

Today's Anxiety Society: The Mental Deterioration of iGen



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Introduction

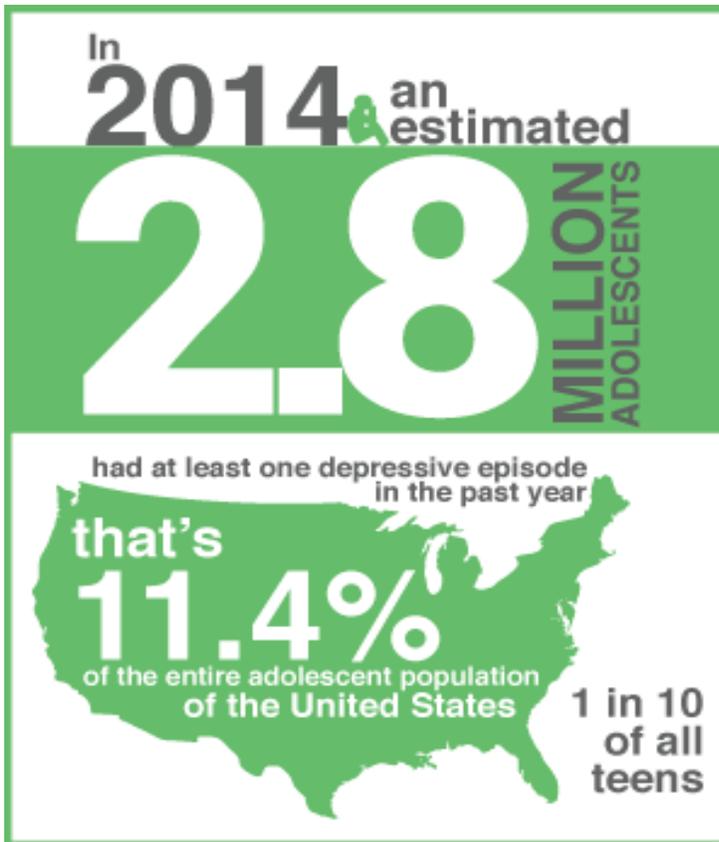
Rodrigo Martinez

We are currently facing a severe trend of higher rates of depression and suicide among young adults. The increases in depression, suicide attempts and suicide appeared among teens from every background across all regions of the country and regardless of economic status, race or ethnicity (Clinical Psychological Science). There was a significant increase in mental health issues in just a five-year span between 2010 and 2015. The result of national surveys shows that the number of U.S. teens who felt useless and joyless increased 33 percent, teen suicide attempts surged by 23 percent and the number of teens between the ages of 13 and 18 years old who committed suicide skyrocketed 31 percent (Twenge). According to Dr. Jean Twenge, author of iGen, “We are on the brink of the worst mental health crisis in decades”. iGen refers to the generation born between 1995 and 2012.

***“We are on the brink of the worst mental health crisis
in decades” - Dr. Jean Twenge***

Teens today spend less time in company of friends, they date less, have less sex, and get less sleep than earlier generations (Twenge). Teenagers today are being raised in a drastically different environment from years past that is causing them to grow and feel isolated. While there are many factors that can be contributing to this negative trend including genetic predispositions, economic factors or bullying we will be focusing on the impact of technology, parenting techniques, and the current academic environment as they are all significant causes contributing to mental health issues. The increased usage of phones and presence of technology has led to many side-effects in teens such as isolation, cyber-bullying and fear of missing out. Teens are more preoccupied to produce content for social media and they always feel an urge to be connected. Moreover, different parenting techniques varying from authoritative to authoritarian fail to properly manage the pressures faced by the new generations such as controlling access to technology. They are also unsuccessfully preparing them to become independent. Finally, the rigorous academic environment employed in today’s society emphasizes work criticism and grades over personal values. Pressures to achieve academically create a competitive environment that fails to promote support among students. Therefore, the

question we are attempting to address is what course of action should we take to not only halt the current deteriorating state of mental health in our generation but also to prevent future generations of suffering from these issues as well?



Approach 1: Parenting Techniques

Cameron Tickerhoof & Luke Juriga

The Effects of Parenting on Children

Parents have an immeasurable impact on their children throughout their entire life especially during their adolescent years. A child's early years are generally controlled and guided by his or her parents until the coming of age. Because of this influence, different parenting styles can affect the child's behavior for the rest of his or her life. Four main parenting styles exist, which can be overlapped and adapted by each set of parents.

1. *Authoritarian parenting*: This parenting style is by far the most strict of all. Children are expected to be completely obedient and live up to the parent's expectations. There is very little personal connection between child and parent, and communication is rather lacking.
2. *Authoritative parenting*: Authoritative parents are similar to authoritarian parents, but there is a more loving connection between child and parent. Orders are given to children and expected to be followed, but the parent is understanding if the child fails to meet such expectation. These parents are more nurturing and caring for their children.
3. *Permissive parenting*: Parental demands are very few in this parenting style. The child is expected to be able to take care of themselves and is usually free of hard discipline. Approachability is very strong in this style, and the relationship between child and parent is very friendly and open rather than strongly obedient oriented.
4. *Uninvolved parenting*: Parenting is extremely limited in all regards. There is very little expectation, openness, and nurturing within this style. The basic needs of the child are filled and nothing more (Jahan and Suri 1).

The Effects of Each Parenting Style

Parenting styles differ from household to household, but different parent-child relationships have various effects on the child's behavior. Permissive parenting puts less demands on the child and can result in the child being less goal driven and self-reliant (Odenwelle et al. 409). Authoritarian parenting can cause children to have attachment irregularities and struggle to show emotion. Authoritative parenting has shown positive influences in self-reliance, greater self-esteem, and better social skills (Hardie-Williams). Authoritative parenting is a medium between permissive and authoritarian styles that has the lowest chance of causing their children to develop negative habits. The last parenting style, uninvolved parenting, has the worst results on children. These

children are found to be extremely lacking in all regards of life from emotional and social skills to overall mental ability (Lombardo).

A parenting method, helicopter parenting, has been arising with millennials. This form of parenting relates that to that of authoritarian, but the parents are much more involved with every aspect of their child's life. The children that grow up with helicopter parents do not develop effective coping skills which is attributed with increased stress and anxiety ("Helicopter Parenting-It's Worse Than You Think").

As a child grows up with these different methods, not only can his or her professional and functional skills be greatly hindered, but also, the child's mental health. Positive relationships have been found between neuroticism and parenting styles. Neuroticism is the tendency for a person to experience negative emotions such as sadness or fear. The higher a person's neuroticism, the more likely he or she is to suffer from depression, stress, or anxiety (Odenwelle et al. 411).

The Effective Parenting Approach

Using this data regarding mental health and behavior in relation to parenting styles, we can effectively choose a parenting strategy that would most effectively mitigate child mental illness, which would assist the child's transition to college.



Students that reportedly had helicopter parents showed "reduced feelings of competency, greater depression, reduced satisfaction with life, greater alienation from peers, greater likelihood of being medicated for anxiety or depression" ("Helicopter Parenting & College Students' Increased Neediness"). Helicopter parenting can be related to both authoritarian and permissive parenting (Romani). With this extra guidance and overprotection, students find it much harder to actually function on their

own. Reliance on parental guidance at all times will cause a child to struggle to find his or her own way.

As previously mentioned, authoritative parenting has a better chance of raising children to be more self-reliant and effective within social environments. Children that grow up with authoritative parenting are generally more prepared for young adult life and have an easier time adjusting to the many hardships that accompany it. By implementing an authoritative parenting strategy, parents can reduce the likelihood of their child suffering from depression, anxiety, and stress, not only in college, but throughout the child's entire life.

Drawbacks

The problem with a parenting style focus is that few families deliberately choose to poorly raise their children. It would be a difficult to try to tell parents the "correct" way to control their children. Parents are likely to believe their specific parenting strategy is the most effective and may struggle to adjust to a new parenting style. Difference in family beliefs and ideals could cause problems in changing parenting strategies as well.

The additional problem this approach faces is that it is completely uncontrollable by the child. The possible underlying effects caused by each parenting style are present throughout childhood, but the child can only be aware of such effects rather than having the ability to change the parenting style.

Conclusion

Helicopter parenting can increase a child's depression, anxiety, and stress levels. Authoritative parenting can effectively reduce child mental health problems. This, however, is solely up to the parents and their parenting beliefs.

Approach 2: Technology

Alena Wesley & Conor Whitlark

The iGen and Social Media Crisis

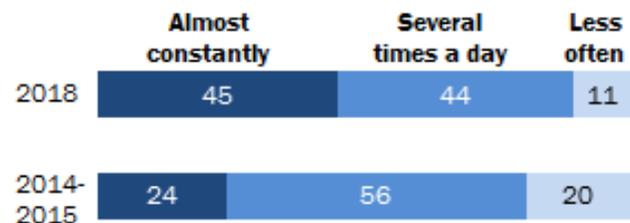
An increasing amount of time spent on social media has had detrimental effects on the mental health state of today's youth. Technology and social media have become an addiction in modern society and it is having a detrimental impact on today's youth. By decreasing the amount of time teens spend online, we can decrease presence of mental illnesses, like anxiety and depression, among this generation.

The Effects of Social Media

Social media plays a major defining factor in the iGen, hence the name. Almost half of teens report that they are online almost constantly (Anderson and Jiang). The iGen uses social media like no other generation has, mainly because it was not available for other generations. Therefore, scientists are discovering a plethora of mental health issues that come along with social media use. Numerous studies have linked a large amount of time spent on social media with poor mental health. Social media is correlated with increasing levels of depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness and isolation, lower self-esteem, and suicidality (Walton).

45% of teens say they're online almost constantly

% of U.S. teens who say they use the internet, either on a computer or a cellphone ...



Note: "Less often" category includes teens who say they use the internet "about once a day," "several times a week" and "less often."

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 10, 2018. Trend data from previous Pew Research Center survey conducted 2014-2015.

"Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018"

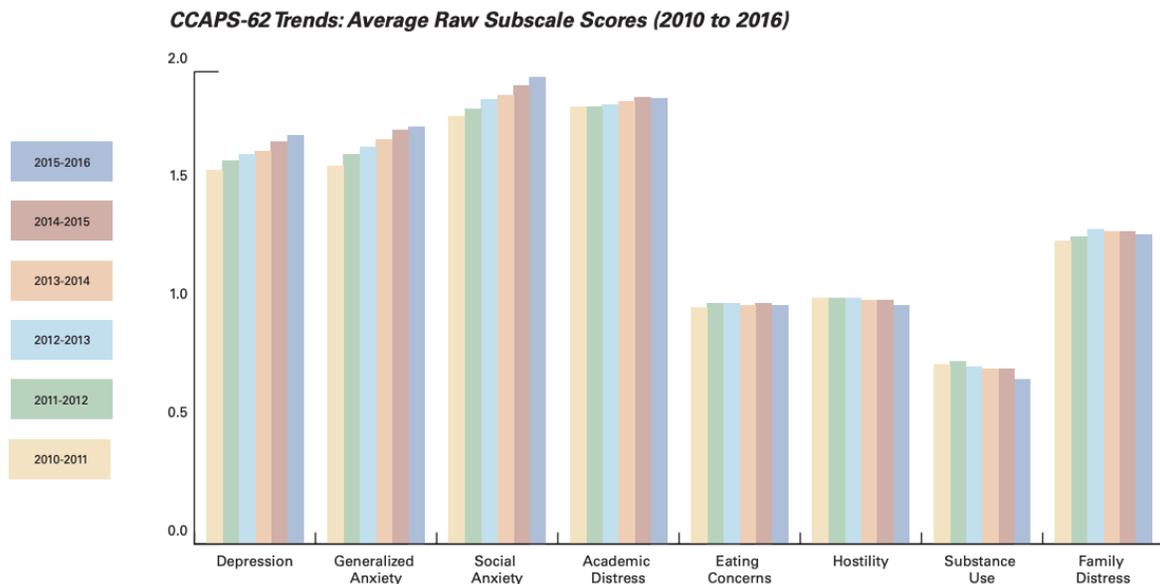
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Research by San Diego State University professor Jean Twenge found that teens who spend five or more hours online a day, compared to those who spend only one hour a day, were 71 percent more likely to have at least one suicide risk factor (Flannery). Teens spend an astonishing amount of time on social media every day. A study from Common

Sense Media, a family technology education non-profit group, found that teens spend almost nine hours a day using media (Tsukayama).

iGen is the loneliest generation by far, and social media shoulders a lot of the blame. While lack of interaction due to more tech savvy hobbies makes more teens spend time alone, it is not the only reason (Twenge). One key contributor to this feeling of loneliness and lack of community is the social phenomenon of FOMO, fear of missing out. By being constantly bombarded on all social media platforms of things one's friends and peers are doing, teens suffer from an elevated FOMO, which manifests itself in increased anxiety, increased depression, and heightened feelings of loneliness. Girls tend to suffer from FOMO and its negative effects much more than young boys, with 40% of girls reporting feelings of consistent FOMO (Lukianoff and Haidt).

Social media leads to teens comparing themselves to others, including to unrealistic "instagram celebrities," many of which use photoshop to edit their pictures. As a result, teens are comparing themselves to standards that are literally unattainable. An increasing amount of time spent on social media directly correlates with an increased risk of reporting eating and body image concerns (Hurley).



What Can We Do?

Michael Ungar, Ph.D. states that parents, communities, and manufacturers share the responsibility for solutions to teens' increased usage of technology and social media.

Ungar suggests corporations provide families with tools to limit their children's (and their own) access to their phones. Apple has already created a "Screen Time" app that allows someone to limit their own phone usage or someone else's, like their child's. He also suggests communities take initiative to encourage children to find "natural highs" through real experiences and not through an online platform. For example, parents can urge their children from a young age to put the iPad down and go play outside.

Sleep is extremely important for young people and social media and smartphones are having a noticeable impact on teenagers sleep cycle. Getting the right amount of sleep can help a teenager stave off depression and do well in school. By making sure kids do not have access to an electronic device an hour before they go to bed you can help ensure they fall asleep at a reasonable hour and get the rest they need (Lukianoff and Haidt). For example, a family can agree to plug in all electronics downstairs when it is time to go to bed. Not having the technology within arms-reach decreases the chances of it being used before bed.

Schools are able to create policies that limit phone use during school hours. Schools can make "cell phone free zones" to avoid the distraction and exposure from social media (Ungar). However, many experts suggest that it is ultimately down to the parents to control their child's time on their phone (Flannery). Parents have a bigger impact than some may think. Parents buy their children devices, constantly let them use those devices, and even pay for data packages (Ungar). By lessening these habits, parents can also lessen their children's exposure to social media use. Parents ultimately need to start the discussion about the use social media at a young age to establish a foundation of trust and sharing with their children.

Drawbacks

It may be difficult to decrease the amount of time teens spend on social media, given the intensity of their addiction. Even with screen time limiting apps, teens can usually find a way to turn them off. Some teens may still find ways around their school's "no phone policy." Ungar explains that young people can always find new platforms and new devices to use. It can be difficult to monitor social media use, as well, given how easy it is to access it and make private accounts.

Children and teens may also react poorly to limiting their screen time and taking electronic devices away before bed. Technology and social media have become such a

major part of the iGen's lives, so living without it, even for the smallest amount of time, may seem like a considerable inconvenience to teens and may result in backlash. Parents may also find it difficult to enforce staying off the phone before bed, as many children and teens will find a way to sneak their phones into their rooms, even if they have been left somewhere out of reach.

Since the parents of the iGen did not experience the addiction of social media, some parents find it hard to monitor their child's social media use because they simply do not understand it at the level their kids do. The parents of the iGen did not grow up with the technology we have today and some are finding it difficult to adjust to the changes and take the necessary actions to combat teen addiction to social media (Tsukayama). Children and teens can sometimes be secretive with their social media and take advantage of their parents' little knowledge about these platforms. Children and teens can easily make and use social media accounts without their parents' knowledge.

This change from such a heavy addiction to social media may take time for teens to adjust to and should not be expected to change their habits immediately. Social media is such a major part of the iGen that changing their habits may be severely difficult.

Conclusion

It is important that teens understand the negative effects excessive social media use has on their mental health, so this movement of decreased usage is something they also want to pursue. However, the responsibility to help break this addiction to social media also lies in the hands of parents, schools, and the community itself. Parents and their children must be communicative about social media use to ensure it is not overused. Schools can create rules that ensure students stay off of their phones during school hours. The surrounding community can also create awareness of how too much screen time can be detrimental to mental health and encourage other forms of entertainment.

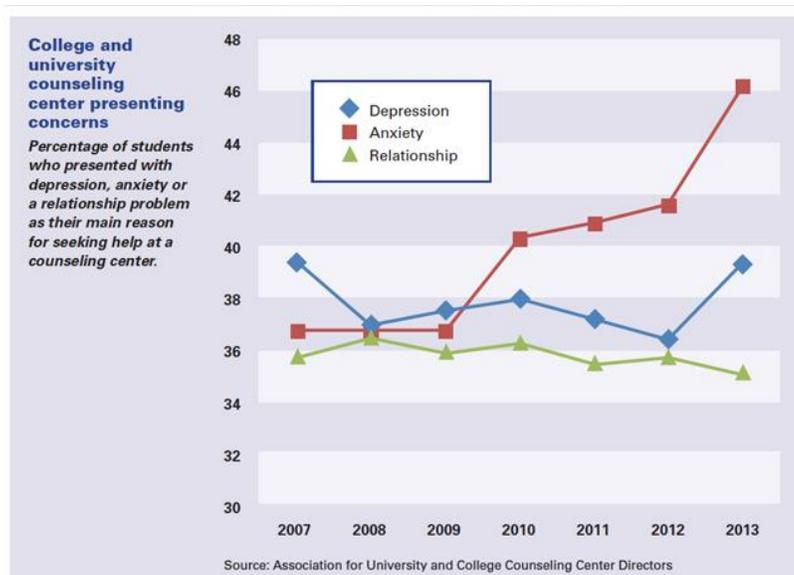
Approach 3: Academics

Caroline Anderson & Sarah Fox

Academic Pressures

The academic environment is among the leading stressors for iGen, with 83% percent stating that school is a source of stress (Smith). Additionally, teen suicide attempts, which have been increasing in the last ten years, often correspond to stressful times in the school year. The highest rates of hospital admissions for suicidal teens occur after students return to the school in the fall (Denizet-Lewis).

This increase in stress levels can be potentially attributed to an increasingly competitive academic environment, which leads students to take on more and more work. In 2009, U.S. high school seniors took an average on 27.2 credits, while seniors in 1990 only took 23.6. Furthermore, in 2009 13% of high school students “were taking a rigorous course schedule,” whereas only 5% of students were in 1990 (Rogers). This increased competitiveness could be related to an increasingly competitive job market. Many students don’t feel that they can achieve employment better or even as good as their parents, which is opposite of the trend of increasing levels of good education and work of the past few decades (Lightfoot).



With all the pressure surrounding the academic environment, there are two general paths in which we could proceed to restructure it: make the academic environment less intense by deprioritizing homework and exams, or foster an environment that allows students to more effectively deal with the stresses associated with school.

By Adjusting Educational Curriculum

The intensity of school curriculum is excessively stressful for our young students. Exams especially are an ineffective method to gauge student knowledge and create high levels of anxiety and stress. Test anxiety affects 10 to 40 percent of all students (Gotter). For many students, exams don't necessarily lead to better learning. "Cramming," memorizing large amounts of information in a short amount of time in order to do well on an exam, "does not contribute to retention or transfer" of information (Jaffe).

Instead of measuring students through exams, formative and authentic assessments can be used to gauge student engagement in a course. In formative assessments, rather than having large final examinations, students are assessed incrementally, and their performance is viewed as a starting point to improve upon. According to the Council of Chief State School Officers, formative assessment "leads to improved student learning and achievement" (Linquanti).

Many other institutions from across the world have started to use these alternative forms of assessment. In Dubai, the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government has no exams. Rather, project based learning is emphasized so "the process" versus the outcome is championed in the academic environment (Rizvi). Similarly, in Denmark, beyond not having exams, many schools ("called folk high schools") don't even have grades! Rather, the academic environment emphasizes critical thinking skills through lectures, discussion, and dialogue (Marshall). Denmark is ranked 4th in education internationally, indicating the success of this method of education ("2017 Best Education Systems").

Overall, by de-escalating the academic environment, we can still provide a quality education to our young students while reducing stress levels.

Drawbacks

By de-escalating the academic environment, we may not be adequately preparing our students for the "real world." According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 40% of American workers report their jobs are "very or extremely stressful" and 29% of Americans say they "felt quite a bit or extremely stressed at work." Stress is a constant occurrence in the workplace, and by making school less stressful, we are preventing students from developing adequate coping mechanisms to deal with such stress. The transition between school and the workplace may seem even more stark than it is currently, and may potentially only serve to delay the onset of stress in young

people. According to psychologist Michael Bradley of Feasterville, PA: "Some parents set out on a mission to get rid of stress in their kids, but the fact is, some degree of stress is very therapeutic and an appropriate amount of stress is what helps us become strong. The hard part is what's appropriate. We do know the more we try to mitigate all stress in our children's life the less resilient that child becomes and they feel hopeless about their own future" (Jayson).

Additionally, implementing new assessment methods such as formative assessment will require even more resources, such as personnel and money, that many school systems simply do not have due to increasing budget cuts (\$19 billion dollars) in the last decade (Crook).

By Implementing More Mental Health Resources in Schools

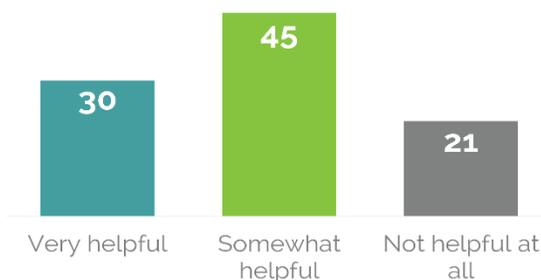
The other method to improve mental health in schools includes keeping exams and hefty coursework, but giving students more resources to learn how to safely and effectively manage stress. On average, the American high school has one counselor for every 500 students (Lombardo). The sheer number of students that each counselor has to work with means that students cannot receive the individual attention that they need to maintain a healthy state of mind. Students need to have this resource available to them as hiring a therapist may be too expensive for the family or the student wishes to keep their mental health private from their parents. If a therapist does not have time to speak with an individual student, that student goes without vital help to manage their stress and anxiety. Schools should hire therapists, which unlike counselors do not deal with the school side of things such as scheduling courses, but are there just as a resource for students to talk about any mental health problems they are having. These therapists can recognize signs of severe mental health issues and ensure that the student receives the proper help that they need.

Other than have more therapists on site to help students, schools also should teach students more about how to manage stress and lesson the stigma surrounding mental health. Stress management programs should be provided for students to learn how to manage stress, which is an important skill to have throughout their careers. In a journal article about establishing stress management in schools, Barbara Morgan suggests that schools should teach the importance of balancing physical, mental, and emotional health. Effective programs include teaching the facts about the physical and mental

effects of stress as well as safe methods to deal with it such as yoga and mindfulness training. Numerous studies have shown the benefit of yoga to reduce anxiety, and yoga programs in schools can be an effective alternative to counseling for students (Morgan). Programs like these teach students not only how to manage their own mental health in a safe way, but that they are not alone in the battle against anxiety and stress.

Helpfulness of university mental health services

Reviews from students who have used university mental health services %



YouGov | yougov.com

July 22-29, 2016

Drawbacks

Hiring more school therapists and implementing programs dedicated to mental health costs money that the school district may not have. On average, a high school counselor is paid about \$50,000 a year, so hiring several more can set a school district back upwards of a hundred thousand dollars (Glassdoor). As a result, making these changes may mean cutting other programs, such as art or theater. Adding programs such as yoga would also cost the district money, as they would have to pay a yoga instructor and buy materials like yoga mats. While this is not advisable, as it would be taking away something that students are passionate about, it is unrealistic to expect all school districts to make these changes without having to cut funding for other programs.

Conclusion

The academic environment is one of the greatest stressors in young adults. By reducing the intensity of the academic environment, we can decrease the stress level of students.

Pros: The methods that could be used to de-escalate the academic environment, such as using formative and authentic assessments, can also promote deeper learning the “cramming” that is involved with exam-based assessment.

Cons: This approach undermines student’s abilities to learn how to manage stress for the future. Restructuring our current academic system would also require a dramatic overhaul of current procedure, which comes with a great monetary cost.

As an alternative to that solution, we can also implement more mental health programs in schools and staff more therapists to help students deal with their stress and anxiety.

Pros: These methods would not reduce the content that the students learn, thus not putting them at a disadvantage for future careers. It would also teach them how to safely manage stress using healthy methods, which they can use later in life.

Cons: Hiring more therapists and adding mental health awareness programs would cost a lot of money for the school district, which may lead to other school programs being cut to compensate.

Overall Summary

Daniel Esparragoza

Increase in anxiety and mental health deterioration in the so-called “igen” generation has brought much awareness to the issue and has caused concerns as to what the future holds. Based on the research done in this study in regards to the alarming trend in more mental instability, we have come to find that three factors have caused this recent issue. Academics, Social Media, and parenting styles have caused the new generation to be weak minded and more anxious.

To Summarize:

Approach 1: New parenting styles have increased the amount of attention their children get. Parents have become more protective and as a result, children have become more dependent on their parents.

Approach 2: Technology has been on the rise in just the last 20 years. Social media usage has increased in teenagers. The intentions of social media were to connect us as people, but in reality, it has impacted the minds of younger generations in negative ways, making them become more depressed and anxious.

Approach 3: Academic pressures have increased for more recent generations as opposed to the academic environments their parents and grandparents faced. There is more competition to be successful and schools have more emphasis on tests and grades. As a result, this has caused children to be very stressed and anxious about school.

So what can be done?

Approach 1: Apply an authoritative parent style. It is becoming more common to find helicopter parents. Yes, the parents that Hover over everything that their kids do. Parents do this with good intentions. They want their children to succeed, they want their children to be safe, and they want their children to be happy. The problem is that parents are going too far. They are completely controlling their children’s lives and children are not learning to make mistakes and be independent. By the times these children are becoming young adults and are going into college, they lack good judgment and lack independence. This comes as a result of having lived a life where their parents were in control. An authoritative parenting style would give children more trust to do things. By letting kids be freer, they learn to make mistakes and that builds character and stronger

minded people. By the time those individuals grow up, they understand how to handle situations and make decisions.

Approach 2: Technology companies can provide parents with setting options to control teenage technology usage. It is common to say that many things are good for us, that is, in moderation. Technology is one of those things. Unfortunately, teenagers abuse their cell phone privileges and become addicted to social media. Social media can be good, but it can also do harm. Bullying on social media is common, bad influences are common, and false standards are common too. These things can make children start developing negative images of themselves. Also, teenagers stay up late on their phones due to their addiction and so lack of sleep also causes issues with mental health. By providing some kind of service, we parents can control their children's technology usage so that their kids can benefit from the good of technology rather than suffer from the negative effects of technology.

Approach 3: Schools can put more emphasis on learning and less emphasis on grades and test. This would require a change in the school curriculum and schooling approach. Students stress out too much over both test and grades in general. In addition to that, students have to take many standardized tests while growing up to prove they have been taught. This is getting in the way of education rather than doing any good. This causes stress and anxiety in teens so the school curriculum should be adjusted to still teach students, but also develop strong-minded individuals. Anxiety and mental health issues are and have been on the rise. Our future does depend on how we handle this situation. Eventually, the generation that is being raised now will be in control of society and responsible for taking care of future generations. It is important to create strong-minded, healthy individuals who can eventually lead the country. By taking a stance and pushing for some change, we can develop a society that does not suffer from anxiety. We can develop a society where technology is used for good. We can develop a society where children learn to make mistakes and learn from them. These things will lead to less mental health issues and less anxious society.

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