

## **Empowering Emotional Well-Being: Generation Z's Openness to Relationship Support Services**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Generation Z is known for its openness, boldness, awareness, and other factors that we had not seen in the previous generations so prominently. They talk openly about sensitive topics like social issues, gender roles, finance, mental health, etc. The current study aims to provide insights on whether they only speak about it or whether they are truly committed to implementing it in their lives as well. We have seen Generation Z encouraging people to reach out to professionals when required, but do they reach out to professionals? The current study focuses on whether they are comfortable with the idea of reaching out to professionals for help in their relationships. This study was conducted on 110 college-going Generation Z students of Delhi NCR since they encourage everyone to reach out for professional help. However, the findings revealed a slightly different picture. Clear resistance could be seen in the students to seek professional help. However, there could be many reasons for this. In India, a collective society, relationships are always considered private matters, and interference from anyone is not encouraged. However, when things go adverse, we reach out to family members or a few friends. The idea of reaching out to seek professional help doesn't come easily in our minds. Contrary to the Western world (USA and Canada), in an individualistic society, seeking professional help to save a relationship is not considered taboo. Certainly, there is a need to develop insights into the possible reasons for the resistance, which is important. Therefore, the current study provides us with insights on what could be the possible reasons for the resistance in Indian couples to seek professional help for their relationship.

**Keywords:** Relationship, Generation, Indian Couples, Modern Relationships, Social Psychology

### **Introduction**

Over the years, a lot has changed. Every new generation comes out to be different from the previous one. These changes are often positive and negative, both. Positive changes include technological advancement and comfort; being more aware of social issues; being more one-minded; and being more flexible than ever. Every generation consists of an age range. For instance, Generation 'X' age range lies between 1965 and 1981; they were the first ones to adapt to technology in their lives. They didn't see it when they were growing up. They had to adapt it in the later stages of their lives. Later comes Generation 'Y.' Their age range lies between 1980 and 1996. They were quite comfortable with the technology and invocation in their day-to-day lives. And they learned it a little earlier than their previous generation. Then comes Generation Z, also known as digital natives. They were born between the years of 1997 and 2012. They have better and more advanced knowledge about technology than any previous generation (Gudino-Paredes et al., 2019). This generation is often associated with a trait, i.e., smart ones. They are considered smarter than the previous generations. They are quick to learn new things, and they are the ones who blend well with 21st-century trends. They are referred to as digital natives as they learn to use technology at a young age and are quite comfortable with it. Generation Z is often characterized by openness, being more aware and bold enough to speak about sensitive issues like gender inequality, inclusivity, new gender roles, financial independence, social inequality, etc.

### **Review of Literature**

There are many misconceptions about Generation Z. The existing research will help us break the existing misconception by dwelling more on the key traits of Generation Z, their relationships, and the challenges they face in the challenges to explore more in developing a strong understanding of the problems faced by digital natives.

**a) Unique Traits of Generation Z**

A lot of researchers have started to show interest in studying different generations, particularly Generation Z since they are digital natives. They are the ones who have more opportunities to expand and have greater mastery over tools and technology (Li and Hasnah, 2023). They are more updated as a part of the community about their focus on their interest areas and more updated with the current trends about many things (Krol and Zdonek, 2020). Despite the perception of Generation Z being smarter than the previous generation and more aware, they still face a lot of challenges in their lives. These challenges can't be ignored. These challenges are associated with the various aspects of their lives. These issues are sometimes related to finances, employment difficulties, societal expectations, relationship issues, mental health issues, etc. Financial issues that are faced by them are related to financial instability due to the economic crisis, which leads to a rapid increase in inflation and stagnant wages, which makes them feel stuck at times in terms of finances as concerned. And, to overcome these challenges, they tend to rely on the digital platform for financial literacy (Spohn, 2024). Furthermore, since there is a gap between Generation Z and previous generations, it often leads to differences in values and expectations between them, which creates a problem in the job market. They have different career expectations, skills, and abilities to adapt to changes (Fataleno and Batubara, 2024). Besides this, they are often seen actively engaging in sensitive issues like climate change, inequality, mental health, etc., which play a significant role in shaping their civic identities and also pushing the boundaries of traditional engagement (Battocchio et al., 2023). These challenges are not limited to the issues mentioned above. An increase in mental health challenges is also seen in this generation due to various factors. Their dependency on social media and other platforms is increasing to the extent that it has started to impact their mental health severely. Their dependency on digital devices needs to be controlled by implying strategies to eliminate the risk of damage caused (Evianti and Rosa, 2024). In addition to this, they also experience challenges in managing their relationships with their parents, friends, colleagues, and partners.

**b) Generation Z's Relationships in the Modern Era**

Relationships play a vital role in the happiness of an individual. However, significant challenges in the relationship domain can be seen in their lives. Relationship dynamics have changed drastically over the years. People find it difficult to adjust to the new roles in their relationships. Now, both partners are treated equally and are aware that their partner is also worthy of respect, which was missing to some extent in the previous generations. Now, both want to focus on their careers, and at the same time, they contribute to the household chores equally, which was sometimes missing in the older generation in most Indian couples. These new roles are new and sometimes difficult to adjust to. If they somehow manage to learn it, then the issue that has been observed is that relationships are divided into different categories. Categories like casual relationships, open relationships, situationships, etc. have made it difficult for people who want to be with someone willing to be with them for the long term. Also, an increase in the number of cheating cases can be seen in relationships now. There could be many reasons for this, such as easy accessibility of alternative options, unrealistic expectations from their partner leading to dissatisfaction in the relationship, leading to increased chances of cheating with the partner, etc. Furthermore, it has been observed that their dependency on digital platforms for communication rather than face-to-face communication could be a reason for the challenges this generation is facing in their interpersonal relationships (Sciortino, 2023; Wulandari et al., 2023). Moreover, social media has also impacted their relationship in a way. People tend to develop unrealistic expectations in a relationship influenced by social media and also pressure to pretend on social media that they have a perfect relationship (Ghojogh, 2023). Also, inexperience in forming long-term relationships among these young adults leads to challenges in maintaining commitment and satisfaction in their relationships (Maner and Miller, 2010). In addition to this, changes in cultural and social norms, like increased individualism, can lead to factors associated with unstable relationships. Whereas society is now very open-minded and has started to accept cross-cultural relationships, their differences due to factors like culture and religion can be challenging for couples (Ghojogh, 2023). Finally, the accumulation of all these challenges often leads to mental health issues. People have developed their digital identities now. To maintain them, along with other challenges, they end up facing serious mental health issues like anxiety, depression, body dysmorphia, identity issues, distorted self-image, etc. These issues impact the quality of their relationship and vice versa (Sciortino, 2023; Dunaetz, 2023).

**c) Key Challenges Faced by Gen Z in Relationships**

Unstable relationships due to the above-mentioned factors need to be addressed on time and should be communicated with the partner. If a couple is facing a difficult time due to the above-mentioned reasons, then it should be discussed with a

relationship counselor or any professional who can help them enhance the quality of the relationship. However, the real challenge lies in their willingness to seek professional help for their relationship. Do they feel comfortable with the idea of reaching out to a counselor for their relationship, or are they hesitant to seek help from a counselor or any professional for their relationship? And if they are comfortable with the help, then to what extent are they comfortable, or are they all comfortable, or are some of them comfortable with the involvement of professional help in their relationships?

The current paper focuses on finding all these answers. In this paper, the researcher aims to explore the willingness of Generation Z to seek professional help to improve the quality of their relationship.

### **Methodology**

Research methodology is the most essential component of research, as it helps the researcher in data collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. From the researcher's point of view, it focuses on the choice of methodology for the research as it ensures the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the research findings (Bahishti, 2022). The methodology for the current research consists of the research designs, sample, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and data collection. For the research design, qualitative research was designed. Qualitative research focuses on exploring and dwelling deep understanding of real-world problems (Moser and Korstjens, 2017). It focuses on gathering real experiences, perceptions, and behaviors for a deeper understanding of the problem (Tenny et al., 2023). The current research method used in the study is a qualitative research design to develop an understanding of Generation Z's willingness to seek professional support and guidance for their relationship. Furthermore, cross-sectional studies consist of analyzing data at a single point in time (Wang et al., 2020). The current study is a cross-sectional survey that provides insights into Generation Z's willingness to seek professional help. Moreover, In the current research, the sample consists of one hundred and ten (N = 110) participants, which consists of 66 females and 44 male participants. All the participants were born between 1995 and 2010, as responses from Generation Z are required for the current study; all were college-going students of Delhi NCR from different universities and departments to capture the diverse experience. They are pursuing bachelor's (BA, BBA, B.Tech.) and master's (MA and MBA). Also, the purposive sampling method was employed to ensure a representative sample. In addition to this, inclusion and exclusion criteria are required in high-quality research. Typically, inclusion criteria consist of key features of the representative population that the researcher will use to answer the research question (Hulley et al., 2013). The inclusion criteria for the current study consist of anyone born between 1995 and 2010, as we need to capture the responses of Generation Z for the research. Also, participants who were enrolled in a degree program were included. Further, all genders were allowed to share their experiences. Exclusion criteria are those additional characteristics of the target population who meet the inclusion criteria, but some additional characteristics are also present that could interfere with research and lead to unfavorable outcomes (Patino and Ferreira, 2018). The exclusion criteria for the current research consist of anyone born before 1995. After 2010 being excluded from the current research as the targeted population was Generation Z. For the collection of data, a mixed-methods survey form was created and shared with the participants. Consent was taken from the participants at the beginning of the survey. Then, questions related to their relationship quality were asked where they had to rate on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means 'low satisfaction', 5 stands for 'moderate satisfaction', and 10 means 'high satisfaction'. And then, their willingness to seek professional support or guidance for their relationship was asked to develop a better understanding of Generation Z.

### **Result and Discussion**

In the current research, the total number of participants (N = 110) consists of participants from varied backgrounds in terms of relationships. Some of them are in relationships, some of them are single, some of them are in multiple relationships, and some of them are in situationships; some of them are with multiple partners, etc. The duration of the relationship of participants who are currently in a relationship varied from 2 months to 6 years. All the participants were asked to rate their relationship on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 stands for low satisfaction, 5 means neutral, and 10 stands for highly satisfactory relationship. The following graph represents the results in Fig. 1.

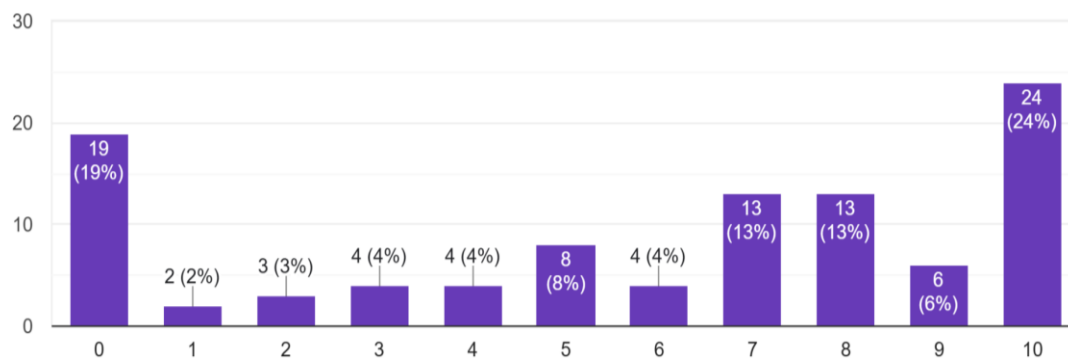


Fig. 1 shows the result of participants' responses to the questions when asked to rate their relationship's overall quality (the rating number is on the x-axis and the number of participants who responded is on the y-axis)

In today's digital era, the lives of digital natives (Generation Z) give an impression of a perfect life in all aspects. In reality, it differs for many, including their relationship aspect. The incongruity between the two lives is significant. Despite Generation Z being known for their openness and awareness about all the sensitive issues, the researcher wanted to explore how open they are to reaching out for help if required for their relationship. The digital natives give the impression that a lot is perfect in their lives, including relationships. In reality, we see hesitancy to accept that relationships have issues and need help to make them work out (Sciortino, 2023). The current research investigates Generation Z's willingness to seek personal support and guidance for their relationship. The current research was conducted on college-going Generation Z students, born between 1995 and 2010. Consent was taken from them at the beginning of the data collection process.

It was expected that Generation Z would be more open to the idea of reaching out for help since they are quite aware of sensitive issues like mental health. However, the results were somewhat mixed. The findings suggested that Generation Z is equally hesitant about the idea of reaching out to professionals for their relationship. Some participants showed their extreme openness to the idea of reaching out for their relationships by responding like, 'Very open,' 'I don't think it is a bad idea to seek help,' '100% open to the idea of reaching out for help as long as we both want to work on it,' etc. This shows that some participants are very open and comfortable with seeking help for their relationship. On the other hand, some participants showed their hesitancy by stating 'not open at all,' 'I don't like the idea of disclosing the relationship problems to a third person,' and 'Not very open, but I am okay with the friends giving advice,' and 'I am not open at all; I try to keep things to myself only.' These responses show reluctance to seek help. There could be many reasons for their resistance, which will be discussed further. Also, some participants are somewhat okay with the idea of reaching out; however, they are not sure. Their responses were somewhat like, 'Somewhat open to the idea of guidance and support.' Some participants say that they are open but want to keep it private to themselves. A couple of participants stated that they are quite okay with the idea of reaching out for help, but their partners are not open to the idea of reaching out to the third person for help.

There could be many reasons for resistance from the participants' side. The first reason could be the stigma associated with mental health issues in India, which discourages young people from the idea of reaching out to others for help, including for relationship issues. The stigma has been attached for so many years that despite the years of awareness, they still prefer not to reach out and open up, as it is often associated with the signs of weakness due to poor knowledge and attitude towards sensitive issues like mental health (Jindal et al., 2024; Gaiha et al., 2020). In addition to this, when it comes to reaching out to a professional like a psychologist, people often misunderstand it with all clinical mental health disorders, but in reality, less severe or non-clinical issues like relationship issues can also be managed with the help of a psychologist. Also, there is a belief that personal issues like relationships should be resolved without any external support, which could be one reason for their hesitance to reach out (Stephans and Eaton, 2020). Also, young people often fear being judged; especially, it was seen that men resist seeking help more; this could be due to the societal expectation of participatory gender conformity (Jindal et al., 2024; Neera and Sivatharini, 2021). Along with other reasons, cultural norms have a role to play. We often

place a lot of emphasis on emotional suppression, and it is sometimes associated with shame, which can make people hesitant about the idea of seeking help (Talebi et al., 2013). These can be a few reasons why people show reluctance toward the idea of reaching out to a professional for help when it comes to their relationship issues.

### **Conclusion and Limitations**

The current research highlights the willingness of Generation Z to seek support or guidance for their relationship. The findings of the research suggest that there is hesitation in Generation Z to seek support for their relationship; it was prevalent in males. There could be any reason for the same. However, the findings of the study can help us in the formulation of an effective awareness program specifically for this generation so that they don't feel hesitant to reach out for help when required. Additionally, there are a few limitations to the study. Data was collected from 110 participants; more participants could be included to develop a better understanding of the representative population. Also, a larger number of participants could help us understand the gender difference in the willingness to reach out for relationships. Also, categories based on the relationship status of the participants (such as in a relationship, single, etc.) could be formed and compared to see who all are willing to reach out for help. Furthermore, possible reasons for Generation Z not being able to reach out could be explored in the study.

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