

Psychiatric disorders among generation Z: findings from four psychiatric facilities of Bangladesh

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Summary

Generation Z (Gen Z), demographic cohort born between 1997-2012, experienced digital advances, economic uncertainties, climate change and pandemic which made them susceptible to mental health issues. The main aim of this study is to examine psychiatric morbidity among Gen Z of Bangladesh. Moreover, current stressful event, level of stress, duration of daily social media use, daily sleep duration, and substance abuse history were examined. A cross-sectional survey design was conducted to collect data from October, 2024 to March, 2025 in four psychiatric facilities of Savar and Manikganj. 204 participants who were mostly female (53.92%), married (58.82%), students (45.59%), and rural residents (55.39%) participated in this study. Major Depressive Disorder (24.51%) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (24.51%) were found to be the most common psychiatric disorders. Relationship issue (14.22%) and familial disharmony (11.27%) were reported as the most current stressful events. 84.81% of the participants were mentioned to be in different level of stress. Excessive social media use (mean= 3.31 hours per day; SD= 2.53) and problematic sleeping pattern (mean= 4.94 hours per day; SD= 1.94) were identified as well. 24.51% participants reported substance abuse history. Bangladesh needs to plan accessible mental health support for Gen Z considering result of this research.

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Introduction

Generation Z (Gen Z) are successors of millennials and predecessors of Generation Alpha who born between mid to late 1990s and early 2010s. To be more specific, demographic cohort born between 1997-2012 are called Gen Z. They are also called digital natives because of their access to internet and digital devices since the World Wide Web (WWW) gained general public access in 1993. Alongside this rapid technological revolution, Gen Z experienced life-threatening traumatic pandemic and pervasive effect of climate change, economic uncertainty, growing social changes, academic competitions in their day-to-day life.¹⁻⁶ They are often considered as a generation with short attention span, gaps in different soft skills, lack of interpersonal skills.⁷

As a result, mental health of Gen Z has become widespread concern worldwide. Alarming rate of depression, anxiety, stress and sleep disorders were identified among Gen Z in different researches around the world.⁸ Loneliness and social isolation were identified very frequently as well.^{9,10} Consequently, sleep disturbance, excessive use of social media, and substance abuse found to be impacting life style of this generation.¹¹⁻¹³ In comparison with millennials, Gen Z reported poor mental health.¹⁴

On the other hand, Bangladesh is a country with high prevalence of psychiatric disorder for the people of all ages. Prevalence of psychiatric disorders among adults ranged from 6.5% to 31% whereas for child and adolescents' prevalence range were 13.4% to 22.9%.¹⁵ Apart from high prevalence, mental health system of Bangladesh has multifaceted problems which resulting in unavailability of needed mental health service.^{16,17} It is considered that Gen Z is more aware and vocal about mental health than other generations.¹⁸ But their access to service in Bangladesh can be hindered because of inadequate mental health service delivery.¹⁹

Gen Z in Bangladesh, who are currently aged between 13-28 years, are currently either studying in schools, colleges, and universities, or starting their career. Prevalence of poor mental health among university students and school adolescences found high in different recent studies of Bangladesh.²⁰⁻²² Even university entrance exams in Bangladesh found to be stressful.²³ Job seekers also experience negative mental health consequences because of unemployment issue in an overpopulated country.²⁴ COVID-19 also wreaked havoc on mental health of Bangladeshi Gen Z.^{20,21} Additionally, Gen Z recently lead the country to a recent mass uprising through a

student protest.²⁵ As a result, mental health of the Gen Z student protestors who experienced this first-hand violence during that protest is considered critical as well.²⁶

So, the main aim of this study is to identify psychiatric disorders among Bangladeshi Gen Z. As literature indicated maladaptive pattern of using social media, sleep disturbance and substance use history along with stress among Gen Z, examining current stressful event, level of stress, duration of daily social media use, daily sleep duration, and substance abuse history are other objectives of this study.

Materials and methods

A cross-sectional survey design was conceived to conduct the study in four psychiatric facilities of Savar and Manikganj. Two facilities of Savar were private chamber of a psychiatrist and two facilities of Manikganj comprised one private chamber and psychiatry department of a private medical college. Gen Z psychiatric patients who attended these psychiatric facilities from October, 2024 to March, 2025 were approached to collect the data for this study where the birth year of the participants were between 1997 to 2012. The number of participants were 204. The questionnaire of this study started with the details of research which included explanatory statements of the research and consent form. A personal information form was used to collect demographic information of the participants. Age, sex (male/female), residence (rural/urban), marital status (married/unmarried/others), educational level (up to primary/ up to secondary school/ higher secondary and above), occupation, monthly family income, and mental illness in the family (yes/no) were collected as demographic information. Diagnosis was confirmed by the psychiatrist following the diagnostic criteria of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5). Additional questions were added to assess current level of stress, any mention worthy current stressful life event, duration of daily social media use, duration of daily sleep, and substance abuse history of the participants. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews after ensuring eligibility of the participant by selection criteria. Data was collected by a psychiatrist during treatment seeking of Gen Z psychiatric patients.

Results

In this study, 204 participants were recruited. Mean age of the participants were 20.84 years (SD= 3.75) ranging from 14-27. More than half of the participants were female (53.92%) and married (58.82%). Education qualification of most (48.53%) of the participants was in the category of Higher Secondary and above. Other participants completed either up to primary education (11.76%) or up to Secondary School (39.71%). 45.59% participants were students whereas 24.02% and 13.24% were

housewives and service holders respectively. 55.39% participants of this study were from rural area. 22.06% responded positively when they were asked about whether there is any existence of mental illness in the family (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants (n=204)

Demographic characteristics	n (%)
Sex	
Male	94 (46.08)
Female	110 (53.92)
Marital status	
Married	80 (39.22)
Unmarried	120 (58.82)
Others	4 (1.96)
Education level	
Upto primary	24 (11.76)
Upto secondary school	81 (39.71)
Higher secondary and above	99 (48.53)
Occupation	
Student	93 (45.59)
Housewife	49 (24.02)
Job	27 (13.24)
Others	35 (17.16)
Residence	
Rural	113 (55.39)
Urban	91 (44.61)
Monthly family income (in thousand BDT)	
>10	31 (15.20)
11-30	94 (46.08)
31-50	56 (27.45)
50<	23 (11.27)
Mental illness in the family	
Yes	45 (22.06)
No	159 (77.94)
Total	204 (100)

Psychiatric disorders identified among participants of this study were- Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Substance Related Disorder (SRD), Bipolar Mood Disorder (BMD), Panic Disorder, Personality Disorder (PD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Schizophrenia, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Conduct Disorder, Conversion Disorder, Somatic Symptom Disorder (SSD), Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Epilepsy (Table 2). Among these disorders, MDD (24.51%) and GAD (24.51%) were the most common disorders. Among anxiety based disorders, apart from GAD 5.88%, 4.90%, and 2.45% were diagnosed respectively with Panic Disorder, OCD and Conversion Disorder. In case of major mental disorders, 7.84% and 3.92% participants

were identified with BMD and Schizophrenia respectively. 5.39% were diagnosed with PD. Table 2 depicts psychiatric disorders among participants of this study.

Table 2: Psychiatric disorders among Gen Z participants (n=204)

Psychiatric Disorders	n (%)
MDD	50 (24.51)
GAD	50 (24.51)
SRD	19 (9.31)
BMD	16 (7.84)
Panic disorder	12 (5.88)
PD	11 (5.39)
OCD	10 (4.90)
Schizophrenia	8 (3.92)
ADHD/Conduct disorder	7 (3.43)
Conversion disorder	5 (2.45)
SSD	4 (1.96)
Epilepsy	4 (1.96)
PTSD	3 (1.47)
Others	5 (2.45)

Though 42.16% participants reported to have no current stressful life events, relationship issue, familial disharmony, academic stress, financial crisis, parental issue were mentioned very commonly. Apart from that, migration of family member, experience of abuse/bullying, illness/death of significant others, work stress, pregnancy/infertility, and peer pressure were mentioned as current stressful life events by the Gen Z participants. 15.19% mentioned to have no level of stress currently. Among 84.81% stressed participants, 25.49%,

45.59%, and 13.73% mentioned to feel mild, moderate and severe level of stress respectively.

Table 3: Current stressful life events among Bangladeshi Gen Z last year (n=204)

Major life events last year	n (%)
No life events	86 (42.16)
Relationship issue	29 (14.22)
Familial disharmony	23 (11.27)
Academic stress	15 (7.35)
Financial crisis	15 (7.35)
Parental issue	10 (4.90)
Migration of family member	6 (2.94)
Abuse/bullying	5 (2.45)
Illness/death of significant others	5 (2.45)
Work stress	5 (2.45)
Pregnancy/infertility	3 (1.47)
Peer pressure	2 (0.98)
Total	204 (100)

Assessment of sleep pattern and social media use among Gen Z psychiatric patients identified- mean of social media use (per day) and sleeping time (per day) were 3.31 hours (SD= 2.53) and 4.94 hours (SD= 1.94). Figure 1 shows hour-wise percentage of social media use (per day) and sleeping duration (per day).

Though only 9.31% of the participants met the criteria of DSM-5 of substance related disorder, 24.51% participants responded positively when they were asked about substance use history. 19 (9.31% of total respondents) participants mentioned to use more than one drug or substance at the same time.

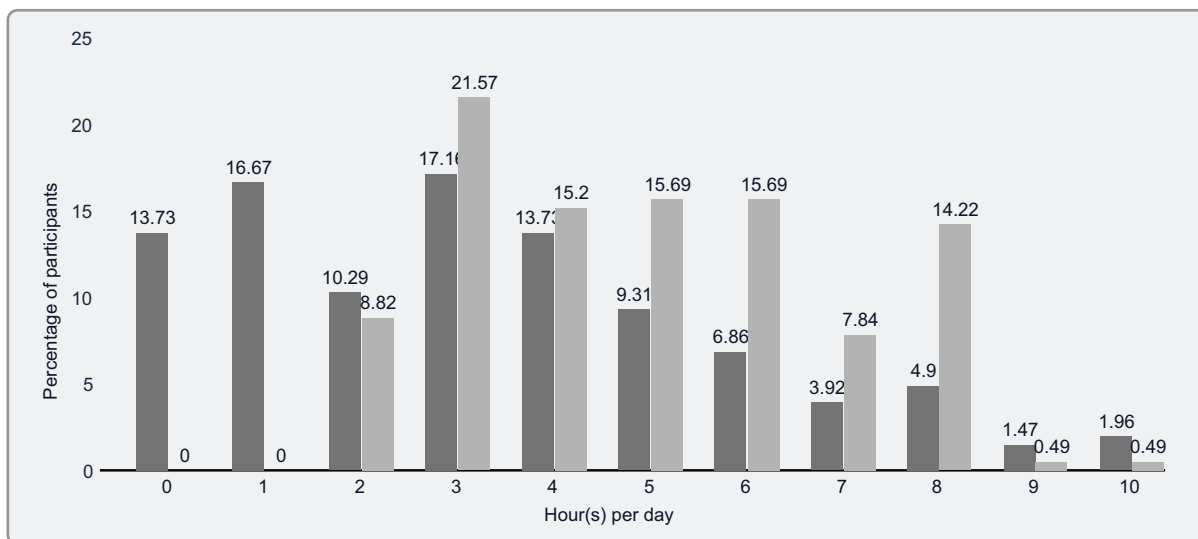


Figure 1: Hour-wise percentage of participants daily social media use and sleep time (n=204)

Discussion

This study was conducted with a view to identifying psychiatric morbidity among Bangladeshi Gen Z considering cultural stress factors of this demographic cohort in Bangladesh. Previously, mental health of adult university students, adolescents school and college students was under scrutiny many times. To our knowledge, this was the very first study conducted targeting this demographic cohort with a view to assessing psychiatric disorders in Bangladesh. Moreover, most of the previous studies conducted either in online or in academic institutions with symptom unveiling screening tools. This study collected face to face data from four psychiatric facilities and confirmed diagnosis of the participants using DSM-5.

Result of this study identified MDD and GAD as the most common psychiatric disorders among Gen Z psychiatric help seekers of Bangladesh. Worldwide high prevalence of depression and anxiety among Gen Z was also reported frequently.^{3,8} In last nationwide survey of Bangladesh, depressive disorders and anxiety disorders were the commonest psychiatric disorders for adults as well.²⁷ Concomitantly, research result of different studies with students from schools, colleges and universities of Bangladesh identified high prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptoms, though formal diagnosis of MDD and GAD was not made.^{22,28} So, findings of this study supported numerous researches aiming to unveil high prevalence of depression and anxiety among adult university students, adolescents school and college students using screening tool.

Among other disorders, 9.31% was diagnosed with SRD in this study. Previously in a study including people of all ages, 7.66% were found to be diagnosed with SRD in the outpatient department of a tertiary level of hospital of Bangladesh.²⁹ Though sleep disorders were identified among Gen Z in a systematic review,⁸ in this study no Bangladeshi Gen Z was diagnosed with sleep disorders. But, problematic sleeping pattern was one of the key findings of this study which is congruent with previous studies of Bangladesh.³⁰ Similarly, both prolonged social media use and digital device addiction among Gen Z of Bangladesh identified previously supported by the findings of this research.^{31,32}

Overwhelming level of stress was identified among Gen Z considering different stress factors.³³ Similarly, this study identified a very high percentage (84.81%) of Bangladeshi Gen Z psychiatric help seeker demonstrating stress. In addition, current stressful life events were incongruence with the factors associated common mental disorders in Bangladesh.¹⁹ Some stressful life events such as financial crisis, familial disharmony, and migration of family members etc. matched with the previous study in this geographical location as well.³⁴

Participants were diagnosed based on interviews conducted by a seasoned psychiatrist in this study. This can be considered

as limitation of this study as diagnosis was not confirmed using any diagnostic tool like Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5 (SCID-5). In future studies, stepwise diagnosis confirmation process like nationwide mental health survey is recommended.²⁷ Moreover, no validated questionnaire was used to identify level of stress or other variables of this study. As a cross-sectional study inability to establish cause-effect as well can be considered as another limitation of this research.

Conclusion

To best of our knowledge this is the very first study which assessed psychiatric morbidity among Gen Z of Bangladesh since most of previous studies attempted only to screen depressive and anxiety symptoms among students. Despite having some limitations, findings of this study identified from Gen Z psychiatric help seeker can help service providers to provide appropriate service, researchers to conduct further research and policy makers to develop policies to ensure mental wellbeing of Gen Z.

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