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Post-Covid Blues: Return to Office, Performance Pressure Keep Gen Z Stressed

DOWN & OUT Mental health experts say they have seen a sharp rise in people in their 20s and 30s seeking counselling

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Mumbai | Bengaluru: Covid-19 has waned, but mental health concerns mounted in 2023.

Nearly half a dozen counsellors and experts ET spoke with said they are getting an alarmingly high anxiety- and depression-related complaints from the Gen Z — who witnessed a multi-fold increase in stress levels amid rising fears of job loss, inroads of artificial intelligence at work, a tightening economy and layoffs in certain sectors.

That apart, heightened performance pressure at work and back-to-office mandates of several companies are leading to rising levels of stress, marking a shift from the

last two years when people were found grappling with health-related concerns and fear of Covid, said mental health experts.

Mental health consultant Itoihelp.net has witnessed a 20-30% increase in people in their 20s and 30s seeking counselling assistance in 2023 compared with last year.

Nearly 70% of the people from a sample of over 10,000 seeking counselling support from mental health service provider Amaha in 2023 were young working professionals in the age group of 22-35 years, said Amit Malik, its founder and chief executive.

Ashish Ambasta, founder & CEO of HappyPlus Consulting, said 45-50% of the young professionals in the 25-35 age range from a sample of about 3,000 people across sectors

Stress at Work

20-30% spike in people in their 20s/30s seeking mental health counselling in 2023

Nearly **70%** of the people who reached out for mental health support to Amaha were in age group of **22-35 years**

COMMON COMPLAINTS

Sleeplessness, fatigue, anxiety, feeling of void, loneliness, relationship problems, frequent bouts of anger, depression



complained of stress in 2023. This was higher than about 30-35% of the people in the 35-50 age group who said that they were stressed.

Sleeplessness, fatigue, anxiety, a feeling of void or an extreme low,

loneliness and relationship problems are some of the common complaints.

A significant number of people who called in for support for stress complained of extreme distress

and depression — a stage where people feel overwhelmed and cannot handle the stress on their own.

"A call for return to work this year, lack of bonding and camaraderie at the workplace, fear of job loss and loneliness in big cities are among the top issues," said Archana Bisht, director at Itoihelp.net. "Many — especially in the tech and new-age sector — who were working from home the last two years are feeling uprooted and lonely," she added. That apart, financial burden has also increased for youngsters who have been called back to their base stations by employers even as the salary levels have not increased much.

"This generation is not able to disconnect from work. The phenomenon of being switched on 24x7 is taking a toll on their mental health,"

said Ambasta of HappyPlus Consulting. "The long absence of socialisation has also led to many youngsters feeling lonely."

Recognising the problem, companies such as Mphasis, Deloitte, L&T and Merck have become more proactive in helping employees deal with stress and normalising mental health conversations at workplace.

"There has been a significant rise in awareness surrounding mental health within organisations," said Ayaskant Sarangi, chief HR officer at Mphasis, which conducted specialised training sessions for managers and HR partners, guiding them on referring employees for counselling.

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