle school. For instance, one boy acquires the latest basketball shoes from a popular brand and proudly displays them to his friends. The display of material possession can trigger feelings of envy in his friends, who cannot afford the same shoes. If his friends become persistently entangled in a cycle of unhealthy competition and repeated failures, it may lead to depression or inferiority in a long-run. A more scientific explanation supported by previous study indicates that adolescents aged between 16 to 19 years old, particularly those from economically disadvantaged family, tend to experience feeling of "not optimistic," "felt failure," or "did not feel useful [10]." This could lead individual lack of hope and self-affirmation. Children could also experience shame or bullying when they know their family are having financial burden. People around children from poor family may also discriminate and stigmatized them, which could cause people suffering from depression, loneliness, and loss of self-confidence [10].

Children and their families experiencing or having experienced war can lead to changes in parenting style and children's adjustment. Parenting style is a crucial determinant of a child's upbringing, profoundly influencing their development and shaping their behavior, emotions, and future relationships. It encompasses strategies and approaches that parents employ to nurture, guide, and discipline their children. Several factors can interplay with an individual's parenting style, including cultural background, socioeconomic status, and personal beliefs. Personal experiences, such as exposure to war, can also play an important role.

War is impermanent and individuals often do not know which comes first – danger or tomorrow. Bombings, gun battles, and air raids become commonplace in conflicting areas. Such conditions can easily lead to high levels of concentration, overstimulation, and susceptibility to hallucinations. Not to mention that parents whose instinct is to protect and care their children. Research shows that in very risky situations, parents exhibited harshness, antagonism, inconsistency, and less warmth, but when just living under threat, parents exhibited more warmth and overprotection. This would easily explain why parents would show overprotection to their children during wars [11].

Overprotective behaviors commonly include excessive monitoring of a child's activities, making decisions for them without involvement, shielding them from potential risks, and micromanaging social interactions. These behaviors could all influence children's adjustment. Consider a scenario in which parents become harsh and aggressive because of war-related factors; their children may witness

a decline in the quality of their parent-child connection and acquire antagonism from their parents. Especially with war-exposed households, such conduct may increase a kid's trauma-related symptoms by lowering a child's sense of security in the home environment and limiting a child's access to social assisted connections, both of which are critical for recovery after experiencing traumatic events [11]. A more serious possibility can be the symptoms of parental overprotection intensify and slowly evolve into a mental illness. A parent's ill health markedly reduces their capacity to adequately care for their child, heightening the risk of adverse outcomes for the child's well-being and development.

#### 4. Suggestions

The consequences of youth having bad mental health are severe and far-reaching. Internally, a bad psychological well-being would lead to feelings of fearfulness, depression, and low self-esteem, hindering their emotional well-being and self-perception. Externally, a weak psychological health could lead to being isolated, stigmatized or even marginalized by society. With that in mind, it is an urgent to implement solutions to mitigate youth mental health issues. By investing in mental health programs, creating policies, and implementing actions to the society, we can break the needs of mental distress and foster healthier communities. Early detection and support can prevent long-term negative impacts on youth mental health and overall development; Intervention and solutions could solve the problem from the root and make youth a better life. A concerted effort to address youth mental health is essential for building a resilient and thriving future generation. This section provides both prevention and intervention measures for youth mental health problem in conflicting areas.

Prevention actions can be implemented under school bases. India high schools can cooperate with health institutions or non-profit organizations and build a mental health center. The health center can provide students with mental health check routinely then build each individual with their own database. The results are automatically imported into the database and would send reports to the doctors and the school principal if there are large fluctuations in the mental state of students. The mental health center would also provide classes to the students, in which way to make the students more aware of mental health knowledge. The author believes that this initiative will actually help alleviate the problem of mental illness in adolescents as part of this program draws in part of a former study. The study is a randomized controlled, double blinding experiment. The study picks 12 schools and testify if a six modules mental health related lecture would help reduce the symptoms of anxiety. The result remains positive: the experimental group resulted in lower anxiety score compare with the control group [12]. However, this program can also meet some limitations. For example, the school finds it difficult to cooperate with organizations or the large consumption of money and human resources that schools could not cope with.

Interventions can be implemented through both international and national wise. As for international wise, the India government could ask United Nation or other non-profit organizations for help, requesting them to send peacekeepers to support war-torn areas. The peacekeepers should not only help fight against invaders; they must also help rebuild homes. Because UN peacekeepers are tasked with maintaining international peace and security in conflict zones around the world. They deploy to areas experiencing armed conflicts or post-conflict situations and work to protect civilians, facilitate peace negotiations, and disarm combatants. Furthermore, they also build rules and laws, promote human rights, and deliver operational supports [13]. The 25th contingent of Chinese peacekeeping troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) totaled 218 personnel. In this peacekeeping mission, the engineering detachment has organized 48 engineering surveys and completed 36 various engineering protection tasks; the medical detachment has received 521 medical consultations, admitted 15 people to the hospital, performed 34 operations and successfully completed various medical treatment tasks [14]. With all the above data, it is reasonable to believe that the problem of mental illness among adolescents in conflict zones can be tackled at its root (war) if India can get help from international organizations.

Interventions can also be implemented at the national level. The Indian government could enhance communication with the governments of hostile regions and focus on non-violent means of resolving disputed issues. Emphasizing negotiations could bring more positive outcomes. In a short run, it could foster diplomatic solutions, reducing human lost and economic devastation caused by conflicts. In a long run, less people would lose their family which may trigger mental health issues, more stabilization in the society which could foster peace, more cooperation which could build more mutual understanding between nations. However, the limitations are clear as well: the time that would spend on the conferences would be long lasting. It took about four years for Germany and the Allied Powers signed an armistice at Compiègne, France, while it took more than 70 years for India and Pakistan to reach a consensus. However, it is worth the time for peace.

## 5. Conclusion

Through analysis, this study reveals that there are direct and indirect causes to youth from conflicting area suffering from mental health problems. The immediate causes can be summarized as: first, war cause people to lose their family members, which increase the number of single-parent family, thereby exposing young people to mental health issues. The author also focuses on the consequences of children and their family's experiences of war. The analysis points out that individual's parenting style could be influenced by war: war could make parents be overprotected and diagnosed with mental health problems. Those could all intentionally cause youth psychological illness. Indirect reasons focus on how family economic hardship could also lead to youth mental health problems. These conclusions are based on the author's personal analysis using a review of online papers, combined with previous research findings. The conclusions obtained in the analytical part of the paper can be raised to general laws. That is because in the analysis the author did not mention about any special circumstance, for example: race, region, or religion. With that said, this essay comes to conclusions that there are several reasons that war could cause youth suffering from mental health issues. The direct cause is that war could lead to multiple negative consequences, for example the loss of love ones, poverty and economic hardship. There are also indirect causes which in this essay we focus on one target audience: the military children who may have higher possibilities to suffer from mental health issues.

The conclusion above shows that the essence of what leads young people to mental illness is war. With that said, the root of the problem is the call for peace. Peace stands as a fundamental to humanity's capacity for understanding, compassion, and progress. In a world marred by conflicts, violence, and discord, the importance of peace cannot be overstated. It is the foundation upon which societies thrive, economies prosper, and individuals' development. Moreover, as we thought about the role of youth in shaping the future, the call for peace takes on an even greater urgency. The youth represent the torchbearers of tomorrow, the ones who will inherit the legacies. A better world for them requires peace as a fundamental prerequisite. It offers them the opportunity to dream, aspire, and achieve without the shadow of conflict looming over their aspirations. In an atmosphere of tranquility, youth can harness their energy, creativity, and potential to drive transformative change.

## References

- [1] World Health Organization. (2021). Mental health of adolescents. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>.
- [2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023). YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY DATA SUMMARY & TRENDS REPORT. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/yrbs\\_data\\_summary\\_and\\_trends.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/yrbs_data_summary_and_trends.htm).
- [3] Watters C. (2017). Editorial Perspective: Effective Mental Health and Psychosocial Interventions for Children and Adolescents in Street Situations. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry, and allied disciplines*, 58 (2), 215–217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12625>.

- [4] WorldOmeter. (n.d.). India demographics. Worldometer. <https://www.worldometers.info/demographics/india-demographics/>.
- [5] Mehra, D., Lakiang, T., Kathuria, N., Kumar, M., Mehra, S., & Sharma, S. (2022). Mental Health Interventions among Adolescents in India: A Scoping Review. *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)*, 10 (2), 337. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10020337>.
- [6] Michelson, D., Malik, K., Krishna, M., Sharma, R., Mathur, S., Bhat, B., Parikh, R., Roy, K., Joshi, A., Sahu, R., Chilhate, B., Boustani, M., Cuijpers, P., Chorpita, B., Fairburn, C. G., & Patel, V. (2020). Development of a transdiagnostic, low-intensity, psychological intervention for common adolescent mental health problems in Indian secondary schools. *Behaviour research and therapy*, 130, 103439. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2019.103439>.
- [7] Deb, S., Strodl, E., & Sun J. (2015). Academic Stress, Parental Pressure, Anxiety and Mental Health among Indian High School Students. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, 26, <https://doi.org/10.5923/j.ijpbs.20150501.04>.
- [8] Murthy, R. S., & Lakshminarayana, R. (2006). Mental Health Consequences of War: A Brief Review of Research Findings. *World psychiatry: official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)*, 5 (1), 25–30.
- [9] Ram, C, Interview, October 15, 2022.
- [10] Gibson, K., Abraham, Q., Asher, I., Black, R., Turner, N., Waitoki, W., & McMillan, N. (2017). Child poverty and mental health: A literature review. Commissioned for New Zealand Psychological Society and Child Poverty Action Group.
- [11] Eltanamly, H., Leijten, P., Jak, S., & Overbeek, G. (2021). Parenting in Times of War: A Meta-Analysis and Qualitative Synthesis of War Exposure, Parenting, and Child Adjustment. *Trauma, violence & abuse*, 22 (1), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838019833001>.
- [12] Ab Ghaffar, S. F., Mohd Sidik, S., Ibrahim, N., Awang, H., & Gyanchand Rampal, L. R. (2019). Effect of a School-Based Anxiety Prevention Program among Primary School Children. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16 (24), 4913. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16244913>.
- [13] United Nations. (n.d.). What we do peacekeeping. United Nations. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/what-we-do>.
- [14] People's Daily Online. (n.d.). All 218 Officers and Soldiers of the 25th Batch of China's Peacekeeping Forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) returned home in triumph.