



# Attitudes Towards Seeking Psychological Services: A Comparative Study Across Generations

<sup>1</sup>Manjushree.M.H & <sup>2</sup>Dr. T. Jothimani

<sup>1</sup> M.Sc., Applied Psychology, <sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor

Department of Psychology,

PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India

## Abstract:

Mental health concerns have gained significant recognition in recent years, emphasizing the importance of seeking appropriate help. Despite advancements in technology and increased psychological services, stigma and fear of being labelled remain significant barriers to accessing mental health support. Understanding individuals' attitudes towards seeking professional help is crucial to addressing this issue, as these attitudes influence whether people access available services. Generational differences, shaped by distinct cultural and societal influences, may play a role in these attitudes. This study explores attitudes towards seeking professional help for mental health issues across Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z in Tamil Nadu. Using data from 300 participants, the results contribute to the understanding of the attitudes of the people in seeking psychological supports across the generations and development of methods in reaching people with Psychological problems more effectively.

**Key Words:** Professional psychological help, Attitude, Generations

## Introduction:

Mental health is a broad term encompassing an individual's emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It encompasses an individual's capacity to manage stress, socialize with others, make informed decisions, and function in everyday life. Mental health constitutes an individual's emotional and psychological condition, cognitive functioning, behavioral patterns, and the way in which an individual perceives and interacts with the environment. Mental health enables an individual to reach their full potential, work effectively, and contribute positively to their local and global communities. It is not only the absence of a mental disorder, but also the existence of well-being and resilience, as well as the capacity to adjust to life's difficulties.

Mental health affects every aspect of human lives, from the individual to the family, the community, and society at large. Every generation has its own unique set of challenges and stresses that affect mental health, and it's important to address them in order to create a healthier, more productive society for future generations.

Gen Z is the generation upbringing in a world with increasing mental health awareness, which may lead to even more open attitudes towards seeking support. The digital age has brought about unique stressors, such as cyberbullying, social media pressures, and information overload, highlighting the importance of mental health support and education for this generation (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2019). Early intervention and support

for mental health issues can positively shape their formative years and prevent long-term mental health challenges. Media, including social platforms and traditional outlets, play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions towards mental health services.

Millennials are the generation between the years 1981 and 2000. Millennials have grown up in an era with more open discussions about mental health. Millennials have faced economic challenges, housing insecurities, and a rapidly changing job market, necessitating mental health support to cope with financial stress and uncertainties about the future. Addressing mental health concerns helps this generation maintain work-life balance and build resilience in the face of career and personal challenges. They are generally more accepting of professional help and are more likely to seek help when needed.

Generation X is the generation between 1965-1980. Growing up during a period of increased awareness of mental health, Generation X has had access to more information about psychological well-being and may be more informed about the benefits of seeking professional help. But still there is a stigma surrounding mental health and a barrier to seeking help, as people fear of being labelled. Addressing mental health allows them to navigate midlife transitions and maintain their mental and emotional health as they age.

Stigma related to mental health is a pervasive and persistent issue that can significantly deter individuals from seeking and accessing mental health services (Pescosolido, et.al, 2010). Stigma is a societal attitude or prejudice that marginalizes or discriminates against individuals based on certain characteristics, behaviors, or conditions, such as mental health conditions. Negative Stereotypes, stereotypical beliefs that individuals with mental health conditions are violent, unpredictable, or incompetent can lead to fear and avoidance of seeking help. People may avoid mental health services due to concerns about being labelled with a mental health diagnosis, which could result in discrimination in their personal and professional lives. Fear of being socially ostracized or losing relationships with friends, family, or colleagues can prevent individuals from seeking mental health assistance. Perceived Weakness, the belief that needing mental health support is a sign of weakness, inadequacy, or personal failure can deter individuals from reaching out for assistance. Cultural or religious beliefs that view mental health conditions as a moral failing, curse, or divine punishment may discourage seeking professional mental health services.

Stigma prevents many people from seeking help for mental health problems. The first thing that happens when people don't seek treatment for mental health issues is that their mental health deteriorates over time, becoming worse and worse and affecting their quality of life. The person's ability to function and maintain a regular schedule is affected, making them less productive at work or school, and affecting their relationships. People may turn to substance misuse as a kind of self-medication in an effort to cope with untreated mental health problems and the distress they cause. The link between physical and mental health emphasizes how urgent it is to address mental health issues free from stigma.

In India, every seventh person suffers from some form of mental disorder. In 2017, India had 197.3 million (95% of the total population) persons with mental disorders, accounting for 14.3% of the country's total population. In 2017, mental diseases accounted for 4.7% (3.7%-5.6%) of total DALYs in India, compared to 2.5% (2.0%-3.1%) in 1990. Depression and anxiety are common mental health disorders in India.

### **Aim:**

The present study is to find out the attitude towards seeking professional help for mental health issues across generations in Tamilnadu.

**Objectives:**

1. To determine the attitude towards seeking professional help for mental health issues in Gen X & Z, and Millennial
2. To examine the difference between generations on attitude towards seeking professional help for mental health issues.

**Hypotheses:**

H1: There will be positive attitudes of seeking professional psychological help across the generations.

H2: There will be significant difference on attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help across generations.

**Methodology:**

The sample for this study consisted of 300 participants aged 15 to 60, randomly selected from across Tamil Nadu, representing three generations: Gen X (n = 100), Millennials (n = 100), and Gen Z (n = 100). Demographic data were gathered using a personal data sheet designed by the researcher. Participants provided informed consent before completing the Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help-SF scale, developed by Fischer and Farina (1995), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 and construct validity of 0.87. Data collection was conducted online via Google Forms.

**Results:**

Table 1: Attitudes of people in seeking Professional psychological help across the generations

|                   | POSITIVE | NEUTRAL | NEGATIVE |
|-------------------|----------|---------|----------|
| <b>GEN X</b>      | 33       | 53      | 14       |
| <b>MILLENNIAL</b> | 14       | 72      | 15       |
| <b>GEN Z</b>      | 54       | 37      | 9        |

From table 1, it is evident that on Generation X, 33 individuals are with positive attitudes, 53 are neutral and 14 with negative attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. Among Millennial, 14 with positive attitudes, 72 are neutral and 15 with negative attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. Generation Z, 54 individuals are with positive attitudes, 37 are neutral and 9 with negative attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help.

**Table 2:** Shows the difference in Attitudes of people in seeking Professional Psychological help across the generations

**ANOVA**

| ATTITUDES      | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig.        |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------|
| Between Groups | 1184.998       | 2   | 592.499     | 16.151 | <b>.000</b> |
| Within Groups  | 10932.112      | 298 | 36.685      |        |             |
| Total          | 12117.110      | 300 |             |        |             |

ANOVA is used to compare three or more independent groups on a continuous outcome. For Attitudes of people in seeking Professional psychological help between Generations, the F-value is 16.151 with degrees of freedom 300. The obtained p - value is 0.000, which indicates that there is significant difference in Attitudes of people in seeking Professional psychological help across the generations.

## MULTIPLE COMPARISONS

| ATTITUDES       |                 |            |       |      |                         |       |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------|-------|------|-------------------------|-------|
| (I)             | (J)             | Mean       | Std.  | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval |       |
| GENERATION      | GENERATIO       | Difference | Error |      | Lower                   | Upper |
|                 | N               | (I-J)      |       |      | Bound                   | Bound |
| GENERATION<br>X | MILLENNIAL      | 2.979      | .854  | .002 | .97                     | 4.99  |
|                 | GENERATION<br>Z | 1.830      | .857  | .084 | 3.85                    | .19   |
| MILLENNIAL      | GENERATION<br>X | 2.979      | .854  | .002 | 4.99                    | .97   |
|                 | GENERATION<br>Z | 4.809      | .854  | .000 | 6.82                    | 2.80  |
| GENERATION Z    | GENERATION<br>X | 1.830      | .857  | .084 | .19                     | 3.85  |
|                 | MILLENNIAL      | 4.809      | .854  | .000 | 2.80                    | 6.82  |

The multiple comparisons table provides us results for which groups differed from each other. From this table we can infer that there is statistically significant difference in Attitudes of people in seeking Professional psychological help between Generation X and Millennial and between Millennial and Generation Z, p-value being 0.002 and 0.000 respectively. There is no significant difference between Generation X and Generation Z.

**Discussion:**

The current study attempts to understand the attitudes of people in seeking professional psychological help across the generations. The sample of 300 individuals participated in the study. The table 1 gives the attitudes of the people across the generation in seeking professional psychological help. It is evident that most of the individuals are with neutral attitudes in seeking professional psychological help. The people with neutral attitudes demonstrated a hesitancy to actively seek assistance, often due to a lack of perceived urgency (Johnson & Davis, 2022). In Generation Z, 54 individuals are with positive attitudes in seeking the professional psychological help. Generation X has 33 individuals with positive attitudes. Millennial has the lowest number of individuals with positive attitudes in seeking professional psychological help. The attitudes of today's youth towards seeking psychological help from the professionals are more positive. There is a substantial shift in attitudes among the youth in India, indicating an increased willingness to seek professional psychological help. Factors such as improved mental health literacy, greater awareness of available resources, and efforts to destigmatize mental health issues were identified as key influencers of this change (Gupta, Patel, & Singh, 2021).

The study also attempted to examine the difference across the generation in seeking professional psychological help. Between the Generation X and Millennials; Generation X and Generation Z, there exists significant difference in the attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. Generation X, the individuals born between 1965 and 1980. This generation has significant difference in attitude towards seeking psychological help with Generation Z, born between 2001 and 2009 and Millennials, born between 1981 and 2000. The study has also found that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of people of Generation Z and Generation X. The Generation X and Z are more open towards seeking Psychological help for their mental wellbeing. When individuals embrace a positive mindset towards seeking psychological

support, they are more likely to engage in timely intervention, resulting in improved mental health outcomes. Access to appropriate psychological help equips individuals with effective coping strategies, enhances self-awareness, and promotes resilience in facing life's adversities. Moreover, a proactive approach towards mental health instils a sense of empowerment, enabling individuals to effectively manage mental health conditions.

This study provides valuable insights into the attitudes of people towards seeking professional psychological help across generations. Across the generations, it is evident that there has been a notable shift towards a more accepting and open approach to mental health. Younger generations appear to demonstrate a greater willingness to seek professional psychological help, reflecting increased awareness, reduced stigma, and a proactive stance towards mental well-being. This may be attributed to growing efforts in public education, awareness campaigns, and the availability of mental health resources. Bridging the gap in knowledge and understanding across generations is crucial for fostering a society that prioritizes mental health. The study also highlights the need for continued efforts in promoting mental health awareness and eradicating stigma to ensure that individuals from all generations can access the support they require, ultimately leading to improved mental health and well-being across society.

### **Conclusion:**

Generation Z has more positive attitude towards seeking professional help for mental health issues than the Gen X and Millennial. A study by Gupta et al. (2021) highlighted a significant shift among Indian youth, with increased willingness to seek professional psychological assistance. This change is attributed to improved mental health literacy, heightened awareness of available resources, and concerted efforts to destigmatize mental health issues. But many individuals maintain neutral attitudes toward seeking professional help, often due to a lack of perceived urgency. This hesitancy underscores the importance of targeted interventions to encourage proactive mental health care (Johnson and Davis, 2022). A study assessing mental health symptoms and coping behaviours during the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic found that younger cohorts, including Gen Z, reported worse mental health indices but also demonstrated a greater willingness to seek help (Park et al., 2020). This suggests a growing recognition among younger individuals of the importance of addressing mental health concerns. However, the same study noted that despite this increased willingness, Gen Z also engaged more in maladaptive coping behaviours, such as increased substance use, indicating a complex relationship between attitudes and behaviours related to mental health (Park et al., 2020). This complexity highlights the need for comprehensive mental health education and resources tailored to younger populations.

The findings underscores the importance of continued efforts to promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma across all generations. By fostering positive attitudes toward seeking psychological support, individuals are more likely to engage in timely interventions, leading to improved mental health outcomes.

### **Limitations:**

- Small sample size limits the generalisation of the findings.
- Study was pertaining to one geographical area.

### **Implications:**

Addressing the mental health needs of Millennials, individuals born between 1981 and 2000, currently aged 25 to 44 is crucial for social policy and planning. This demographic is particularly susceptible to stress and related health issues due to the challenges inherent in early and mid-adulthood. Implementing targeted educational initiatives can enhance mental health literacy, reduce stigma, and promote proactive help-seeking behaviours within this group. Research indicates that Millennials are more open to discussing mental health compared to previous generations, contributing to a reduction in stigma (NAMI, 2019). However, despite this openness, many still experience significant mental health challenges. A study by Park et al. (2020) found that

younger adults reported higher levels of mental health symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. Social policies should focus on integrating mental health education into various platforms accessible to Millennials, such as workplaces and online communities. Employers can play a pivotal role by offering mental health resources and fostering supportive work environments. According to Florida Tech Online (2023), promoting mental health days and providing training can help mitigate mental health issues among Millennial employees. A report by the Manhattan Institute (2023) suggests that school-based mental health initiatives, particularly targeting late teens, can be effective in early intervention, potentially reducing the prevalence of mental health disorders in adulthood.

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