

## Editorial

# The Predicament of the younger Generation

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The Journal of Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention is a distinguished publication within academic circles, providing a valuable platform for the dissemination of innovative research findings from around the globe. The contemporary trends in education and the advancement of critical thinking underscore the necessity for an interdisciplinary approach to addressing the pressing challenges of our era. From a philosophical perspective, the robust concept of ecosystem sustainability represents a paradigm in which partialities from both the natural sciences and the humanities find a firm place, and at the same time, this paradigm offers a creative space for inspiring dialogue beyond the professional mandate of the individual authors of the papers presented. Each issue of the journal presents a range of highly technical perspectives on different issues within ecosystem sustainability, oscillating around a central theme.

An examination of the contents of the latest issue indicates that all the papers included in volume No. 15, Issue 6 are characterised by a common theme: the struggle experienced by the young generation. The questions pertaining to the contemporary young generation are highly valid and pertinent, as they pertain to the teleological dimension inherent in any contemporary reflection and analysis. The quality of the future is, to a certain extent, determined by decisions made in the present. The contemporary young generation is confronted with a future characterised by a multitude of variables that remain to be identified and thus cannot be analysed and incorporated into educational processes, the cultivation of the social atmosphere, the ethical formatting of the media space, the functioning of various institutions, or the incentives that would

improve the functioning of the family. This presents both a challenge and a responsibility for scientific research.

Generation Z, comprising young people born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019) and is one of the most distinctive generations in the history of Western society. Shaped by digital technologies, globalisation, and various crises (the threat of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, cybersecurity issues, the war in Ukraine), Generation Z has been at the centre of academic debates in various disciplines. This article focuses on the analysis of this generation from the perspectives of sociology, psychology and spirituality.

## 1 A sociological perspective

Sociologists have identified several characteristics that are indicative of Generation Z. A primary trend that has been observed is a high degree of individualism, which is often concomitant with a strong sense of social justice (Twenge, 2017). Generation Z members have been characterised by their upbringing in a world where discussions concerning equality, race and climate issues were prevalent, and this has resulted in them becoming more engaged in these topics.

Nevertheless, the process of digitalisation has also occasioned detrimental outcomes. According to Préra (2019), the prevailing trend of social interaction among Generation Z is characterised by a phenomenon termed “digital loneliness”, a term denoting the tendency for interpersonal relationships to be formed, maintained and communicated via social media platforms. This phenomenon has been shown to have a detrimental effect on the quality of interpersonal relationships, resulting in the emergence of new forms of social inequality.

The constant access to information via the Internet and social networks often causes Generation Z students to prefer superficial information over deep learning and intellectual effort that leads to critical thinking (Smith, 2020). This tendency, as posited by Bloom's taxonomy of learning, often results in their stagnation at lower levels of cognition (Bloom, 1956). This emergent trend poses a grave challenge to contemporary society, a challenge which many scholars are endeavouring to address. Research also suggests that the average length of the ability to concentrate in young people is declining dramatically. As McSpadden (2015) reports, the average attention span has declined from 12 to 8 seconds since 2000, a period which corresponds with the commencement of the mobile revolution.

Contemporary technologies, including online learning platforms, facilitate personalised learning opportunities. As Prensky (2001) observes, digital tools have the capacity to assist students in learning at their own pace and at times that are convenient for them. The contemporary generation of students has a propensity for interactive and collaborative activities. Examples of such activities include project-based learning and problem-solving within teams (Wang et al., 2019). Furthermore, the increasing emphasis on social justice and equity among young people may encourage the education system to adopt a more inclusive approach. Conversely, while the younger generation is often regarded as tech-savvy, a substantial disparity exists among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Access to quality equipment and the internet remains non-universal (OECD, 2020). Consequently, the education system faces the challenge of effectively responding to the unique needs of the current generation of young people. A balanced educational model integrating traditional and modern approaches has the potential to unlock students' creativity and engagement while fostering the acquisition of in-depth knowledge. It is therefore vital to ensure that questions remain unanswered to avoid the risk of scientific research and development becoming saturated.

The findings of sociological surveys indicate that the contemporary generation appears to be

the least constrained by conventional norms. This phenomenon is associated with their receptivity to diversity and different cultures. However, it is important to note that this demographic is also facing mounting pressure to construct personal brands and engage in perpetual self-presentation on social media platforms. This phenomenon, as posited by Rideout (2015), can engender a range of psychological challenges, including feelings of anxiety, burnout, a diminution of authenticity, and the development of narcissistic personality disorder.

## 2 Psychological view

From a psychological perspective, the current generation of youth is associated with significantly higher incidences of stress, depression, and general apathy (Twenge et al., 2019). The impact of digital technology and the constant availability of information is causing a strain on mental health (Smith et al., 2021). Notwithstanding this phenomenon, young people of this generation are also becoming active advocates for improved access to psychological help. (Petrovic, et al., 2024). This is evidenced by the efforts to destigmatise psychological and psychiatric interventions, thereby challenging the prevailing social taboo surrounding mental health issues. (Stan-Pavlikova, 2024).

The importance of self-expression and authenticity at all costs is another salient aspect of this generation (Erikson, 1968; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Social networks not only facilitate the formation of identity, but also function as a medium for combating stigma and prejudice. This phenomenon is further evidenced by the increasing popularity of mental health movements, signifying that Generation Z places significant emphasis on psychological well-being as a fundamental component of quality of life. Furthermore, Generation Z is distinguished by a strong sense of inclusion and empathy. Psychological studies suggest that their openness to different perspectives contributes to the development of emotional intelligence, making them better at conflict resolution and intercultural dialogue.

Conversely, psychological research has yielded a series of concerning findings that, if disregarded, could potentially lead to deleteri-

ous consequences in the long term. Urukovičova's (2022) study, "Generational differences in narcissism and value orientation" published in the journal *Československá psychologie*, examined the differences in narcissism rates between Generations Y and Z in Slovakia. The results indicated that Generation Y exhibited higher levels of narcissism compared to Generation Z, with males demonstrating higher levels of narcissism compared to females. The study also revealed a positive correlation between narcissism and a preference for individualistic values, and a negative correlation with a preference for collectivistic values, regardless of gender and generational affiliation.

A plethora of studies have indicated that Generation Z young people are frequently regarded as being creative, open-minded and intelligent. Conversely, they are often perceived as lacking in motivation and struggle to overcome obstacles and challenges. Notwithstanding this, a significant proportion of this demographic – up to 80%, according to Mayako (2017) – anticipate that they will need to work harder than preceding generations to achieve success. This attitude may be indicative of a pessimistic outlook towards the future. Conversely, a study by Adecco (2015) posits that contemporary youth exhibit elevated levels of self-assurance and an optimistic perspective towards the future. They are impatient in achieving their goals and extremely creative with an openness to almost limitless innovation.

Recent studies (Shafiq et al., 2024) have indicated a novel phenomenon: the influence of social media and the pressure to attain an idealised appearance is compelling young people to seek aesthetic interventions at an early age. This tendency has been linked to narcissistic tendencies and a desire for recognition.

Conversely, some experts have cautioned against the oversimplification of Generation Z as overly sensitive or self-centred, suggesting a need for nuanced understanding of these complex social and psychological phenomena (Bennett, 2016). It is crucial to acknowledge the significance of individual differences, as not all members of Generation Z necessarily embody these characteristics. While some studies sug-

gest higher rates of narcissism in younger generations, the phenomenon of narcissism remains an open question, and more research is needed to better understand the entire issue.

### 3 Spiritual view

In the context of religion, Generation Z faces unique challenges. According to the Barna Group (2018), trust in institutional religion among Gen Z youth is at an all-time low; yet their interest in spirituality and ethical issues remains strong. The McKinsey Health Institute's global survey (Coe et al., 2024) of 41,000 respondents across 26 countries finds that spiritual health matters to many, regardless of age, country or religious beliefs. Considering these findings, several scholars have proposed that the spiritual dimension of an individual's life should be incorporated into our understanding of health (Chirico, 2016). In addition, scholars have emphasised the importance of religious organisations adapting to the digital sphere and creating authentic spaces for dialogue. For the young generation, the pursuit of understanding the "whole" and "meaning" in their spirituality is of greater importance than belonging to a "tradition" or an "institution".

The family constitutes the primary social environment through which an individual is shaped, both cognitively and behaviourally, as well as spiritually. In accordance with Bauman's concept of "fluid modernity" ("liquid modernity"), contemporary society is becoming less stable and more fragmented (Bauman, 2000). In such a context, the family can serve as a stabilising force by providing a framework of values that helps Generation Z find solace and direction in a rapidly changing and often unpredictable world. The fostering of emotional stability, in this context, is inextricably linked to spirituality, and within the family unit, it assumes a pivotal role. Regular dialogue between parents and children is conducive to the development of young people's ability to express their feelings and resolve conflicts in a constructive way (Siegel, 2015).

In this context, theology has the potential to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the value of community and transcendent relationships. The present generation of young

people, known as Generation Z, are seeking answers to their existential questions beyond the confines of traditional frameworks. This development creates an opportunity for the exploration of novel and creative forms of theological discourse. Themes such as sustainability, social justice and individual spirituality have assumed significant prominence in contemporary discourse, and it is imperative that theology engages with these issues to facilitate introspection on the institutional forms of contemporary piety. Despite a decline in formal religious participation, a significant proportion of young people express interest in values and principles rooted in religious traditions (Mindel, 2024). This phenomenon presents both a challenge and an opportunity for theologians and religious organisations to seek new ways of communicating and engaging in an open society.

In this context, the following practical recommendations are posited for the purpose of assisting in the formation of a healthy spirituality in young people:

1. The creation of family rituals - regular meetings and discussions about daily problems help to engender a sense of belonging.
2. Limiting digital time - the introduction of family rules on technology use can encourage a healthier balance between digital and real life.
3. Encouraging active lives - families should encourage their children to engage in extra-curricular activities that develop their skills and build self-esteem.

## Conclusion

Generation Z is a complex phenomenon that necessitates an interdisciplinary approach to its study. Sociological analysis reveals their unique social patterns, psychological studies highlight the challenges of mental health, and spiritual perspectives open up the discussion of new forms of spirituality (Kondrla et al., 2024; Tkacova, Pavlikova, 2024). Understanding this generation is essential for building a sustainable and just community in the perspective of the future. Families are in a unique position to influence the values, emotional stability, and overall structure of Generation Z's lives. The family, therefore,

has the capacity to exert a significant influence on the development of this generation by providing support, facilitating regular dialogue, and establishing stable behavioural patterns. In this way, the family can play a pivotal role in helping Generation Z to navigate and overcome the challenges that the modern age presents to their thought world.

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