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GEN Z AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS IN THE MODERN WORKPLACE: A NARRATIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The psychological crisis of Generation Z has become an increasingly critical issue amidst a modern workplace undergoing profound technological, social, and cultural transformations. Today's youth face not only professional demands but also the impacts of social media, comparison culture, success pressure, and an always-online environment. This review aims to synthesize and analyze research regarding psychological crises in Gen Z within the modern workforce, evaluating factors that exacerbate stress, anxiety, and occupational burnout.

Adopting a Narrative Review methodology, literature was sourced from PubMed, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect (2015–2025) using keywords related to Gen Z, mental health, social media, burnout, and future anxiety.

Synthesized findings indicate that several determinants contribute to Gen Z's psychological crises, including occupational burnout, social media comparison, future anxiety, the quarter-life crisis, hustle culture, and constant digital connectivity. These factors intensify emotional exhaustion, anxiety, diminished self-worth, and psychological distress.

In conclusion, the psychological crisis of Generation Z is not merely an individual issue but a reflection of shifts in modern society and digitized environments. Supporting youth mental health requires a multidimensional approach to foster healthier workplace and societal frameworks.

Keywords: Gen Z, psychological crisis, burnout, workplace mental health, social media, future anxiety.

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The psychological crisis within Generation Z has emerged as a critical imperative in the modern corporate landscape [1], [4]. Beyond conventional professional demands, young practitioners are profoundly impacted by the pervasive influence of social media and a detrimental social comparison culture [3], [4]. Extensive research corroborates that excessive digital engagement is directly correlated with elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress [2], [11], [12]. According to Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, the propensity for benchmarking personal progress against curated online personas often fosters feelings of inadequacy or the fear of professional obsolescence [4], [7], [12].

The escalation of occupational stress and burnout is directly proportional to the accelerated pace of work and the "always-online" paradigm [12], [14]. Specifically, future anxiety—driven by socio-economic volatility—significantly undermines individual psychological well-being [1], [6], [15]. This developmental phase is frequently compounded by a quarter-life crisis, manifesting as profound disorientation and self-doubt regarding one's career trajectory [5], [6]. Furthermore, the institutionalization of hustle culture leads to severe emotional exhaustion and a decline in psychological capital [5], [8], [9]. Despite being raised in relatively protective environments, the intensity of modern competition exacerbates emotional vulnerability, rendering psychological resilience a pivotal determinant for effective stress adaptation [7], [13].

Scholars advocate for a multidimensional intervention framework that encompasses the optimization of workplace environments, the cultivation of healthy digital ecosystems, and the enhancement of stress management competencies [7], [8]. This review elucidates the specific risk factors and psychological manifestations unique to Generation Z, proposing strategic support orientations to ensure the sustainable development of the workforce in the digital era.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study utilizes a Narrative Review methodology to synthesize and analyze contemporary literature regarding the psychological crises of Generation Z within the modern workplace. This approach allows for a comprehensive qualitative integration of diverse research findings to provide a holistic overview of the subject.

2.2. Data Sources

Relevant literature and academic publications were systematically retrieved from the following electronic databases and academic platforms: "PubMed", "Google Scholar" and "ScienceDirect"

In addition to peer-reviewed articles, reports from prominent international organizations and practical surveys on youth mental health were consulted to provide real-world context and empirical depth.

2.3. Search Strategy

The search was executed using a combination of primary and secondary keywords, including: "Gen Z"; "Burnout"; "Workplace mental health"; "Future anxiety"; "Social media"; "Young adults"; "Quarter-life crisis" and "Work stress"

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To ensure a rigorous and exhaustive search, Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied. Core Search String: ("Gen Z" OR "Generation Z") AND ("burnout" OR "anxiety") AND ("workplace")

2.4. Inclusion Criteria

Documents were selected for inclusion based on the following pre-defined criteria:

- Published in English or Vietnamese.
- Published between 2015 and 2025.
- Focused on mental health, occupational stress, burnout, or psychological phenomena specifically affecting young adults and Generation Z.
- Peer-reviewed scientific articles, systematic/narrative reviews, or authorized academic reports.

2.5. Exclusion Criteria

The study excluded documents that met any of the following conditions:

- Literature lacking a direct correlation to the workplace environment or mental health.
- Articles without verifiable academic origins or non-peer-reviewed sources.
- Opinion-based articles, editorials, or publications lacking empirical data and scientific rigor.

2.6. Data Synthesis and Analysis

Following the selection process, the data were categorized and analyzed based on the following thematic frameworks:

- Occupational Burnout and Workplace Stress
- Social Media Influence and Comparison Culture
- Future Anxiety and Existential Uncertainty
- Quarter-Life Crisis in the Professional Context
- Hustle Culture and the Always-Online Connectivity
- Strategic Directions for Mental Health Support for Young Professionals

3. DETERMINANTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISES IN GENERATION Z

3.1. Occupational Burnout and Workplace Stress

Burnout is increasingly recognized as an important mental health issue among young professionals in the modern workplace. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), burnout is a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed [1],[14]. Generation Z appears to be particularly vulnerable to emotional exhaustion due to high performance expectations, unstable career environments, and increasing pressure for early achievement.

Chronic workplace stress → Emotional exhaustion → Burnout

Studies have shown that prolonged occupational stress may negatively affect sleep quality, emotional regulation, motivation, and overall psychological well-being [1]. In addition, blurred boundaries between work and personal life in digitalized work environments may further increase the risk of burnout among young adults [8],[9]. Social media may also contribute to psychological exhaustion by reinforcing unrealistic standards of success and productivity [3],[4].

3.2. Social Media and Comparison Culture

The rapid growth of social media has significantly influenced the mental health of Generation Z [2],[3],[4]. Raised in a highly digitalized environment, young individuals are constantly exposed to online platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn. This exposure has changed the way people build self-image, communicate socially, and evaluate personal value.

Several studies have reported associations between excessive social media use and anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and psychological distress among adolescents and young adults [2],[12]. According to Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, individuals tend to evaluate themselves through comparison with others, especially in competitive environments [11]. In modern social media settings, continuous exposure to idealized lifestyles and professional success may increase feelings of inadequacy and fear of falling behind.

Social media exposure → Social comparison → Anxiety and low self-esteem

Furthermore, prolonged social media use may negatively affect sleep quality, concentration, and emotional regulation in young people [10],[12]. These findings suggest that social media plays an important role in shaping psychological well-being among Generation Z.

3.3. Future Anxiety and Pressure for Success

Future anxiety has become increasingly common among young adults in modern society [15]. Economic instability, rapid technological change, career uncertainty, and increasing social expectations may contribute to persistent stress and emotional distress among Generation Z.

Future uncertainty → Anxiety and emotional distress

In addition to workplace and social factors, parenting styles and intergenerational expectations may influence the psychological well-being of Generation Z [13]. Some studies suggest that overprotective parenting may reduce opportunities for young individuals to develop coping skills and psychological resilience.

Overprotective parenting → Reduced psychological resilience → Anxiety and stress

Generation Z may also experience pressure from both family expectations and social comparison. Young people are often expected to achieve academic and professional success while simultaneously adapting to rapid social and technological changes.

Family expectation + social comparison + career pressure → emotional distress

Research suggests that psychological resilience plays an important role in stress adaptation and emotional regulation [7]. Individuals with higher resilience are generally better able to cope with adversity and prolonged stress.

Psychological resilience → better stress adaptation → improved mental well-being

Current evidence also suggests that improving stress management skills, emotional regulation, and healthy digital habits may help support mental health among young adults [7],[8],[10].

Young people today are often exposed to pressure related to academic achievement, financial success, and career development at an early age [3],[4]. Social media may intensify this pressure by continuously displaying idealized images of success and achievement. As a result, many individuals experience fear of failure, insecurity, and uncertainty regarding their future.

Family expectation + social pressure + career uncertainty → future anxiety

Research has shown that future anxiety is associated with reduced psychological well-being, emotional exhaustion, and increased risk of anxiety symptoms [15].

3.4. Quarter-Life Crisis and Identity Confusion

Quarter-life crisis refers to a period of emotional instability and uncertainty commonly experienced during the transition into adulthood [5],[6]. Many young adults experience confusion regarding career direction, personal identity, and life goals despite appearing functionally stable in daily life.

Identity confusion → emotional distress → quarter-life crisis

Researchers suggest that the increasing complexity of career choices and modern social expectations may contribute to feelings of self-doubt and dissatisfaction among young adults [5],[6]. In addition, social media may intensify the perception of "falling behind" when individuals compare themselves to the achievements of others online.

Social expectation + identity uncertainty → quarter-life crisis

Studies have linked quarter-life crisis with anxiety, emotional distress, and reduced life satisfaction among young people [5].

3.5. Hustle Culture and Always-Online Connectivity

The development of digital technology has contributed to the rise of hustle culture, in which constant productivity and continuous self-improvement are often viewed as indicators of success [3],[4]. Many young adults feel pressure to remain productive and competitive in academic and professional environments.

Productivity pressure → Chronic stress → Burnout

At the same time, the always-online culture has blurred the boundaries between work and rest [9]. Smartphones and digital communication tools allow individuals to remain connected to work outside standard working hours, reducing opportunities for psychological recovery.

Always-online culture → Mental fatigue → Emotional exhaustion

Research suggests that constant connectivity may increase stress, emotional exhaustion, and sleep disturbances among young professionals [9],[10]. These findings indicate that the combination of hustle culture and digital overexposure may contribute significantly to burnout and psychological distress in Generation Z.

3.6. Intergenerational Factors and Psychological Resilience

In addition to workplace and social factors, parenting styles and intergenerational expectations may influence the psychological well-being of Generation Z [13]. Some studies suggest that overprotective parenting may reduce opportunities for young individuals to develop coping skills and psychological resilience.

Overprotective parenting → reduced psychological resilience → anxiety and stress

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4. IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND THE MODERN WORKPLACE

Current literature suggests that the psychological crises experienced by Generation Z are influenced by multiple psychological, social, and environmental factors [3],[4]. Occupational pressure, social media exposure, future uncertainty, and constant digital connectivity may collectively contribute to chronic stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion among young adults.

Social pressure + digital environment + workplace stress → anxiety and burnout

One important concern is the increasingly blurred boundary between work and personal life. Although digitalized work environments provide greater flexibility, constant online connectivity may reduce opportunities for psychological recovery and increase the risk of long-term stress [9],[10]. Young professionals are often expected to remain responsive outside regular working hours, which may contribute to emotional fatigue and burnout.

In addition, social media has become an important factor shaping self-image and personal values among Generation Z [2],[11]. Continuous exposure to idealized standards of success and achievement may intensify social comparison, fear of failure, and feelings of inadequacy. Many young individuals experience pressure not only to succeed professionally but also to present a successful image on digital platforms.

Research also highlights psychological resilience as an important protective factor in stress adaptation [7]. Individuals with higher resilience are generally better able to regulate emotions, cope with adversity, and maintain psychological well-being during stressful situations.

Psychological resilience → better stress adaptation → improved mental well-being

Some studies suggest that Generation Z grew up in a relatively protective environment while simultaneously facing increasing academic, occupational, and social competition [13]. This situation may increase emotional vulnerability and reduce the ability to adapt to prolonged stress in modern work environments.

Furthermore, improving stress management skills, emotional regulation, and healthy digital habits may help support mental health among young adults [7],[8],[10]. Increasing awareness regarding mental health and facilitating early psychological support may also contribute to reducing long-term anxiety and emotional exhaustion.

Overall, the psychological challenges experienced by Generation Z reflect broader social and cultural changes associated with digitalized environments and the modern workplace

5. CONCLUSION

The psychological crisis of Generation Z has emerged as a critical issue within the context of a rapidly evolving modern society and professional landscape. Current research indicates that occupational stress, burnout, social media influence, future anxiety, the quarter-life crisis, hustle culture, and intergenerational factors collectively undermine the mental well-being of young adults.

Beyond professional demands, Generation Z is simultaneously confronted with escalating social competitiveness, a pervasive comparison culture on digital platforms, and a profound sense of future instability. These stressors not only impair psychological health but also

negatively impact the adaptive capacity, quality of life, and professional efficacy of young individuals in the digital era.

Modern Workplace Environment + Social Media + Future Anxiety -> Gen Z Psychological Crisis

Furthermore, shifting intergenerational values and modern parenting paradigms play a significant role in determining an individual's ability to cope with stress and failure. These findings underscore that the psychological crises facing Generation Z are not merely individualized phenomena; rather, they reflect profound structural transformations in society, technology, and culture in the contemporary age.

Based on the synthesized findings, this review suggests that mental health support for Generation Z must adopt a multidimensional framework. This includes fostering healthier workplace environments, raising mental health awareness, developing psychological resilience, and enhancing stress management skills among young professionals.

Moving forward, further empirical and longitudinal studies are imperative to evaluate more deeply the long-term impact of digitized environments and modern social determinants on the mental health trajectories of Generation Z.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE REVIEW

Despite its contributions, this review possesses several inherent limitations. Firstly, as this study adopts a Narrative Review methodology, it does not employ the rigorous statistical procedures of a systematic review or meta-analysis. The literature selection was based on thematic relevance and data accessibility, which may introduce a degree of selection bias in the synthesis.

Secondly, a significant portion of current research regarding Generation Z and mental health originates from Western contexts. Empirical studies within the Vietnamese landscape remain relatively sparse; consequently, some findings may not fully encapsulate the unique socio-cultural nuances and specific workplace dynamics inherent to Vietnamese youth.

Furthermore, the conceptualization of "Generation Z" remains inconsistent across scholarly literature, with variations in birth year ranges and core value systems. This lack of a unified definition introduces heterogeneity when comparing and synthesizing data across disparate studies.

Additionally, mental health is a multifaceted construct influenced by variables such as familial background, economic status, and individual psychological traits. Within the scope of this paper, the analysis primarily focuses on modern workplace environments, social media influence, and prevalent psychological stressors, rather than providing an exhaustive evaluation of all contributing determinants.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this review systematizes contemporary research pertaining to the psychological crises of Generation Z, providing a comprehensive overview of the social and psychological determinants impacting young adults in the modern landscape.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In the coming years, there is an imperative need for further empirical studies and longitudinal research to evaluate more profoundly the long-term consequences of digitized environments, social media engagement, and occupational pressures on the mental health of Generation Z. Specifically, academic inquiry within the Vietnamese context should be expanded to reflect the unique cultural characteristics, societal values, and professional landscapes inherent to the nation's youth.

Furthermore, research should prioritize the exploration of psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and protective factors. Such investigations are essential for designing and implementing evidence-based intervention programs tailored to the needs of young individuals in the modern era.

In addition, examining the psychological impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the proliferation of remote work environments, and shifting career structures represents a significant research frontier. Understanding how these digital-era transformations intersect with youth mental health will be critical for fostering a sustainable and supportive professional future for the upcoming generation.

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