I am Stable - Emotional Wellbeing among Teenagers and College Students in India

Introduction

Every hour one student commits suicide in India due to stress, anxiety disorder, personality disorder, depression, and relationships [1]. Despite such an alarming rate of student suicides, there is a deep stigma around mental health and the majority of people are not ready to talk about it. Teenagers and college students are prone to stress which they are not capable of handling due to lack of communication with their parents, teacher, friends, etc. Neither they intend to seek help from a psychologist because of social stigma. We attempt to study the perception of 14 to 22 year olds coming from different socio-economic strata of society and design a platform to address their needs.

In this position paper, we elucidate findings and challenges while working with this segment of the population. We propose practices for designing better coping mechanisms addressing this particular segment.

Design Methodology

We conducted qualitative research to study the perception of 14 to 22 year olds towards emotional wellbeing and their help seeking behavior. We used both user-centered and co-design approaches to understand the causes of stress and their mindset about emotional wellbeing. This included taking anonymous surveys and semi-structured interviews with students who were comfortable talking face to face. Conducting interviews with students from marginalized communities and economically weaker sections of society was more challenging. The study was done in the regional language which is Hindi for students from marginalized communities because they were uncomfortable in English.

After collecting the data we did a thematic analysis of interview data and observations. We also interviewed a few parents and teachers to analyze how they try to help their children or students.

Findings

The initial survey was conducted with college students and school students. 70% of school students and 20% of college students belonged to the economically weaker section living in Okhla, Delhi. College students surveyed and interviewed are studying in top universities like IIT Delhi, IIIT Delhi, AIIMS, DU, etc. Proper consent was taken from the respective teacher or parent before conducting a survey with school students. They were given confidence that their data would be kept private and their anonymity would be maintained.

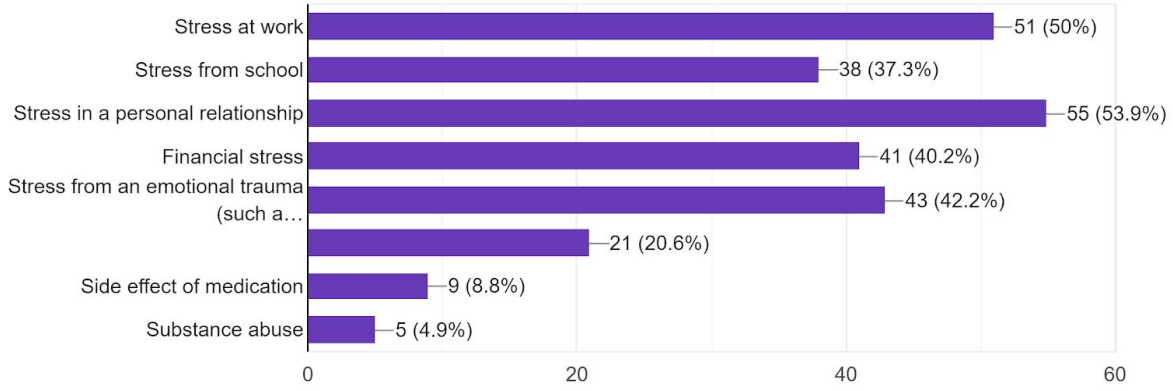

Figure 1. Factors inducing anxiety

To our surprise relationship stress is more prevalent than academic stress as it's faced by 53.9% of respondents as against 50% facing stress at work(which is stress due to coaching in after school hours for school students and stress at internships for college students). 38% of students facing stress at school(college for undergrads) due to rote learning being prevalent in the Indian education system. 49% of students reported that they never face a panic attack but 45.1% of students reported that they face a panic attack on several days which is alarming. Only 18.6% of students said that they took professional help while 69.6% resorted to listening to music, reading books, and diverting their minds. 74.5% of students said that emotional health problems are common in their community and 83.3% believed they are treatable but surprisingly 71.6% said

they don't know anyone who has faced these problems highlighting that people are not talking with each other about such problems. Financial stress was also reported by significant 40.2% of students majority of which belonged to marginalized communities and economically weaker sections implying lack of basic facilities is a major constraint for students in day to day life.

Results

Students are not willing to talk about their stress and anxiety with anyone though they believe conversation would help them get better. Many of them are not aware of methodologies they can adopt in day to day life to improve overall wellbeing. We intend to build a platform keeping in mind these design challenges to enable conversation among people and provide a micro solution that may be adopted in day to day life.

Challenges

Due to the stigma surrounding emotional health students are usually not comfortable talking face to face. Many times people give morally correct responses to avoid social scrutiny. Students from marginalized communities feel even more uncomfortable and not able to understand questions too at times. Emotional wellbeing is like a new topic they have never heard of and it's difficult to make them realize it's importance.

Sustainable Development Goals

Currently, this work revolves around SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. Applying the HCI process to identify user needs and co-designing with various users and stakeholders helps to build a solution acceptable to everyone. But due to the stigma surrounding mental health in India people are not willing to talk about emotional wellbeing. It would be interesting to study practice and strategies used for conducting research in such scenarios. SDGs drive a lot of our policies and studying it in detail with HCI would help to design guidelines for long term solutions.

Benefit from HCIxB

Attending this symposium would be a remarkable opportunity for me. It would help me to establish an in-depth understanding of sustainable development goals and their application on the ground which would help me to conduct research with a diverse set of people. I look forward to participating in an engaging discussion with other researchers in this domain and gain invaluable insights from their experience of facing similar challenges. Moving forward learnings from this symposium would help me to explore sustainability deeper and study better design techniques.

Author

Sanchit Mittal is a third-year computer science and design undergraduate student at IIIT Delhi. His research interests lie in ICT4D and HCI for Education and Health which help him to build better products/services for his social initiatives. He is working on several projects ranging from building a platform for high schoolers to increase their EQ to analyzing healthcare apps providing e-Consultation services. In addition, he leads the student group 'Enactus IIITD' to pursue different social entrepreneurship projects based on sustainable development goals.

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References

[1] Student suicides rising, 28 lives lost every day—The Hindu. (n.d.). https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/student-suicides-rising-28-lives-lost-every-day/article30685085.ece