



General Studies-2; Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Youth Lifestyle and Mental Well-being

Introduction

- India is poised for rapid economic growth driven by its young population.
- The youth contribute significantly to both production and demand, positioning India to be a future economic powerhouse.

Lifestyle Changes Affecting Youth

- The rapid changes in lifestyle, spurred by economic growth, have negatively impacted the mental well-being of Indian youth.
- **India reports the highest growth in ultra-processed food consumption among youth**, contributing to poor physical and mental health outcomes.
- Research suggests these foods may be as addictive as smoking.
- **Low levels of exercise and inadequate sleep** are becoming common, contributing to health concerns.
- **The early introduction and widespread use of smartphones among teenagers** have adverse effects on cognition, emotional regulation, and overall mental well-being.

Mental Health Challenges

- **India is experiencing a silent mental health epidemic, particularly among adolescents.**
- Recent findings from a database of over 1,50,000 individuals highlight this growing issue.
- Shifts in cultural practices, such as weakened family relationships, are contributing to declining mental health, especially among youth.

Socioeconomic Factors and Mental Well-being

- Data indicates that **youth from lower-income families who exercise regularly, have strong family relationships, and avoid ultra-processed foods show better mental well-being** than their wealthier counterparts with sedentary lifestyles and weakened family bonds.
- There is growing evidence that **returning to traditional values**, such as strong family connections, healthy diets, and physical exercise, contributes to improved mental health.

Long-term Consequences

- If the current trends of poor mental health continue, India's demographic dividend may be undermined.
- A shortage of qualified, capable, and productive workers could affect the economy as a whole.

Paths to Transformation in Mental Health

- **Step up funding and human resources** in mental health services across health and other sectors.
- **Reduce stigma and discrimination** by including individuals with mental health conditions in all aspects of society and decision-making.
- **Address social and structural determinants of mental health** by intervening in homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.
- Implement actions such as protecting children from abuse, supporting early childhood development, addressing bullying, and enhancing green spaces.
- **Regulate harmful substances, such as ultra-processed foods and hazardous pesticides**, which are linked to poor mental health outcomes.
- Build networks of community-based mental health services.
- Scale up care options for common mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety.
- **Ensure that mental health services are accessible and affordable, particularly for vulnerable and underserved populations.**

Conclusion:

- To protect the demographic dividend and ensure sustainable economic growth, India must intervene now to improve the mental well-being of its youth.
- This requires a coordinated effort from government, the private sector, and civil society to reshape environments, strengthen care systems, and promote mental health as a national priority.