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The Problem With Our Generation

In a world full of problems, it is hard to pinpoint one that is more severe than the others. Amongst the people of Generation Z, the defining issue is mental health. Having over 61 million members of this generation in the United States, there have been more reports of mental health issues compared to any other generation. This brings about the question, why does our generation suffer mental health issues more severely than any other generation?. With such a widespread issue, there are many causes, and this makes it harder to find a resolution. However, there are a myriad of reasons why our generation suffers from poor mental health, and knowing and understanding these reasons is the first step to a worldwide solution.

Generation Z is defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012. In the present day, that means the generation consists of those ages 10-25. This generation has reported the highest rates of stress, anxiety, and depression. There are also very high suicide rates amongst this generation. What is the cause of this problem? The root of mental illness is not just one factor, but numerous factors. These include genetics, environmental factors, childhood trauma, stressful events, negative thoughts, imbalance of chemicals, and drugs and alcohol. All of these factors contribute to poor mental health in some way. Specifically in this generation, the rates of gun violence, sexual assaults, and joblessness contribute to poor mental health. Of all generations, Gen Z faces many chronic stress factors daily.

Some of the main contributing factors to poor mental health are technology and social media. Having a cellular device at one's fingertips that can perform almost any task may be seen as a positive thing, but many don't know how cell phones deteriorate mental health. The average teenager will look up a question that they cannot answer, getting them used to instant gratification, and taking away from their desire to problem solve and learn. With this generation spending an average of 8+ hours a day online, this takes away time from exercise, learning, and socializing. According to IBM, Gen Z uses the internet for texting and chatting for a significantly larger amount of time daily than they do to do schoolwork or learn. With this generation's priorities being texting and using their phones, young adults often lose the ability to hold conversation and their social status deteriorates. Being able to think about texts for a long time before sending them may bring about anxiety in real in-person conversations. As for social media, young adults are constantly seeing people who post pictures of themselves looking perfect, and this creates a false standard that viewers feel they do not meet. This causes Gen Zers to doubt themselves, and second-guess their self-worth. While technology and social media bring about good results, the amount of depression and anxiety that they cause outweighs these benefits.

Violence, abuse, and lack of having a person to talk to also contributes to mental health problems. First off, Gen Z has access to news like no other generation has, and so these young

adults see the horrible things that are going on in the world every day. 75% of Gen Zers have reported that school and mass shootings are a significant source of stress. Even if the young adult goes to a school in a safe environment, seeing the horrible school shooting stories on the news, or ever experiencing one sticks with them for their life and causes great anxiety. While abuse is not exclusive to this generation, 51% of all reported sexual abuse is accounted for by teenagers. Not only does physical abuse play a major role in poor mental health, but so does substance abuse. Drug abuse can affect any generation, but Gen Z is especially subject to it due to the increased loneliness and obsession with social media. Many teenagers see drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism for the anxiety and depression that they experience, which worsens their physical and mental health as they become dependent on unhealthy things.

With all these problems, there must be a solution. The main cause of suicides are feelings of loneliness, depression, an anxiety. If all Gen Zers had a therapist, or somebody that they were comfortable with talking about their problems to, a lot of these negative impacts would be reduced. A lot of the time suicides occur because the individuals parents are unaware of the mental health problems the person is experiencing. Even if there were programs in schools where guidance counselors could receive messages from students anonymously and then give lessons or meet with groups to discuss a certain problem, some people would find comfort or hope. The main resolution is letting Gen Zers know that they are not alone, and that there is always somebody there who loves them and will care for them. If students who felt they were dealing with poor mental health could organize therapy sessions through their school they may be more likely to do so rather than go out of their way to a third-party psychiatrist. Having mental health days off where students can use the day to reflect and catch up on work would relieve some stress, and they could even use the day to relax and do something they enjoy. Every individual has a different coping mechanism, and so having at least five mental health days per school year would be beneficial as the individual could decide what they want to do during their day off.

In the end, mental health is a serious concern among this generation. While there is no simple solution, there are many methods that could aid in improving the mental health of teenagers. In today's world, there are a lot of factors that contribute to poor mental health, making it hard for Gen-Zers to cope. Mental health problems are certainly the defining issue of this generation, and it can be resolved.