

Mental Health Isn't New. Listening to It Is



In recent years, the UK has faced wave after wave of difficulty, from the isolation and anxiety brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic to the ongoing stress of the cost of living crisis. It's no surprise that we're now in the middle of a mental health crisis. Diagnoses surging, particularly among young people, with one in five aged 8 to 25 now living with a mental health condition.

But with this surge in awareness, has come a wave of criticism. Some argue that younger generations are just overly sensitive, that they're being over diagnosed for struggles that previous generations faced without any labels. So is this really a case of overreaction? Or are we finally recognising problems that have always been there, just ignored or brushed under the rug?

What the Numbers Say

Over the last decade, there has been a noticeable rise in mental health diagnoses, especially among the younger generations. In 2023, one in five people aged 8 to 25 had a mental health condition. This number has been rising since 2017, most notably in the 17-19 age group.

Terms like anxiety, depression and ADHD have become more common in the media, leading some to claim that Gen Z is simply more fragile or overly sensitive. But this isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of growing awareness.

We're finally starting to have open conversations about mental health, which has helped break down stigma and encouraged more people to seek help. That, more than any supposed rise in sensitivity, is the real reason behind the increase in diagnoses.

Different Words, Same Problem

Mental health didn't skip a generation, it just hid in plain sight



Critics tend to argue that the older generations had it tough but didn't complain like the younger generations do. The truth is people have always struggled with their mental health, they've just suffered in silence and used different language. For example, in the war, soldiers were described as having "shellshock" or "nerves", instead of being diagnosed with PTSD. Many people glorify, those "good old days" when people were told to have a "stiff upper lip" and "man up" and suppress their feelings and experiences, and deem the younger generations as overly sensitive and weak for being willing to talk openly about their mental health. This is not weak, this is an act of courage as it takes real strength to speak up.

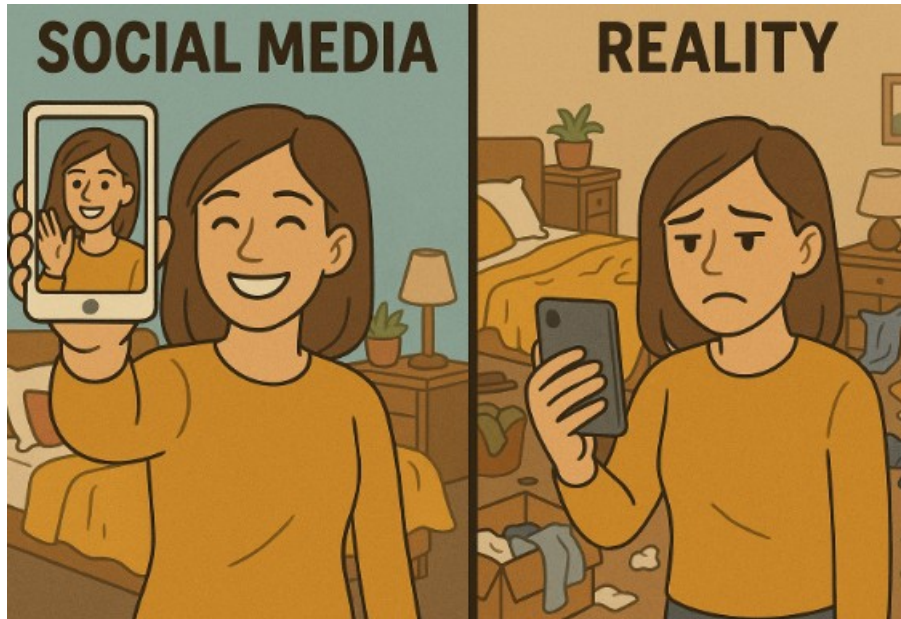
Why Overdiagnosis Isn't the Main Problem

Even if a few are misdiagnosed, many more are finally seen

Yes, it is possible that there is a slight overdiagnosis, some people may be mislabelled, or self-diagnose inaccurately, but the rise in awareness far outweighs the downsides. Receiving a mental health diagnosis can help many people feel heard and validated and opening the door to treatment through therapy or medication. The real issue isn't too much support, it's access to it. As more people reach out for help during a growing mental health crisis, the system is struggling under the pressure. Long waiting lists mean delays in care, leaving people to struggle without support and, in many cases, worsening their condition.



Social Media



With mental health now such a big topic, we can't ignore the impact of social media. On one hand, it can be a force for good, by providing a sense of community and resources to help people, particularly vulnerable teenagers to be supported and feel heard, especially if they are unable to access any professional support. In those moments, it can really make a difference.

But let's be honest, it is undeniable that social media is a huge part of the problem. It constantly promotes an image of perfection: edited photos, fake lifestyles, impossible beauty standards. You scroll through your feed and start comparing your everyday reality to someone else's highlight reel and it's no wonder people end up feeling like they're falling short. This constant comparison can lead to anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and in the worst cases, even suicide.

And then there's the way mental health is sometimes talked about online. It's fair to say that, yes, some people do exaggerate symptoms, sometimes for attention, validation, or even just humour. Words like *"anxiety"*, *"trauma"*, and *"depression"* get thrown around so casually that they lose their real meaning. The risk here is that it ends up making it easier for critics to roll their eyes and write it all off as just another "Gen Z trend", and worsens the serious struggles faced by so many.

What we're seeing isn't a generation falling apart, it's a generation finally being heard. While the rise in diagnoses may spark debate, it shows that people are finally talking about their mental health, and that conversation matters. By acknowledging the reality of these struggles, we open the door to greater understanding, better support, and real change.