

## UNDERSTANDING GEN Z'S MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

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<p><b>Info Article</b></p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b> <i>This study explores the psychological and emotional challenges faced by Generation Z in the digital era. The investigation focuses on four critical issues affecting their well-being: digital overload, academic and career pressure, global uncertainty, and isolation and loneliness. The increasing use of technology has led to an increase in screen time and digital engagement, resulting in cognitive fatigue and emotional exhaustion. Academic expectations and a highly competitive job market contribute to stress and burnout. Economic instability, climate change, and political unrest further intensify anxiety and uncertainty about the future. Despite being the most digitally connected generation, many Generation Z individuals experience social isolation, as online interactions often fail to provide meaningful emotional support. This study identifies key patterns and interconnections among these challenges. Findings suggest that excessive digital consumption negatively impacts mental health, while societal pressures exacerbate stress levels.</i></p> <p><b>Abstrak:</b> Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tantangan psikologis dan emosional yang dihadapi Generasi Z di era digital. Investigasi ini berfokus pada empat masalah penting yang mempengaruhi kesejahteraan mereka: kelebihan beban digital, tekanan akademis dan karier, ketidakpastian global, serta isolasi dan kesepian. Meningkatnya penggunaan teknologi telah menyebabkan peningkatan interaksi digital, yang mengakibatkan kelelahan kognitif dan kelelahan emosional. Ekspektasi akademis dan pasar kerja yang sangat kompetitif berkontribusi terhadap stres dan kelelahan. Ketidakstabilan ekonomi, perubahan iklim, dan kerusuhan politik semakin meningkatkan kecemasan dan ketidakpastian mengenai masa depan. Meskipun merupakan generasi yang paling terhubung secara digital, banyak individu Generasi Z mengalami isolasi sosial, karena interaksi online sering kali gagal memberikan dukungan emosional yang berarti. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi pola-pola utama dan keterkaitan di antara tantangan-tantangan tersebut. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa konsumsi digital yang berlebihan berdampak negatif terhadap kesehatan mental, sementara tekanan masyarakat memperburuk tingkat stres.</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

Generation Z is individuals aged 12-27 years old in 2025. This generation is particularly vulnerable as it is going through a critical stage of development, with high numbers of depression and anxiety (Park et al., 2024; Casey, 2024). According to multi-year research published in 2023, nearly two-thirds (65%) of Generation Z reported experiencing no less than one mental health problem in the two years preceding the present. The percentage was smaller for all the previous generations, such as millennials at 51%, Generation X at 29%, and Baby boomers at 14% (Casey, 2024). In contrast to earlier generations, Generation Z grew up in the digital era and is commonly called the digital native generation (Wulandari et al., 2024).

The internet is easily accessible for Generation Z to communicate on social media. However, social media has often become a boomerang for Generation Z because it makes a person addicted to continuous appreciation and affirmation. When they get negative responses, Generation Z is prone to depression and anxiety. The effects of social media such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and YouTube change an individual's lifestyle and communication (Mojtahe, 2022). Social media is changing traditional communication ways, such as face-to-face interactions, to gadget-based communication, which can affect an individual's stress, depression, anxiety, social isolation, and decreased physical interaction (Mojtahe, 2022). To avoid stress or depression, doing physical activity is one of the ways such as walking to reach friends or family (Matilda et al., 2025) but it seems not many people are interested in doing such activity.

In addition, the use of gadgets can also cause other mental health problems, such as stress and sleep quality disorders. According to Surat et al. (2021), excessive gadget use can affect depression at 13%, anxiety at 10.7%, stress at 12.5%, and sleep quality at 3.4%. According to Elhai et al. (2017), Generation Z spends an average of 16 hours a day utilizing their gadgets, which indicates that users cannot live without their digital gadgets every time in a day. This will cause digital overload, potentially damaging to mental health. Mental health will also affect the academic performance of a person; an individual with low mental health often has difficulty maintaining academic activities because it is challenging to focus on learning. Not only will it impact academic performance, but it will also influence an individual's social, emotional, and cognitive performance (Mojtahe, 2022).

A low academic performance will, in turn, lead to career opportunities that do not meet expectations. Thus, it often results in unemployment due to not getting a job opportunity. This also leads to negative impacts on mental health. In a company, human resources are crucial to achieving sustainable growth (Chen et al., 2023). Without competent human capital, an organization cannot grow properly. Generation Z is faced with an academic demand that requires a high level of capability; however, due to the absence of good mental health and emotional management, Generation Z is stressed and overwhelmed. Increasingly, Generation Z is faced with high work-related expectations, long working hours, and heavy workloads, therefore putting them at a significantly higher risk of psychological distress by lower performance indicators (Chen et al., 2023). Psychological distress is a crucial indicator of psychological health and manifests as a spectrum of emotions, starting from anxiety to depression and culminating in psychologically distressing feelings (Ridner, 2004).

## METHOD

This study is qualitative research in which it utilizes cross-keyword literature data from the Mendeley database. This research was intended to examine the challenges faced by Generation Z in mental health. By exploring various literatures, this study was able to uncover deep insights related to the purpose of this study. There were 112 data pertinent to the query ‘gen z’, ‘generation z’, ‘mental health’, ‘anxiety’, and ‘depression’ obtained from the database. The data was analyzed by considering the titles and reviewing the abstracts to determine the relevance of the topic to our research aims. In a result, we obtained 102 data related to our research aims. Figure 1 shows the workflow of this research.

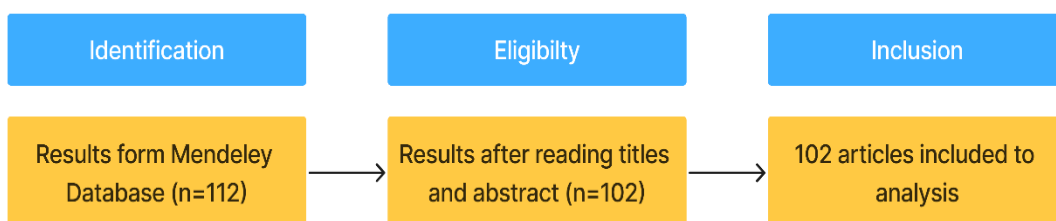


Figure 1. Data Flow Process

The data were processed by using VOSViewer to identify gaps from the previous studies. The visualization generated through VOSViewer is shown in Figure 2, as depicted in the network map, highlights the interconnectedness of key research themes. The nodes represent frequently occurring keywords extracted from research titles, while

the edges indicate the strength of their co-occurrence relationships. Color coding signifies distinct clusters, demonstrating thematic groupings within the research domain. From the visualization, three primary clusters emerge. The first cluster, the red one, focuses on ‘Gen Z’, ‘mental health’, ‘social media’, and their ‘impact’, suggesting a strong research interest in understanding the psychological and social effects of digital engagement among younger generations. The second cluster, the green one, revolves around the ‘pandemic’, its ‘effect’, and the ‘role’ it played, indicating a concentration of studies on the influence of global crises on societal behavior. The third cluster, the blue one, connects ‘generation z’ with ‘young millennials’, and ‘perspective’, emphasizing comparative studies between these demographic groups.

We can discern research trends and potential gaps by analyzing those three clusters. For instance, while the effects of social media on mental health are extensively studied, there may be limited exploration of intersectional factors such as socioeconomic background or cultural variations. Additionally, the role of external stressors like pandemics on generational mental well-being remains a critical area for further examination.

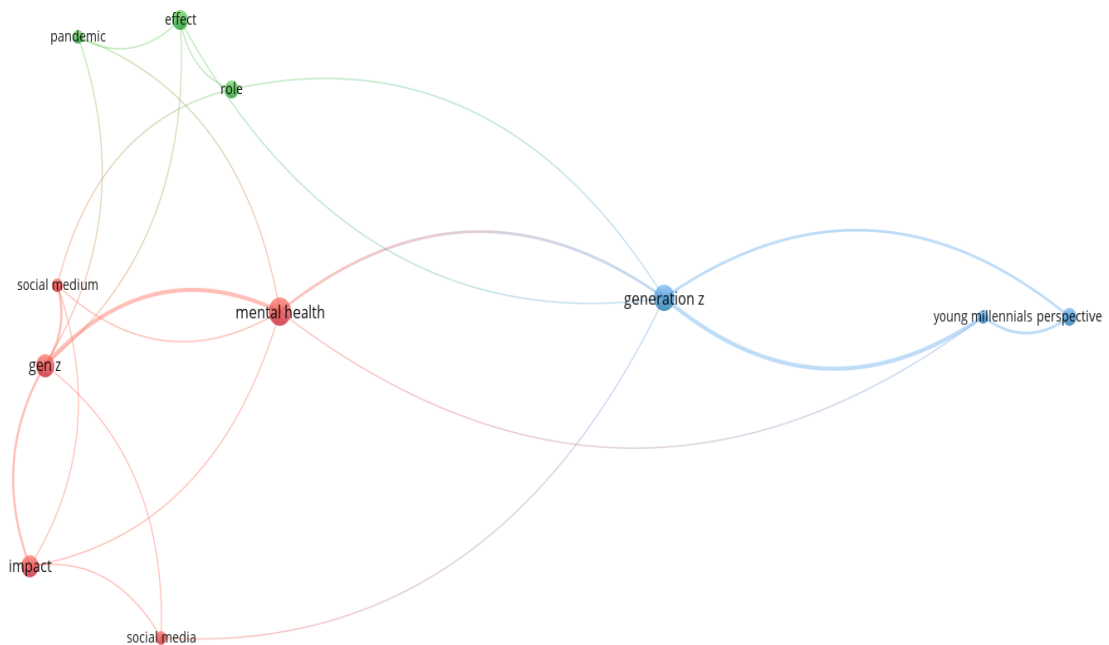


Figure 2. Titles Network Visualization

Additionally, the abstracts were analyzed to identify the discussion in the collected data, and the outcome is represented in Figure 3. The network visualization in Figure 3 illustrates the key concepts and their relationships extracted from the abstracts of the collected research papers. Each node represents a frequently occurring term,

while the edges denote co-occurrences, indicating how often these terms appear together in the same context. The clustering of terms reveals distinct thematic areas within the body of literature. From the visualization, three major thematic clusters can be observed. The red cluster centers around 'mental health', 'gen z', 'social medium', 'life', 'generation', 'person', 'time', 'research', 'technology', and 'impact', highlighting a predominant focus on how digital engagement and generational factors influence psychological well-being. The green cluster is primarily associated with 'generation z', 'participant', 'data', 'year', 'age', 'students', 'stress', 'anxiety', and 'depression' suggesting a concentration of studies examining the psychological burden faced by younger demographics, particularly in academic settings. The blue cluster, which includes terms like 'study', 'effect', 'individual', 'factor', and 'covid,' points to research exploring external influences, such as the pandemic, on mental health outcomes. This analysis confirms that existing studies largely address the interplay between generational identity, mental well-being, and external stressors, while also highlighting potential gaps in research. For instance, there may be limited studies on intervention strategies or longitudinal analyses of these psychological trends over time.

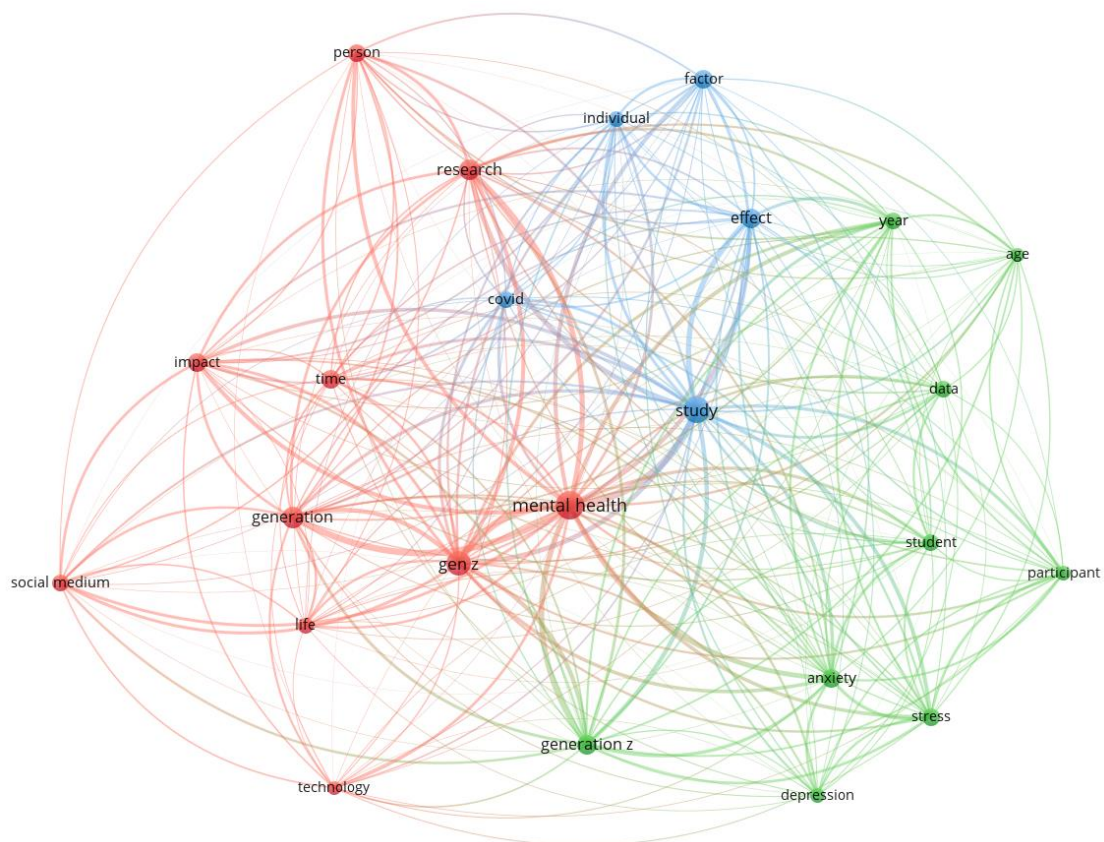


Figure 3. Abstracts Network Visualization

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

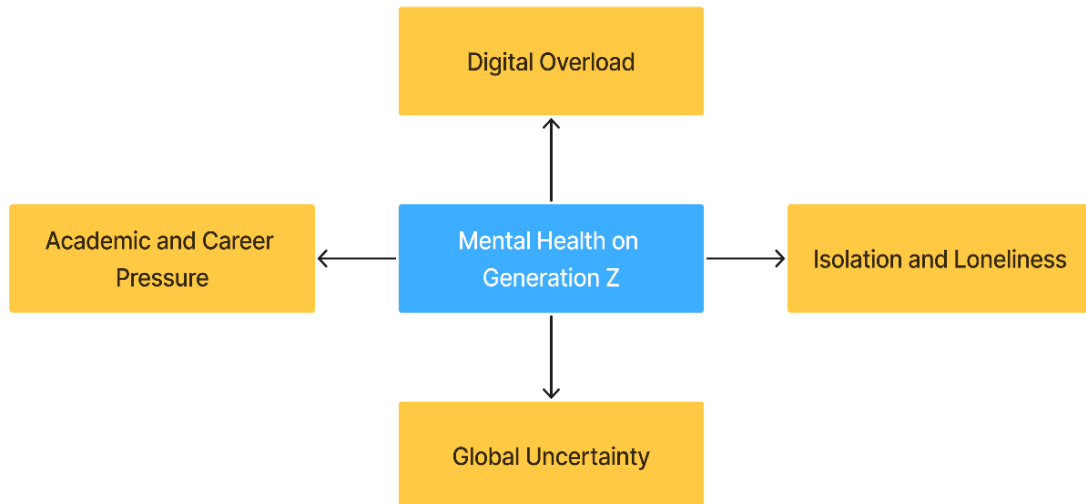


Figure 3. Four Key Factors Influencing Mental Health on Generation Z Diagram

The findings from this study highlight four key factors influencing the mental well-being of Generation Z: digital overload, academic and career pressure, global uncertainty, and isolation and loneliness. As illustrated in Figure 3, these aspects have been the focus of extensive discussion in contemporary research, underscoring their substantial impact on the psychological experiences of young individuals. The subsequent discussion will delve into each of these factors, supported by pertinent literature.

### Digital Overload

Generation Z has grown up in a hyper-connected digital age. Constant exposure to social media and technology has brought various challenges to its mental health. The pervasive use of digital technology, particularly social media, has been associated with elevated stress levels and mental health challenges among Generation Z. Prolonged screen time and incessant digital engagement can result in cognitive fatigue and emotional exhaustion, often referred to as digital overload. One of the key concerns is digital overload, which can lead to social comparison, cyberbullying, and feelings of not being good enough. Research indicates that extensive exposure to social media can precipitate heightened anxiety, disrupted sleep patterns, and diminished attention spans (Twenge et al., 2018). In addition, the pressure to maintain an online presence and engage with digital content has been shown to exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and self-comparison, leading to a decline in overall well-being (Keles et al., 2020).

The prevalence of seemingly idealized lives portrayed on social media, exemplified by career achievements, luxurious vacations, and physical appearances, has become a subject of concern. Generation Z is susceptible to feelings of anxiety and depression when confronted with the discrepancy between their perceived and actual lives, often stemming from the comparison to these unrealistic representations. Pressure to maintain an idealized online persona, often measured by the number of 'likes', comments, and followers, further exacerbates these feelings. Intensified online activity has been shown to increase the risk of cyberbullying, highlighting the need for interventions to address this issue. Generation Z, who spends a considerable amount of time on online platforms, often becomes victims of harassment or cyberbullying, which can manifest as malicious comments, rumor propagation, or threats. These experiences can lead to significant psychological distress, including diminished self-esteem and mental health concerns (Aprilia et al., 2020).

Pervasiveness and omnipresence of such attacks can be more detrimental than physical bullying, as they can occur at any moment and in any location. Additionally, exposure to unrealistic standards on social media has been found to precipitate feelings of inadequacy and identity crises (La Base et al., 2023). Generation Z may experience a sense of pressure to meet unrealistic expectations, which can result in stress, anxiety, and depression. Additionally, the fear of missing out (FoMO) can engender further stress when observing others participating in events or experiencing activities that they do not possess (Farida et al., 2021). Therefore, individuals must acknowledge the significance of 'digital disconnection' as a pivotal step in achieving a state of serenity and liberation from the pervasive effects of digital excess. This concept can be conceptualized as a manifestation of digital detoxification, a strategy that involves the deliberate and intentional cessation of digital activities to promote mental well-being and productivity (Enli & Fast, 2023).

### **Academic and Career Pressure**

Recent years have witnessed an escalation in the intensity of educational and professional expectations, resulting in considerable psychological distress among young individuals. The convergence of high academic standards and the demands of the job market have been shown to contribute to stress and burnout among students, who are expected to demonstrate academic excellence while concurrently preparing for future careers. The ever-increasing emphasis on standardized testing, competitive university

admissions, and skill development has given rise to an environment where young individuals feel compelled to excel. For instance, academic performance is a significant factor in the selection process for further education, as it is given considerable weight in the decision-making process (Li, 2021).

Research indicates that excessive academic demands, coupled with concerns about financial stability, have led to heightened anxiety levels and reduced well-being among students (Pascoe et al., 2020). Many young people report experiencing pressure not only from educational institutions but also from societal and familial expectations, which further exacerbates their stress levels. Adolescents demonstrating inadequate academic performance are susceptible to peer influence within the college environment. These individuals often experience feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and apprehension during their academic pursuits. Concurrently, their academic struggles render them susceptible to peer investigation and social exclusion (Jiang et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be posited that parent-child, teacher-student, teacher-parent, and peer relationships are of the utmost importance for young people. These relationships play a significant role in the social development of young people (Buist et al., 2004).

Moreover, the transition from education to employment has become more challenging due to rapidly evolving job market demands. The increasing prevalence of automation and economic fluctuations have rendered traditional career pathways increasingly unpredictable, thereby engendering heightened uncertainty regarding future job security (Galea et al., 2020). Consequently, young professionals frequently feel compelled to pursue multiple internships, certifications, and extracurricular experiences in order to remain competitive, a phenomenon that can result in exhaustion and mental fatigue (O'Connor et al., 2021). Similarly, the societal expectation of achieving a successful career in one's early years imposes considerable psychological pressure on young individuals, adversely impacting their self-esteem and overall mental well-being (Kurz, 2021). To address these challenges necessitates systemic modifications in educational policies and occupational environments, with the aim of cultivating a more harmonious equilibrium between professional ambition and mental well-being.

### **Global Uncertainty**

Generation Z has come of age during a period marked by considerable global challenges, including economic instability, climate change, uncertain employment and

political unrest (OECD, 2021). These factors have contributed to an increase in stress and anxiety among young people. Economic instability, typified by recessions, job insecurity, and rising living costs, has led to a sense of uncertainty regarding financial prospects among many young individuals. Concerns regarding student debt, housing affordability, and stagnant wages have contributed to a pervasive sense of financial insecurity, affecting both mental health and long-term aspirations (Reyna, 2024). This economic unpredictability has led to increased levels of stress (Simonse et al., 2024), with many young adults feeling that traditional pathways to financial stability, such as homeownership and secure employment, are becoming less attainable.

Furthermore, the escalating threat of climate change and the persistent political unrest have compounded feelings of helplessness among Gen Z. Frequent exposure to news about natural disasters, environmental degradation, and inadequate governmental responses has been associated with eco-anxiety, a form of chronic stress caused by concern over the planet's future (Ogunbode et al., 2022). The phenomenon of eco-anxiety, also referred to as climate anxiety, has been consistently linked to potential mental health implications (Reyes et al., 2023). In addition, political instability, including conflict and social unrest, as well as human rights violations, has been demonstrated to influence young individuals' perception of the world as unpredictable and volatile, thereby engendering mental health challenges (Jenkins et al., 2011). This continuous exposure to global crises can result in a sense of hopelessness, making it difficult for Gen Z to maintain optimism about their future. Addressing these concerns necessitates systemic policy interventions and the implementation of mental health support strategies, with the aim of assisting young individuals in navigating these uncertainties while cultivating resilience and empowerment.

### **Isolation and Loneliness**

Despite being the most digitally connected generation, many members of Generation Z report experiencing profound social isolation and loneliness. Loneliness is defined as the subjective experience of emotional distress caused by the perception of an absence or inadequacy in social connections with others (Bekhet et al., 2008). This phenomenon is characterized by the feeling that relationships with others are either absent or deficient. While social media platforms provide opportunities for virtual interactions, they often fail to replace meaningful in-person connections, leading to a paradox, where individuals feel more isolated despite constant online engagement

(Twenge, 2017). The studies indicate that excessive screen time and reliance on digital communication can contribute to weaker offline social skills and increased feelings of loneliness (Bonsaksen et al., 2023). The curated nature of social media has been demonstrated to exacerbate social comparison, leading many young individuals to experience feelings of inadequacy or disconnection from their peers (Bonsaksen et al., 2023).

Not to mention, societal shifts in recent times have contributed to feelings of isolation among Generation Z. The decline of community-based interactions, the rise of remote education and work, and the disruptions caused by global events—such as the COVID-19 pandemic—have all played a role in reducing face-to-face socialization (Buecker & Horstmann, 2021). The social media platform is frequently utilized as a means of mitigating feelings of loneliness. Teppers et al. (2014) investigated the underlying motivations behind individuals' use of social media. Their study revealed that leveraging social media for the purpose of establishing new social connections serves to mitigate feelings of loneliness. In contrast, utilizing social media for social compensation, defined as deriving satisfaction from interactions on social media platforms, has been observed to increase feelings of loneliness. While digital spaces offer a sense of belonging, they often lack the emotional depth and support provided by real-world relationships. Eliminating these issues requires a balance between online and offline interactions, fostering an environment that encourages authentic social connections and community engagement.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of current studies has revealed significant challenges faced by Generation Z in the modern digital era. The phenomenon of 'digital overload', characterized by excessive screen time and constant online engagement, has been identified as a contributing factor to a range of health concerns, including cognitive fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and diminished well-being. Notably, the convergence of academic and career pressures, driven by high expectations and competitive job markets, has led to an environment marked by stress and burnout. The contemporary global landscape, characterized by economic fluctuations, environmental concerns, and political instability, has further compounded these challenges, leading to feelings of anxiety and uncertainty among young individuals. Moreover, despite the pervasive connectivity facilitated by social media, a significant proportion of Generation Z

members encounter feelings of loneliness and social isolation, a situation that has a detrimental effect on their mental well-being.

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