

# Unveiling the Struggles of India's Youth: Identifying Challenges and Solutions

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## Abstract

**Background-** In the context of a global population that is experiencing an increasing average age, India stands out as a nation with one of the most youthful populations. The working-age population in India has surpassed the population of individuals who are not of working age. Based on available reports, it can be shown that a demographic dividend has been present for a period of around five decades, commencing from the year 2004-05. The potential is quite high. In order to accommodate the anticipated annual expansion of the working age population, the Economic Survey 2019 proposes the augmentation of employment opportunities. The successful completion of this task necessitates a staff that possesses a high level of education, expertise, and physical well-being. This study aims to present a comprehensive overview of the various concerns and challenges faced by contemporary youth. This article endeavours to present ideas aimed at addressing these challenges and harnessing the full potential of India's Youth.

**Methodology-** This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data and employing a thematic review of literature to comprehensively examine the concept of youth.

**Findings-** The study's findings indicate the presence of significant gaps in education, healthcare, and employment that require urgent attention from the government. This is particularly crucial during times of crisis, such as the current pandemic, where a substantial number of young individuals have experienced job losses. Therefore, it is imperative for the state to proactively address this pressing issue by generating job opportunities and not neglecting its severity.

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**Conclusion-** The allocation of resources towards the development and enhancement of human capital has been found to provide remarkable levels of returns. Indian youth of today encounter a multitude of issues that necessitate not only acknowledgment, but also proactive measures to address them.

**Keywords:** Youth, Education, Employment, Healthcare, Pandemic, State, Skilled

## **Introduction**

There is currently no universally recognized definition of the term “youth” on an international scale. However, in the context of statistical analysis, the United Nations establishes the age range of youth as those between 15 and 24 years old, irrespective of any alternative definitions put out by particular Member States. The notion of the Youth emerged in anticipation of the International Youth Year (1985). A nation may establish a demarcation point regarding the age at which an individual is legally recognized as an adult, commonly known as the ‘age of majority.’ The age of majority in various countries is often recognized as 18. Consequently, upon reaching this specified age, individuals are deemed to have attained adulthood. The definition of youth varies across countries, and is influenced by a multitude of factors including cultural norms, institutional frameworks, economic conditions, and political systems. Globally, there exists a population of over 1.2 billion individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, constituting approximately 16 percent of the overall global population. Based on the 2030 Agenda, it is projected that the global population of young individuals would exceed 1.3 billion by the year 2030, coinciding with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Given the growing demands of young individuals for equitable and progressive opportunities, it is imperative to promptly address the diverse range of obstacles they encounter, including but not limited to issues pertaining to healthcare, education, gender parity, and employment. The acquisition of knowledge and access to opportunity are crucial factors that enable young individuals to flourish, ultimately rendering them a formidable catalyst for societal progress. It is imperative for young individuals to obtain the necessary education and skills that will enable them to contribute effectively to society. Additionally, it is crucial for them to have access to a labor market that can adequately satisfy their needs and aspirations. In order to effectively attain the Sustainable Development Goals, it is imperative to ensure that no nation, individual, or collective entity is excluded or marginalized. The inclusivity of all nations, individuals, and groups is a central objective of the Sustainable Development Goals. Given the global scope of the 2030 Agenda, it is imperative to incorporate the

perspectives and needs of the youth across all goals and objectives. There are four distinct domains whereby the concept of youth is explicitly referenced: youth employment, adolescent females, education, and sports for the sake of peace. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that young individuals possess the capacity to effect transformative change and are tasked with the crucial task of harnessing their potential to create a sustainable society that is suitable for future generations. The World Youth Report emphasizes the importance of reaching targets in education and employment, despite the fact that all of the Sustainable growth Goals are necessary for the growth of young people.<sup>1</sup> Though youth is defined as a biological state, it is also a social condition that refers to the meanings and expectations that different cultures and societies attach to individuals between childhood and young adulthood. Scholars argue, however, that age-based definitions are inconsistent across cultures and times and, therefore, it would be more precise to focus on the social processes associated with the transitioning to adult independence when defining youth.

Youth is the developmental stage during which individuals form their personal identity. The self-concept of young individuals is influenced by various factors, including but not limited to peer pressure, lifestyle choices, gender, and cultural background. During an individual's lifespan, there exists a critical phase wherein the choices they make possess the utmost potential to significantly influence their forthcoming trajectory. According to the United Nations, a significant majority of individuals aged 15 to 24, approximately 85 percent, reside in developing nations worldwide. This proportion is anticipated to rise to 90 percent by the year 2025. Moreover, this demographic majority exhibits heterogeneity, with a portion residing in rural regions and a significant number flourishing in densely populated urban areas throughout many locations such as India, Mongolia, other regions of Asia, and South America. Certain individuals lead traditional lifestyles within tribal societies, whereas others engage in global youth culture within urban ghettos. The prevalence of poverty, famine, and inadequate access to clean water significantly affects the well-being of several young individuals residing in developing nations. Several geographical areas are afflicted by health issues, particularly due to the high incidence of HIV/AIDS. Approximately 200 million young people live in poverty, 130 million are illiterate and 10 million live with HIV/AIDS disease as mentioned by the United Nations.<sup>2</sup>

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1 United Nations, (n.d.). Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet; Global issues Youth. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>

2 Wikipedia contributors. (2022). Youth. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Youth&oldid=1087724198>

## **Sustainable Development Goals and the Youth**

It was adopted in 2015 that 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are to be implemented with 169 targets. Nearly one third of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicate a focus on young people, either explicitly or implicitly, focusing on participation, empowerment and well-being. It was adopted in 2015 that 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are to be implemented with 169 targets. Nearly one third of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicate a focus on young people, either explicitly or implicitly, focusing on participation, empowerment and well-being. Six key Sustainable Development Goals include 20 youth-specific targets:<sup>3</sup>

- Goal 1 (End poverty)
- Goal 3 (health)
- Goal 4 (education)
- Goal 8 (decent work)
- Goal 11 (settlements)
- Goal 13 (climate change)
- Goals 16 (peaceful, just and all-encompassing societies)
- Goal 17 (partnerships and implementation)

With nine Major Groups with which the UN closely collaborates, the SDGs recognize youth as being central to sustainable development and their role in achieving stability and peace. Sustainability is defined as meeting the present needs without compromising those of the future. It starts with the respect of future generations as crucial stakeholders. Over the next 15 years, the youth of today will mature alongside Sustainable Development Goals. This is the group that will determine whether the 2030 Agenda is a success or a failure. Thus, engaging the youth and empowering them in the quest for a more sustainable future is of particular importance.<sup>4</sup>

**Goal 1 (Ending Poverty)** - Although MDGs have made significant progress, poverty persists and there remains much to be done. 85 million young people live in extreme poverty in the Asia-Pacific region alone. In particular, reducing poverty is a pressing issue for young people, as 16 percent of employed youth lived below the poverty line in 2015, as opposed to nine percent of working adults.

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3 Bokoyeibo, A. (2018). Youth and the Sustainable Development Goals. *Atlas Corps*. Retrieved from <https://atlas Corps.org/youth-and-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

4 Hwang, S., & Kim, J. (2017). UN and SDGs: A Handbook for Youth. ESCAP East and North-East Asia. Retrieved from <https://www.unescap.org/resources/un-and-sdgs-handbook-youth>

**Goal 3 (Health)** - The mortality rate among young mothers who give birth is higher than that of older mothers, and the mortality rate among babies born to adolescents is significantly higher than that of older mothers. While there is inadequate prenatal care for pregnant young women in the Asia-Pacific region, adolescent fertility rates are one of the highest in the world.

A second issue in the region that cannot be ignored is mental health and well-being. Particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, suicide rates for female youth are among the highest among OECD countries, and the Republic of Korea has the highest suicide rates.

Accidents or preventable causes put too many young people at risk. The region is plagued by road traffic accident deaths as well as the abuse of illicit drugs, alcohol, and other substances.

**Goal 4 (education)** - For youth to have access to quality education, it is paramount that everyone is included in the process. In contrast to their male counterparts, young women do not have the same access to education and training, which deprives them of the opportunity to make choices about their futures, including whether to pursue higher education or find employment. It is imperative that young women are empowered and that equitable investments are made in their human capital in order to achieve sustainable development. In countries in North-East Asia, discrimination against women has been eliminated in the educational system, but the challenge remains to link this progress to women's economic and political empowerment. A number of OECD countries, such as the Republic of Korea and Japan, have among the largest wage gaps between men and women.

**Goal 8 (decent work)** - Efforts to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for youth are difficult in most North-East Asian countries. Having decent, productive work is crucial to young people. In the life cycle of a young person, the transition from school to training to the workforce represents a critical point. However, the voices of these individuals are too often drowned out, and their positive and negative experiences and opinions are never shared, especially with decision-makers. Moreover, young people are often trained for skills, but their skills do not match the requirements of the labor market. Many youth are stuck in unemployment, which is significantly higher than the rate for adults in all geographies. In the event that youth do obtain employment, they often work in vulnerable conditions - giving up job security and wage stability, and having limited access to financing, loans, and other services.

**Goal 11 (settlements)** - Young people are at the forefront of this rapid urbanization process as they move from rural to urban areas in an

increasing number of North-East Asian countries. As a result, young people are disproportionately vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, and urban poverty, and the majority of them live in slums and informal settlements created by unplanned and compressed urbanization, which lack basic services and present health, security, and safety issues.

**Goal 13 (climate change)** - Out of the world's top 10 carbon dioxide emitters, four of them are from North East Asia. Asia-Pacific countries face huge human and economic costs from extreme weather events as a result of climate change, which requires swift and effective action to combat. Our young people are demonstrating an increasingly high awareness of environmental and social issues, which has the potential to alter society in towards the creation of low-carbon and climate-resilient communities.

**Goals 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies)** - As part of the Asia-Pacific region, a key challenge is removing prejudicial sociocultural practices that prevent youth from participating in politics. Youth participation and leadership are particularly important, as is a focus on marginalized groups of young people, such as young women, disabled youth, indigenous youth, or migrants.

**Goal 17 (partnerships and implementation)** - As part of SDG 17, the global partnership for sustainable development will be revitalized, in particular by ensuring that no person is left behind in the quest to achieve the SDGs. Initiatives and programs have been designed to encourage young people to join this multi-stakeholder partnership.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, this is how the youth gets involved with the Sustainable Development Goals making a mark for themselves and their nations.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative approach, specifically focused on secondary data sources. The research methodology involves conducting a thematic review of the literature, whereby each issue is thoroughly explored and its spatial aspects are extensively elucidated. The study relied on a range of literature sources, including book chapters and online articles from databases such as Google Scholar, research sites, United Nations sites, Economic and Political Weekly. Additionally, various newspaper articles from The Hindu, Hindustan Times, and Times of India were also considered.

In addition to engaging with TED Talks and short videos pertaining to

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<sup>5</sup> Hwang, S., & Kim, J. (2017). UN and SDGs: A Handbook for Youth. ESCAP East and North-East Asia. Retrieved from <https://www.unescap.org/resources/un-and-sdgs-handbook-youth>

youth, the analysis also incorporated the examination of tailored websites such as YouthKiAwaz and IDR.

The searchable literature undertaken to understand the magnitude of issues and challenges as faced by the Youth of today, was merged with keywords like “Youth”, “Education”, “Employment”, “Health Care”, with the usage of AND as the Boolean operator.

## Findings

### *Youth in India*

In the context of a global population that is progressively aging, it is noteworthy that India possesses one of the most youthful populations. In 2022, it is projected that India will have a median age of 28, while China and the United States will both have a median age of 37. Western Europe is expected to have a median age of 45, while Japan will have the highest median age of 49. The working-age population in India surpasses the non-working-age population in terms of numerical strength. Based on available reports, it can be observed that a demographic dividend has been present for a period of around five decades, commencing from 2004-05. The potential is quite high. However, it is important to consider two factors. The initial determinant lies in the heterogeneity of India’s population, leading to varying periods in which distinct parts of the population encounter this demographic dividend. It is projected that the working age population in Bihar will continue to grow until 2051, while Kerala’s population is already experiencing the effects of aging. Consequently, it is projected that by 2031, approximately half of the 22 major states will experience a decline in their working-age population. The employability of the working age population, as well as their health, education, vocational skills, and the presence of effective governance and land policies, constitute the second determinant of the demographic dividend’s achievement. India can only reap the benefits of its demographic opportunity if its policies and initiatives are appropriately linked with this demographic transformation. Our individual trajectories are not predetermined by our demographic characteristics.

In order to accommodate the anticipated yearly expansion of the working age population, the Economic Survey 2019 proposes the augmentation of employment opportunities. The successful completion of this task necessitates a workforce that possesses a high level of education and expertise. According to UNICEF, a significant proportion of the youth population in India, specifically 47%, is projected to lack the necessary education and skills required for gainful employment by the year 2030. If a significant

portion of the younger population continues to lack skills, experience underemployment, and express dissatisfaction, the potential benefits of the demographic dividend may be negated and instead result in adverse consequences. According to the National Family Health Surveys, which have been conducted until the 2015-16 period, substandard levels of infrastructure, malnutrition, and inadequate presence of qualified educators have been identified as factors that have significantly contributed to the unsatisfactory educational outcomes observed in government schools in India. A significant number of young individuals in India are being left behind as the nation endeavors to transition into a knowledge-based economy. In government schools located in the national capital, there is currently a concerted effort to prioritize both equity and excellence, resulting in noteworthy outcomes. The significance of high-quality education is paramount in achieving gender equality and enhancing individual productivity. The implementation of coordinated incentives aimed at promoting the adoption of uniformly structured public school systems, prioritizing equity and quality, is likely to expedite the development of a knowledge-based society more effectively than the privatization of schools. Currently, the majority of districts are equipped with highly reliable internet connections. It is imperative for public school systems to offer comprehensive high school education to all students, while also fostering an environment that promotes the development of relevant skills, training, and vocational education aligned with the demands of the job market. The influence of demography should not supersede that of topography. There is a pressing need for the modernization of school curriculum, accompanied by a systematic enhancement of teacher training programs. This would enable teachers to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to assume leadership roles within the educational system, thereby empowering them to challenge the rigid constraints imposed by syllabi. The acceleration of human capital development can be achieved by integrating virtual classrooms with massive open online courses (MOOCs), thereby equipping individuals with the necessary skills for future employment opportunities in a timely manner. A higher educated workforce could be fostered by investing in open digital universities.<sup>6</sup>

## **Education and Youth**

India has made significant strides in enhancing educational accessibility through the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All) and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act. Currently,

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<sup>6</sup> Ghosh, D.M. (2020). Youth can be a clear advantage for India. *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/youth-can-be-a-clear-advantage-for-india/article30897179.ece>

children residing in rural areas are provided with convenient access to a primary educational institution situated within a radius of one kilometer. Furthermore, the enrolment rate for primary education has achieved a level of near universality. In the year 2014, the number of children who were not enrolled in school was less than six million, which marked a decrease from about eight million in the year 2009. Despite the aforementioned successes, transitioning from a focus on accessibility to one centered on learning and equity continues to be a significant obstacle. More than one third of youngsters have discontinued their education before completing elementary school. In accordance with the Right to Education (RTE) Act and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is imperative to ensure the provision of a high-quality early childhood education to children, as it serves as the fundamental basis for fostering lifelong learning. Approximately 70% of children between the ages of 3 and 6 years old participate in pre-primary education. Given the substantial magnitude of this figure, an estimated 20 million children are currently not enrolled in preschool, with a particular emphasis on those residing in rural regions and hailing from economically disadvantaged households. The probability of children experiencing higher rates of dropout and suboptimal academic achievement is heightened when they transition directly into primary school without access to high-quality preschool education. Consequently, the academic achievement of students is significantly influenced by their initial experiences in school and their level of preparedness.<sup>7</sup>

Young Indians are demanding better education and career-oriented training. Every higher education institution should also provide skill-based education and job placement to its students. There should be a greater emphasis on career-related courses and there should be a connection between the lessons and real-life scenarios rather than just books. Young adults in non-urban areas lack good communication skills this can further lead to a barrier to getting a job and progressing in one's career.<sup>8</sup>

## **Employment and Youth**

The youth demographic is a significant asset in terms of fostering economic growth, propelling technical advancements, and serving as a catalyst for societal transformation. The task at hand is effectively utilizing these available resources. The youth challenge is often regarded as the most

7 United Nations, (n.d.). Education and Employability, United Nations in India. Retrieved from <https://in.one.un.org/un-priority-areas-in-india/education-and-employability/>

8 Kaur, R. (2013). Problems faced by youth in India. Maps of India. Retrieved from <https://www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/inindia#:~:text=Education%3A%20First%20and%20the%20foremost%20concern%20of%20today%E2%80%99s,should%20be%20a%20part%20of%20every%20higher%20institution.>

critical economic development challenge of the 21st century. Moreover, the decrease in birth rates has led to a significant increase in the population of adults in their working-age years, commonly known as the demographic dividend. The bulge in the working age population has raised concerns because to its potential for economic growth and prosperity, as well as the various ways in which states are addressing the associated implications and opportunities. The younger demographic often encounters challenges when it comes to locating and sustaining satisfactory employment opportunities. One of the important elements of the task is this. The challenge of addressing the escalating youth unemployment rates poses a significant difficulty for both industrialized and emerging nations alike. The persistence of youth unemployment poses a significant obstacle to the future economic growth and advancement of a nation. Youth unemployment and employment hold a key position on international development agendas. India has exhibited a longstanding preoccupation with youth policy since its attainment of independence. According to the Planning Commission, the youth are regarded as the most crucial demographic group inside Indian society. Furthermore, the issue of unemployment was explicitly highlighted as a challenge confronting the younger generation. Regrettably, inadequate emphasis has been placed on the issue of youth unemployment in isolation. Unemployment concerns are prevalent in both developing and industrialized nations. Despite persistent policy emphasis and ongoing programs aimed at eradicating unemployment and underemployment, India remains a developing nation grappling with the challenges posed by these issues. In comparison to numerous other socioeconomic indices, there is a notable disparity in unemployment rates between rural and urban areas. The unemployment rates among urban employees tend to be greater compared to those of their rural counterparts. Three distinct theoretical frameworks for understanding unemployment have consistently exhibited a similar trend, which has endured throughout the course of the last three decades. It is noteworthy that when examining the unemployment rate on a weekly and daily basis, males exhibit a lower rate compared to females. However, when considering the normal status, no discernable trend can be observed during the given period.<sup>9</sup>

The Indian youth population is actively pursuing employment opportunities, however, the industrial sector is facing challenges due to a scarcity of skilled labor. The outcome is that young individuals are experiencing unemployment. The absence of interconnectivity among

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9 Dev, S.M., & Venkatanarayana, M. (2011). Youth Employment and Unemployment in India. *Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.igidr.ac.in/pdf/publication/WP-2011-009.pdf>

policy makers, industry stakeholders, training providers, and educational institutions has led to an education system that is driven by supply rather than demand. To optimize demographic dividends, it is imperative for training institutes to align their educational programs with the requirements of the industry. It is projected that over a span of ten years, almost 40 percent of individuals aged 15 to 29 will join the workforce, necessitating the provision of suitable employment prospects for this demographic. India has encountered challenges in achieving desired levels of growth in industrial jobs. The job landscape in rural areas is predominantly characterized by a significant reliance on agriculture, with around 90% of the labor force engaged in this sector. Consequently, the availability of non-agricultural work possibilities remains limited. The 12th Plan outlines a vision for the migration of the labor force from agricultural to non-agricultural sectors. However, this transition may result in a dearth of employment opportunities or the creation of low-productivity, low-wage positions due to a mismatch between the skills possessed by workers and those required by the non-farm sectors. The expansion of formal employment is crucial in order to mitigate the influx of young individuals into the low-wage sector and prevent them from becoming trapped in poverty. Currently, formal employment constitutes approximately 8 percent of the whole labor force. India has set a target to equip 500 million individuals by 2022 and an additional 50 million individuals by 2022 with the necessary skills to enhance the employability of its young. The provision of training should possess the characteristics of accessibility, high quality, and a enough quantity in order to effectively achieve the desired objective. Various new approaches have been implemented to access challenging places. Good examples include virtual classrooms, mobile vans, and simulation-based systems. The Government of India is comprised of 23 Central Ministries that are actively involved in the domain of skill development. Tests and certifications are utilized as a means of acknowledging and validating the acquired knowledge and skills of those who have undergone formal training. There are various programs that exist with the aim of enhancing the employability of young individuals, operating at different levels such as general, group, and regional.<sup>10</sup>

## Health and Youth

Two out of three countries fail to consult young people when making plans for their national development despite nearly half of the world's

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10 Sanghi, S., &Srija, A. (2014). Youth Unemployment in India. *Planning Commission, Government of India: Confederation of Indian Industry*.<https://ies.gov.in/pdfs/sunitasanghiiansrija.pdf#:~:text=Youth%20Unemployment%20in%20India%20India%20is%20declining%2C%20the,for%20males%20and%2011%20per%20>

citizens being younger than 30 (UN Envoy on Youth). In terms of youth population, India is the world's largest with 600 million young people below the age of 25. We must not forget that a demographic transition alone does not automatically generate a productive workforce, despite exponential increases in productivity and economic growth. Although India is pushing youth-targeted programs (aimed at employment and skilling), there has been no mention of the voices of young people. As youth under 18 cannot vote and are missing out on political representation, their voices go missing. Young people own and control their work, however, this does not represent their actual social, economic, and political ambitions. As part of the YouthBol campaign, the Centre for Catalysing Change (C3) aims to understand the health and well-being of young Indians. An estimated 36 percent of the youth surveyed said they considered better healthcare infrastructure crucial to their health and well-being. The top priority expressed regarding healthcare infrastructure was comprehensive information and services - especially in relation to sexual health and rights, substance abuse, and mental health. Young people's priorities of health have changed between age groups due to the fact that adolescents are not a homogeneous group. Understanding and managing substance abuse was the top concern for those within the age brackets 15 to 19 years. Meanwhile, sex education, access to affordable STD treatment and contraception services were most important for 18-24-year-olds. Gender-specific priorities were also different. Women and young girls emphasized the need for open discourse regarding menstrual hygiene and pain management. In contrast, prevention and treatment of substance abuse was a priority for young boys. Their request focused on substance abuse that was beyond alcohol and tobacco, such as paint thinners, correction fluid, and medications. In addition to making adolescents aware of substance abuse issues, a need was expressed for a confidential telephone hotline that would offer adolescent counselling and easy access to quality rehabilitation and de-addiction services. In the broader context of health, mental health emerged as a third focus area. Academic stress, peer pressure, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and learning difficulties plague young people. They subsequently expressed a pressing need for mental health services that are accessible, non-judgmental, confidential, and affordable. Among the major concerns of transgender youth, safeguarding their mental health was one of the top priorities.<sup>11</sup>

In contemporary times, the internet is replete with a wealth of material pertaining to various sexual orientations such as homosexuality, asexuality,

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11 Jagtiani, T. (2020). Young adults in India want better healthcare. *IDR*. Retrieved from <https://idronline.org/young-india-is-demanding-better-health/>

pansexuality, and other non-heterosexual identities. Consequently, this vast availability of knowledge has engendered a sense of curiosity among young individuals, prompting them to embark on a journey of self-discovery in relation to their own sexual identities. Over time, there has been an increasing fluidity in gender roles, as well as evolving perspectives on sexuality and identity. These advancements are taking place amidst a backdrop of elder generations who tend to maintain conservative viewpoints or have little exposure to this material. In contemporary Indian society, it is observed that a young teenager have the capacity to acquire information and is engaged in the process of self-identification. However, it is noteworthy that the opportunity to narrate their personal experiences is seldom afforded to them. Adolescents exhibit heightened vulnerability to experiencing emotional distress, elevated levels of stress, and feelings of social isolation throughout this developmental phase. The youth face extra challenges in expressing their own experiences due to the absence of discourse surrounding mental well-being within familial and educational environments. The increased prevalence of mental health difficulties among young Indians can be attributed to a combination of various reasons. Mental health disorders have a prevalence rate of 10-20% among the pediatric and teenage population, although a significant proportion of individuals within this demographic fail to receive the requisite assistance. Approximately 50% of mental disease cases manifest throughout adolescence, particularly around the age of 14. The suicide rate within the demographic of individuals aged 15 to 19 years old ranks as the third highest nationwide. According to the National Mental Health Survey 2016, there is a significant population of approximately 9.8 million adolescents in India, aged between 13 and 17, who require immediate and proactive care in order to address their mental health needs. In Indian households, a prevailing societal stigma persists about mental health, resulting in inadequate provision of appropriate assistance and opportunities for open dialogue among young individuals. Furthermore, the perspectives and insights of these individuals in their youth are systematically disregarded or devalued based on the assumption that they lack the necessary maturity or knowledge to comprehend the situation at hand. Furthermore, the financial implications associated with receiving assistance are significant. Not every individual has the ability to avail themselves of the services of a private practitioner, resulting in a significant portion of the population relying on public healthcare systems. Therefore, it is quite evident that there is a dire need for better public healthcare infrastructure and policies.<sup>12</sup>

12 Jaggi, C. (2021). 'Hear me, I am not okay': Young India & mental health. *The Times of India*. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/hear-me-i-am-not-okay-young-india-mental-health/>

## **Pandemic and Youth**

The world's largest democracy is facing a crisis. India's economy is not able to generate enough jobs for its population. It may result in a lack of goods and services in India due to a higher unemployment rate. India's unemployment status for December 2021 was released recently by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). Approximately 7.91% of Indians were unemployed in December, according to the report. The month of November saw a 7% unemployment rate. In Haryana, 33.1% of the work force is unemployed. In Rajasthan, 24.1% is unemployed. In Jharkhand, 17.3% is unemployed. In Bihar, 16% is unemployed. In Jammu and Kashmir, 15% is unemployed. Karnataka (1.4%), Gujarat (1.6%), Odisha (1.6%), and Chhattisgarh (2.1%), on the other hand, had among of the lowest jobless rates in the country. In addition to the economy's delayed recovery, there is a surplus of labour and a delayed agricultural season, which are factors contributing to high unemployment rates. Worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a damaging effect on the labour market, resulting in thousands of people losing their jobs and businesses closing down. A report released by the CMIE also showed an increase in urban unemployment rates from 8.21% to 9.3%, as well as rural unemployment rates from 6.44% to 7.28%.<sup>13</sup>

Prior the pandemic, young people who had spent considerable time and money on higher education are finding it increasingly difficult to find employment, which might adversely affect their future prospects, as well as those of future generations. This difficulty has been exacerbated by the current pandemic. Across the globe, young workers typically hold entry-level positions in low-skilled occupations. The majority of firms invest relatively little in their training. Because of this, employers are often inclined to sacrifice these positions during difficult economic periods. The Atlantic Council think-tank states that there is an overrepresentation of young people in sectors such as retail, hospitality, and tourism, which have been badly affected by policies that enforce social distancing. In addition, India has been hindered from capitalising on a unique opportunity, with the largest youth population in the world. A demographic dividend is anticipated in India until 2040 due to the increasing proportion of working-age individuals compared to their dependents (children and the elderly). However, since the pandemic has caused massive economic damage, analysts warn that India will not be able to reap these benefits.<sup>14</sup>

13 Athal, K. (2022). Youth unemployment in India Post Covid-19. The Times of India. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/krishna-athal/youth-unemployment-in-india-post-covid-19/>

14 Sanghera, T. (2020). Generation Pandemic: India's Youth Face Jobless Future. *Aljazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/7/7/generation-pandemic-indias-youth-face-jobless-future>

Another issue that the Youth faced was centred on their Mental Health. It is vital that we address the unprecedented impact the extended Covid-19 pandemic has had on the mental health of the young (15-29 years of age) who constitute nearly 27.5% of our population. The 2021 State of the World's Children Report found that one in seven children aged 15 to 24 experienced depression during the pandemic. One third of all suicides in 2020 were committed by youth in the country, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. Stress, depression, and internalization of disorders have increased as a consequence of the loss of in-person education, routines, and social opportunities. Their abilities to learn, behave, and interact socially have also been severely affected by the pandemic. In India, according to a UNICEF report (2021), 60% of students were able to access distance learning, while 80 percent of students were learning significantly less through digital learning than through traditional classroom learning. It is believed that the shift to online mode has affected their ability to learn and cope, increased stress levels, and affected their sleep and concentration. Further, this can have negative consequences on their future performance, neurodevelopment, and emotional stability. In addition, this may also affect their interpersonal skills, which are learned and reinforced by engaging in sports and recreational activities in school and college. With an average family size of 4.9 members in India, any familial conflict that arises from the lockdown and mobility restrictions might be exacerbated by the familial stresses caused by the lockdown. One of the worst affected is the mental health of the disadvantaged youth who are deprived of technology or parental support, and rely on their social and protective networks for development. Furthermore, youth with early-life stress, such as orphans, victims of abuse, or those lost to the pandemic are potentially vulnerable to developing severe psychological issues. The situation was worse for young girls and women. According to UN Women, the pandemic resulted in more girls dropping out of school than boys, and in India, 65 percent of parents were reluctant to keep their daughters in school to reduce costs. In turn, this can result in an entire generation of girls not being able to complete their school education and having mental health issues such as depression and low self-esteem.<sup>15</sup>

### **Implications for Social Work Practice and Recommendations**

As a social worker, one should utilize all the methods of social work (Social Case Work, Social Group Work, Community Organization Method, Social Welfare Method, Social Action Method and Social Work Research) in

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<sup>15</sup> Chauhan, V.S., & Bhan, A. (2022). Mental Health in India: Wellbeing of the Youth during Covid-19. *The Indian Express*. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/mental-health-india-well-being-youth-covid-19-7826423/>

order to develop the youth and to motivate them in community development and nation building. In order to fulfil the individual as well as social needs of youth, social workers should build their capacities and strengths. It is also important that social workers assist youth in achieving social, emotional, spiritual and mental well-being. Some of the suggestions that could be adopted to lessen the above mentioned challenges are:-

- To create skill-based programmes or professional courses in every college so that during placements the youth has better selection opportunities.
- Young entrepreneurs can be mentored by employers and can be provided with entry-level jobs and internships, as well as on-the-job training programs.
- Leadership programmes should be developed and encouraged for the youth this will not only build their self-esteem but also the nation will get many confident and knowledgeable youth leaders.
- It is also important to develop affordable mental health services for youth and infrastructure so that they can seek help if they need it.
- Upskilling existing manpower as well as improving medical, nursing, and technical education.

## **Conclusion**

The youth of India in the most interesting time in the history of the country. Given the phenomenon of globalization in the Indian economy and the pervasive integration of the Internet into our daily routines, our prospects for achieving significant success are more promising than those of any preceding generation. In contemporary society, the younger generation represents a highly significant asset for any nation. The allocation of resources towards the development and enhancement of human capital has been found to provide remarkable levels of returns. The contemporary Indian youths encounter a multitude of issues that necessitate not only acknowledgment, but also the development of measures that are adequate to address them.

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