

METAPHOR



Youth Mental Health Perspectives

An Evaluation of Survey Results



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Disclaimer:

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Abstract/Summary

Introduction

Studies¹² have shown an alarming rise in rates of anxiety, depression, and other worrying behaviours among adolescents and young adults. These trends highlight the urgent need to obtain a comprehensive understanding and initiate proactive interventions to address youth mental health issues.

Understanding the perspectives, experiences, and needs of young individuals regarding mental health is crucial for designing effective prevention, intervention, support and advocacy strategies.

The sociological survey on Youth Mental Health Perspectives in Germany addresses a critical gap in understanding and addressing the mental health needs of young people. By centering youth voices and experiences, the survey endeavours to inform evidence-based interventions, foster dialogue, and advocate for systemic changes that prioritize the mental well-being of future generations.

National background

Around 13 million children and young people currently live in Germany. This represents 16 per cent of the population. Around 700,000 children are born every year.

Childhood and adolescence are characterised by different developmental phases, each with its own conditions for well-being, physical and mental health and disease risks. The health of children and adolescents is influenced by family and social structures as well as medical care services, and with increasing age also by their behaviour. Health and

¹ [World Health Organization. \(2021\). *Mental Health of Adolescents*.](#)

² [Westberg, K.H., Nyholm, M., Nygren, J.M. and Svedberg, P. \(2022\). Mental Health Problems among Young People—A Scoping Review of Help-Seeking. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, \[online\] 19\(3\), p.1430.](#)

mental health in childhood and adolescence have a major impact on health in later adulthood.³

Since the start of the Corona pandemic, the utilisation of mental health services has significantly increased and has now stabilised at a high level. Among adolescents, especially girls are affected. This is the result of a recent analysis of the DAK-Gesundheit Children and Adolescents Report. The data shows that adolescent girls continue to be the most affected by depression, anxiety disorders and eating disorders.⁴

Mental illness and behavioural disorders were the most common cause of inpatient hospital treatment for young people aged between 15 and 24 in 2020. just under 18% of all hospital treatments for 15 to 24-year-olds were due to mental health problems. The most common reasons for treatment included depression, behavioural disorders caused by excessive alcohol consumption and depressive episodes.⁵

The DAK report also makes it clear that children and adolescents from different social backgrounds make different use of medical treatment. This is shown by the example of depression. There are clearly different trends between adolescent girls from families with high and low social status. For example, utilisation among socially disadvantaged girls fell back to almost the pre-pandemic level in 2022 but rose sharply among teenagers from middle and high social classes. At the same time, 29 per cent more adolescent girls from the middle class were diagnosed with depression than before the pandemic. Among girls from high social classes, there was even an increase of 28 per cent.

³ RKI . (n.d.). Themenschwerpunkt Kinder- und Jugendgesundheit. [online] Available at: https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/Gesundheitsmonitoring/Themen/Kinder_und_Jugendgesundheit/KiJuGesundheit_node.html [Accessed 23 Apr. 2024].

⁴ DAK Presse. Available at: https://www.dak.de/presse/bundesthemen/kinder-jugendgesundheit/psychische-erkrankungen-bei-jugendlichen-bleiben-auf-hohem-niveau_54000 [Accessed 23 Apr. 2024].

⁵ Statistisches Bundesamt. (n.d.) [online] Available at: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/Zahl-der-Woche/2022/PD22_32_p002.html. [Accessed 23 Apr. 2024].



However, it is important to mention that the report shows the use of support measures. The treatment of young people with a higher social status has a strong rate of increase. This means that young people from higher social classes are treated more frequently on average. This may be because socially better-off families, parents and guardians are more aware of mental illnesses than families with lower social status and that mental illnesses and related help services may be less stigmatised in higher social classes. Young people from socially weaker backgrounds are not fundamentally less mentally ill, they are just less likely to seek treatment. This may be due to the widening gap between rich and poor. Nevertheless, medical help is sought earlier and in recent years, the topic of mental illness has become less of a taboo.⁶

Therefore, the German federal government has developed a strategy to promote child health. This also addresses the importance of mental health. The German government wants to expand the preventive medical check-ups for children to include aspects of mental health. Emotional problems, anxiety, depression or eating disorders could thus be recognised and treated at an early stage. Participation in pediatric check-ups is also to be increased, particularly among socially disadvantaged and migrant families, as they make significantly less use of pediatric check-ups than families from higher social classes.

Measures to increase participation rates should be expanded with the involvement of health insurance companies, among others.

Targeted prevention of neglect and domestic violence is also essential for the normal mental development of children. Additionally, the measures include, in particular, prevention and promotion of mental health through comprehensive psychosocial care and health education measures. The focus here is on depression, anxiety disorders,

⁶ Deutsches Ärzteblatt. Available at: <https://www.aerzteblatt.de/archiv/234556/Psychische-Gesundheit-von-Kindern-und-Jugendlichen-Die-Hilfesysteme-sind-ueberlastet> [Accessed 23 Apr. 2024].



eating disorders, social behaviour disorders and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.⁷

In conclusion, the coronavirus pandemic has thus triggered an increase in mental health problems among children and young people compared to the years before the pandemic. However, it is also clear that health services relating to mental health are on the rise and that the German government recognises the importance of prevention and therapy services and wants to expand them. The increase in the use of therapy services also shows a reduction in the stigma attached to mental health.

The survey and its results will highlight the insights, opinions and experiences of those affected; Young people between the ages of 13 and 30.

Methodology of the conducted survey

The survey was carried out online between the 7th of February 2024 and the 8th of April 2024 and employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative measures to obtain data and ensure a comprehensive understanding of youth mental health perspectives. The survey was answered by 102 respondents. The results ensure representation across diverse demographic groups, by age, gender, education level, geographic location, and socioeconomic status (see [Demographics](#)).

Data Analysis Approach

The quantitative data are analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to summarise demographic characteristics and survey responses.

⁷ Strategie der Bundesregierung zur Förderung der Kindergesundheit. (n.d.). Available at: https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/fileadmin/Dateien/5_Publikationen/Mi_nisterium/BMG-G-07051-Strategie-Kindergesundheit.pdf [Accessed 23 Apr. 2024].

The qualitative data will undergo a thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights derived from responses.

The analysis of the responses to the survey on Youth Mental Health Perspectives generates meaningful insights, informs evidence-based interventions and policies, and contributes to the advancement of knowledge and practice in youth mental health promotion and support.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic distribution of the respondents who participated in the survey online in Germany is as follows:

Gender

A total number of 102 participants took part in the survey. 20 (19,6 %) of the participants identified as male, 77 (75,5 %) participants identified as female, 1 (1%) person identified as non-binary or third gender, 1 (1%) person identified as Trans and 3 (2,9%) of the participants did not want to share their gender.

Place of residence

Out of the 102 participants, 9 (8,8%) participants said they are living in Big cities (population 300,000+), 33 (32,4 %) stated, that they are living in cities (population 30,000 to 300,000), 30 (29,4 %) participants are living in Towns (population 5,000 to 30,000), and 30 participants have stated that they live in Villages (population up to 5,000).

Education

Expectedly for the age groups of the respondents the most common educational level among them is secondary education degree (67,6 %), with university or college degree (20.6%) being the next most common level. The least common educational level among the participants are VET (7,8%), primary education (2,9 %), and one person (1%) saying there are currently doing their Abitur (A-levels).

Occupation

Overall, the majority of respondents are either students (52%) or employed (44,1%), with a small proportion being self-employed/freelancers (2 %), or unemployed (2%).

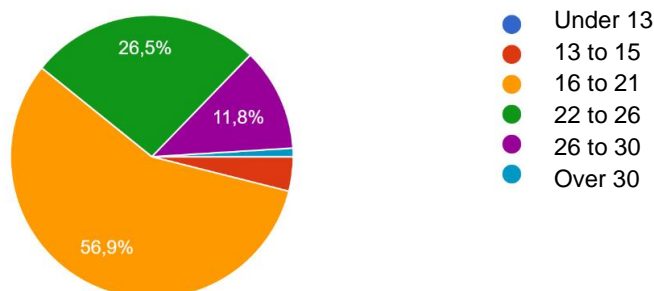
KulturLife aimed to make the survey as representative as possible, so that children and young people from the defined age groups and all areas of society were surveyed in accordance with their distribution in German society. However, due to KulturLife's primary target groups, this was not entirely possible. As we mainly work with pupils from secondary school classes, vocational school pupils, students, and recent graduates, it was very difficult for us to reach the age groups 13 to 15 and 27 to 30. In addition, our participants tend to have a higher school-leaving qualification. Due to the demographics of our participants and the chosen medium of the survey, it is to be expected that the survey could not reach all demographics of young people in Germany. As the survey was carried out online, we can assume that it is not representable for marginalized groups, educational drop-offs, etc. which may have limited access or are harder to motivate to use online resources. Nevertheless, we think that the survey results can be used to create an important insight into the trends, understandings, and opinions of young people about the topic of mental health.

Age

Table: Distribution of respondents across different age groups.

Wie alt bist Du?
102 Antworten

How old are you?





Research results

Age group 13 to15

This age group shows a basic knowledge and familiarity on the matter, as well as some own experience with mental health struggles but their knowledge on clear definition is lacking. For the respondents, mental health encompasses mostly emotional well-being, stability of one's mental state, and the balance of emotions and moods. All participants in this age group showed confidence in their understanding of the term mental health but when asked specifically about their definition of mental health, half of the participants did not answer. The participants indicate that school and social media play an important role in their mental well-being and that both lack education about and sensitivity towards mental health and mental struggles.

Some participants showed their struggles and experiences with mental health issues while others indicated that they are not affected by mental health issues. Overall, the results indicate a mixed understanding and engagement with mental health-related concepts and issues.

Quantitative questions:

The results of the age group 13 to 15 show room for improvement in raising awareness and understanding about mental health issues. Nevertheless, the results also indicate struggles with mental health already appear in the youngest age group involved in the survey.

The reported daily stress levels and feelings of anxiety are moderate. This highlights the importance of implementing effective stress management strategies and support systems.

Mental Health Education and Awareness

The importance attributed to mental health education suggests moderate importance for the participants with an average rating of moderate to strong importance. While most participants stated that they have been taught about mental health in school, they do not feel that school provides adequate mental health support (Average rating: 1,75) and have either never or rarely experienced discussions about mental well-being in educational settings. Additionally, all participants stated that they have witnessed bullying or discrimination and their impact on mental health. This underscores the need for comprehensive and accessible mental health education programmes in educational institutions and communities.

Respondents report a moderate level of knowledge about mental health conditions, showing that there is room for improvement in increasing awareness and understanding of various mental health issues.

While the quality of sleep is reported to be strong (Average rating: 4,00) and implies good sleep hygiene among respondents, the academic pressure is perceived to have a strong effect on mental health (Average rating: 4,00), highlighting the importance of implementing effective stress management techniques and support mechanisms within educational settings.

Social Environment and Social Media

The Ability to talk with their social groups including family settings and peers about struggles and mental health in general is crucial for young people who are still finding their places in society and are building their own identity. Most respondents answered the question "Do you think it is not possible to talk openly about mental health in your environment?" with a negative response (Average rating: 2,00). However, respondents feel more comfortable talking about mental health problems with peers than with adults with average ratings of 3,5 compared to 3,00.



This suggests a potential barrier in seeking support from older generations and highlights the importance of supporting more open communication channels between different age groups since the respondents already see the possibility of talking about mental health with their environment.

The survey reveals a positive trend towards openness in discussing mental health in society, although there is still room for improvement in creating a more supportive and stigma-free environment for mental health discourse. Additionally, it highlights the importance of social media and school settings for young people's mental well-being and shows, that mental-health education and awareness need to be increasingly addressed by educational institutions and social media outlets.

The impact of social media on mental health is perceived to be strong (Average rating: 4,75), indicating a strong awareness regarding the potential effects of social media use on mental well-being in the youngest age group tested.

Qualitative Questions:

Mental Health Perception

Based on the responses, important mental health-related issues cited include mostly depression and anxiety disorders but also explosive behaviour and bullying at school, highlighting the range of challenges individuals between the ages of 13 to 15 perceive as significant in relation to their understanding of mental health.

The responses to the open questions show that the respondents see the most beneficial support for young people facing mental health in emotional support from friends and teachers. Professional help such as attending sessions with psychologists or psychiatrists was not listed, emphasizing the importance of educating young people about professional help as an opportunity to receive both emotional and professional assistance in coping with mental health challenges.



Age group 16 to 21

The participants between the ages of 16 and 21 show deeper knowledge and familiarity on the matter. More than half of the participants stated that they know how and where to access resources for mental health, and they rated their knowledge of mental illnesses and mental health resources as average to good with an average rating of 3,72.

The respondents in this age group see the greatest misconceptions and misunderstandings about mental health problems in particular in the perception and acceptance in society and the social environment, the strong presence of social media and the lack of therapy programmes and support systems. Some participants mentioned misconceptions like "The assumption that it is just a phase," "That mental illnesses are not taken as seriously as physical illnesses," and "Mental health problems are not always visible." Overall, the results indicate a deeper understanding of the complexity of mental health and awareness of stigma and misconceptions surrounding mental health and mental health problems.

Quantitative questions:

Mental Health Education and Awareness

The importance attributed to mental health education is quite strong with an average rating of 5,14. This underscores the awareness of this age group for mental health and mental well-being. It highlights the importance of comprehensive and accessible mental health education programs in educational institutions and communities.

The results indicate that young people between the ages of 16 and 21 do not feel that their mental health is adequately taken into account in their current phase of life (Average rating: 2,94) and their mental health is only moderately taken into account in their educational institution or workplace. Additionally, around half of the participants stated that they can not or can only moderately deal with stress and anxiety. These results indicate a lack of efficient support systems and awareness of mental well-being



in professional settings. They also highlight the importance of implementing effective stress management strategies in educational and vocational settings and the need to increase support systems for young people.

Social Environment

Participants rated the perceptions of stigma surrounding mental health in their generation as moderate (Average rating: 3,76) while they value the support through peers as important (Average rating: 4,28) and see their generation confronted with particular challenges concerning mental health (Average rating: 4,58). These results underline that even if stigma is present in the respondents' environments, they still emphasise the importance of friendship and peer support for the mental well-being of young people. In addition, addressing stigma through education and advocacy efforts is crucial to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for individuals experiencing mental health challenges.

While respondents value discussing mental health with peers, 38 of the 58 participants stated that they never or rarely discuss mental health with their family and only 2 participants in this age group stated that they talk daily with their family about mental health.

Those results suggest a potential barrier to seeking support from older generations and highlight the importance of fostering open communication channels between different age groups.

The survey asked this age group about their personal experiences, social environment and Lifestyle choices. The respondents stated that they rate the availability of support and access to sufficient mental health care in their area only as moderate (Average ratings: 3,1 and 3,14) and over half of the participants said that they or someone they know experienced situations where they did not receive the mental health support they would have needed, indicating the need to increase and expand mental health care in



Germany. Additionally, further research could help to find new ways to improve access to mental health care, especially in smaller cities and rural areas.

Respondents clearly indicated that they believe lifestyle choices (diet, exercise, sleep) affect mental health (Average rating: 4,7) and that they value mindfulness or meditation practices for mental health (Average rating:7,12). Emphasising these statements, more than half of the participants stated that they participate monthly, weekly or daily in activities that can improve their mental health. These answers indicate that young people between the age of 16 and 21 are aware of the importance of mental health and the risk factors for mental health issues.

However, the following results are in contrast to the previous statements. Although 43 people stated that they had experienced anxiety or depression, more than half of those surveyed had not yet sought professional help, only 6 people had taken part in group therapy or self-help groups and only 14 people had used online resources for mental health. These results show that, on the one hand, access to professional help needs to be improved and, on the other hand, the individual attitudes of the respondents could still be characterised by biases that need to be overcome. So that young people are not ashamed to make use of the professional support that could help them.

Social Media

The influence of social media is also addressed in the survey. Participants do not see that mental health is adequately represented in social media (Average rating: 2,94) and 47 out of 58 participants feel the influence of social media on their mental health monthly, weekly or daily. Considering those results, the role of social media should be reconsidered, and social media should be held more accountable. Mental health education and awareness should also be representative on social media.



Qualitative Questions:

Individual perception of Mental Health

When asked "What kind of resources or support do you think would help young people with mental health problems?", many of the respondents answered with more education, open dialogue, understanding from older people and more therapy services. One person stated the following: "More education and that it is no longer a taboo subject and is not played down by adults or parents." Another person wrote: "That the topic is talked about more, that it is easier to talk to someone you can really trust, and that the topic is taken more seriously".

The respondents also had the opportunity to give their assessment of the influence of social media on mental health. Many people saw a negative influence and a cause of mental and social pressure in social media. At the same time, however, some people also stated that social media can help to educate people about mental health and people can exchange and talk to like-minded people and feel less alone. Some of the responses included the following: "Social media can tend to create an environment where people compare their lives with each other. This can lead to a negative impact on self-esteem as users often compare themselves to the supposedly perfect or idealised lives of others." or "I think social media is a good place to educate people about these issues as, for example, on TikTok people who have this situation talk about it and others no longer feel alone with these problems and understand that it is okay and may seek help. However, I also think that many psychological problems can be caused by social media because it does have a big influence on the lives of today's generation.

Role of social media

The responses to the questions show that the age group 16 to 21 has a good knowledge and awareness about mental health risks and the importance of mental well-being. They already participate in mental health-improving activities and can identify risk



factors for mental health. Nevertheless, the answers also emphasise a need to increase therapy services and decrease stigma and fear when seeking help.

Finally, the answers show today's importance and power of social media. Social media can be seen as a risk factor for mental health issues or as an opportunity to educate a big audience about the importance of mental well-being while decreasing the stigma about mental health issues. Social media should therefore not be ignored. Revised regulations and stricter child and youth protection could help here. At the same time, social media should also be used as a helpful tool to reach young people in their everyday lives.

Age group 22 to 26

21 Out of 24 Participants between the ages of 22 and 26 stated that they have access to mental health resources but when asked how well they know the accessible resources in their region, the average answer is only moderate (Average rating: 3,0). Indicating, that knowledge about possible resources and how to access them can be improved in this age group. However, the respondents were able to give reflective and knowledgeable answers to the question asking about today's obstacles for young people regarding mental well-being. The majority of participants emphasized the challenge of finding their purpose in life, developing their own identity and handling social and educational pressure. Additionally, the struggle to find available therapy services and suitable support systems is repeatedly named.

Quantitative questions:

Mental Health education and awareness

Participants indicated that awareness of mental health issues and their treatment in society, in their community, at their workplace or in educational institutions is only moderate (Average rating:3,0). There is room for improvement in raising awareness and understanding about mental health issues. The survey also revealed that social

relationships can have a strong influence on mental health (Average rating: 4,0) and most participants discuss mental health with peers and colleagues at least monthly. This means that the creation of a positive environment with stable relationships should be supported, especially for young people experiencing a significant number of changes in their current life like changing schools, graduating, having their first job etc. which the participants rated as a significant influence on mental health and mental well-being.

Social Environment

The experience of a daily stress level is reported as moderate, while the feeling of stress and pressure caused by academic or professional pressure is experienced by more than half of the participants at least weekly and social expectations have an at least monthly influence on the mental state of the majority of the participants.

Perceptions of stigma surrounding mental health seem to be significant with an average rating indicating a presence of stigma in the respondents' environments, this result is supported by another statement indicating that more than half of the participants feel that there is a stigma surrounding the decision to seek help for mental health issues.

More than half of the participants stated in one question that they experienced or witnessed discrimination caused by mental health issues, but more than half answered in another question that they did not experience discrimination them self, indicating that the first statement was mostly related to witnessing the discrimination of others. Therefore, addressing stigma through education and advocacy efforts is crucial to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for individuals experiencing mental health challenges.

The healthcare system in Germany is not well equipped for mental health issues according to the respondents. A significant number of participants has used the help of professionals. Those results indicate that there needs to be improvement in the accessibility of mental health care. On a positive note, a large proportion of respondents take part in sporting and physical activities at least once a week. however,



on average they rarely take part in mindfulness and relaxation exercises that can support mental health. Consequently, the benefits of these exercises could be promoted more and integrated into everyday working or school life to give young people opportunities to relax.

Social Media

It is interesting to note that this age group finds that mental health issues are presented acceptably on social media, with an average score of 3.5, leaving room for improvement. And the importance of social media should continue to be explored. This is because the respondents also see the significant importance of new technologies and digital life for mental health among young people. At the same time, however, they rarely use digital tools for their mental health. This is where digital resources could be further promoted to temporarily compensate for any lack of therapy places.

In summary, the age group demonstrates a reflective knowledge of mental health and an understanding of risks and Biases relating to mental health problems.

Qualitative Questions:

Individual Perception of Mental Health

The participants were asked how they see the connection between lifestyle choices and mental health. Most participants saw a connection and described it as follows: “In my opinion, they influence one another” or “Very strong. A healthy and conscious lifestyle is essential for long-term health.”

When asked about the quality and accessibility of mental health services, the respondents state that it is deficient or mediocre at least. They stated that “they have little presence and are often associated with waiting times or costs. On the other hand, I have experienced how overworked the staff are and how they make fun of those affected. That was very off-putting because, in my opinion, it should actually be a non-judgmental safe space.” One participant also stated that “[it is] difficult to say. Once



you've got around to looking, you can find something, at least for short-term help. But long-term offers, such as a place in therapy, are very difficult [to find].”

Overall, the participants show an awareness of mental health issues and are aware of the struggles and deficiencies of the mental health care system. The participants indicated that stigma around mental health still existent and education and promotion about mental health can be helpful to decrease those stigmas.

Age group 27 to 30

The knowledge about mental disorders such as anxiety and depression is rated as good with an average rating of 4,5 and ten out of twelve participants stated that they have access to mental health resources. Additionally, mental health is majorly seen as important as physical health and participants between the ages of 27 and 30 significantly stated that they regularly look after their loved ones' mental health (Average rating: 4,0). They also rate their skill to detect mental health issues as more than average (Average rating: 3,5). They are indicating that the age group is aware of different mental health issues and know how to detect them in others.

Quantitative questions:

Mental Health education and awareness

Participants viewed education and open discussion about mental health in schools and society as highly important and rated the influence of societal norms on mental health problems as high (Average rating: 4,5). This highlights the argument that education and advocacy can be crucial for reducing stigma and creating public awareness of mental health.



Respondents do not see mental health concerns and access to mental health resources as adequately covered either in their workplace or learning institution or by the national health system and health insurance plans. The infrastructure for mental health therefore needs significant improvement and revision according to the survey results. Government measures that can support mental health are also rated as inadequate with an average score of 2.0 and respondents are not satisfied with the available resources.

In terms of activities that can improve mental well-being, participants are very active with an average score of 4.0. In addition, 10 out of 12 respondents have taken a day off work to improve their mental health and 8 respondents have sought professional help, but digital tools and online forums are not very common in this age group either.

Social Environment

Significantly, all participants stated that they or someone they know has been diagnosed with a mental disorder before while 10 out of 12 participants said that they have faced hurdles when trying to access mental health resources. This indicates a lack of access to mental health services and a barrier between potential patients and mental health institutions that needs to be worked on.

Perceptions of stigma surrounding mental health are concerning, with an average rating of 4,0 indicating a significant presence of stigma in the respondents' environments. Furthermore, the participants only feel moderately comfortable to discuss mental health with their families (Average rating: 3,0). Addressing stigma through education and advocacy efforts can be crucial to creating a supportive and inclusive environment for individuals experiencing mental health challenges.



Social Media

Finally, in terms of the role of social media, respondents consider social media campaigns to raise awareness of mental health to be mediocre (Average rating: 3,0) showing that the role and use of social media related to mental health education needs to be improved.

Qualitative Questions:

Individual Mental Health Perception

Participants were asked what specific changes they would like to see in their workplace or environment to better support mental health and responses varied between more therapy services, less workload and open communication.

The survey also asked about personal experiences with mental health struggles and the support they sought or wished they would have gotten in those situations. One participant stated, “Support from friends and family, desire for a therapy place was there, but eternal waiting times made it difficult to get a place during the critical phase...” Another said “I sought support from my family doctor and the regional institutional outpatient clinic [an institution usually connected to a hospital where one has access to therapy without being an institutionalised patient]”.

Regarding hurdles to access mental health services, the age group mainly named the lack of therapy offers, inadequate coverage through health care and long waitlists.

It is interesting to mention, that the participants between 27 and 30 viewed the evolution of public and societal opinions regarding mental health issues and seeking therapy as improved and the stigma around it as decreased but not completely removed. The participants stated that “Stigma in society has been significantly reduced/ Mental health is also taken seriously in the workplace/ Improvements should be made to the healthcare system” or “Awareness has increased, it's more open and more talked about in my generation and the younger generation. But the availability of therapies is still the



same as it was many years ago, although many more people would want to go now... and the older generations are not as open as the younger ones, I think.”

Finally, a lot of the participants between 27 and 30 have had their own experiences with the mental health care system and are aware of risks and signs of mental health issues. They see improvement in the public awareness and acceptance concerning those issues but also see the need to continue improving the public awareness and to increase the access to therapy services.

Comparisons of Perceptions Among Different Age Groups

Knowledge about Mental Health and psychological disorders

While all age groups rate the importance of mental health education as high (rating between 3,5 and 5), there are some distinctions between their level of knowledge concerning mental health and mental health disorders. In the youngest age group, only some participants could identify specific mental health disorders and participants between 13 and 21 rated their average knowledge as moderate. The oldest age group rated their knowledge about mental health and mental health resources as good and indicated that they would be able to see warning signs of mental disorders in others. Nevertheless, there is potential in all age groups to improve their knowledge and awareness.

Access to Mental Health resources

When asked about access to resources, a clear trend can be seen: The older the respondents are, the more confident they are about their regional access to mental health resources. This suggests that older respondents could be better informed about support and therapy services in their region. On the other hand, it may also indicate that

resources for mental health help or not enough offers of support are aimed at the younger population or that access is more difficult for them. This means that there is a lack of information about access to resources as well as a lack of support services specifically for younger people between 13 and 21.

Stigma and social perception

All age groups agreed on the existence of stigma around mental health issues and seeking support for mental health. While the younger participants stated that they feel more supported by their peers and often feel misunderstood by adults and their families, the older participants between 22 and 30 emphasised the existence of improvement of accepting mental well-being as important and had fewer issues with using professional help from mental health services. Especially the age group between 27 and 30 indicated that they see more acceptance and awareness in the younger generation which could indicate a positive trend towards more mental health awareness. But it also shows that the importance of mental well-being has not reached all generations in society. Since the younger participants feel less comfortable talking to professionals, mental health education can help to reduce burdens and individual fear of being stigmatized when seeking professional help.

Prevention and mindfulness

In the age group 13 to 15 only a small number of participants participated in school activities, sports and mindfulness activities related to mental health and only one person ever used a digital tool for mental health support. The older age group 16 to 21 sees a strong connection between lifestyle choices and mental health and highly values mindfulness and meditation practices to improve mental well-being. But the majority of them have also never used digital tools. Participants between the ages of 22 and 26 participate at least monthly in physical activities and talk about mental health with their friends and colleagues. Nevertheless, their participation in mindfulness and mediation



practices is less likely compared to the age group 16 to 21. They also rarely use digital tools to improve their mental health. The majority of the 27- to 30-year-olds participate in activities that can improve mental health and most of them have taken a day off to support their mental well-being at least once. But like the other age groups, only a few have used digital resources and tools for mental health before. In general, the positive influence of physical activities and mindfulness activities is known within the age groups but their participation in such varies. All age groups could profit from education about digital tools that support mental health to improve their mental well-being.

Social Media

All age groups see social media in particular as a major risk and a negative influence on mental health. Factors such as comparing themselves with unrealistic standards of living, cyberbullying or spiraling into issues were often mentioned. Most of the participants also consider education about mental health through social media to be inadequate. However, it is interesting to note that participants aged 27 and over in particular view the development of social media in terms of education as positive and also see it as an opportunity to promote mental well-being.

Conclusion

The survey highlights the results that national studies and reports already pointed out. Young people are increasingly aware of their mental health, have to deal increasingly with mental health issues, social and academic pressure and are likely use mental health support services in their life.

The results and answers of all participants have also underlined the role and potential negative impact of social media. As the use and normalisation of social media are at an all-time high, young people feel its impact through comparison with unrealistic

lifestyles, cyberbullying or loneliness. Indicating the need to increase social media campaigns' education about mental health risks and the need to stronger regulations for youth protection.

All age groups stated the importance of awareness and education about mental health to decrease the lack of knowledge and stigma surrounding mental health issues.

Especially the younger participants also indicated reluctance and fear to discuss issues and mental health disorders with adults and professionals emphasising the need for mental health education that reduces fear and biases towards seeking help in order to motivate the younger generation to seek help if needed. Finally, all age groups mentioned the lack of sufficient therapy services in Germany and the need to improve this issue. Relating to the report mentioned in the introduction, the German government needs to improve and expand mental health services.

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