INDIA'S GROWTH STORY HAS A STRESS PROBLEM

Why Mental Well-being May Be Critical to Unlocking India's Demographic Dividend

October 2026

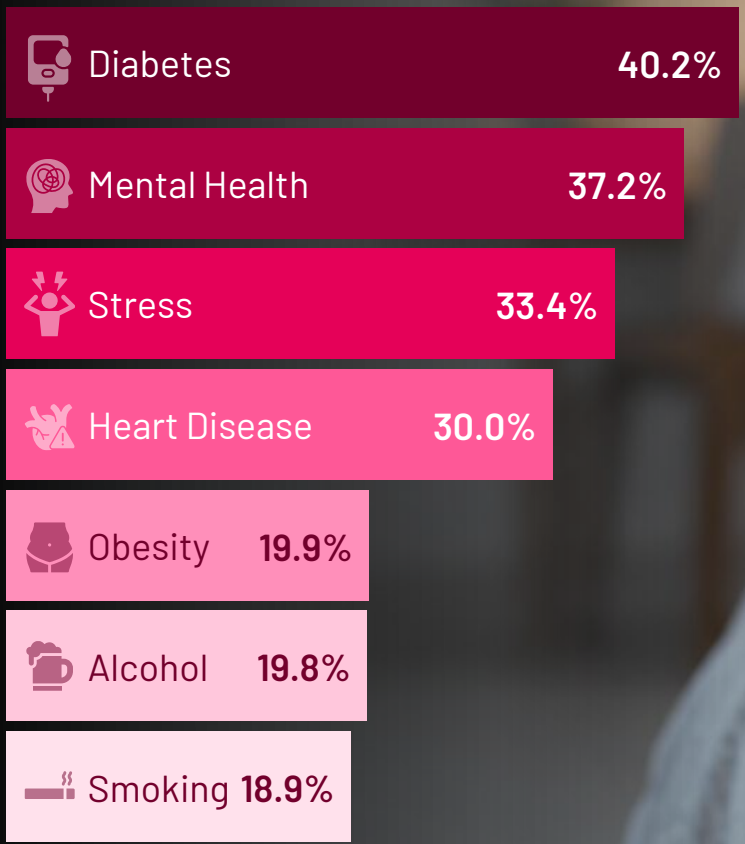


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Mental health has emerged as one of the most pressing health challenges facing India today. Among urban Indians, it ranks as the country's second biggest health problem, behind only diabetes.

Significantly, stress itself ranks third, highlighting the extent to which psychological well-being has become an everyday concern for Indians, not just a clinical or healthcare issue.

Top 7 Biggest Health Problems Facing Indians Today



Base: 500 online adults under the age of 75 years in India



This marks an important shift. Mental health is no longer a niche concern discussed primarily by healthcare professionals or advocacy groups. It has become a mainstream issue that Indians increasingly recognise as affecting individuals, families, workplaces and communities.

The impact is evident in everyday life. More than three-quarters of Indians report experiencing stress that affected their daily lives during the past year. At the same time, conversations about well-being are expanding across generations, with both younger and older Indians placing increasing importance on mental health.

Taken together, these trends point to something larger than a health challenge. They reveal a society grappling with the psychological consequences of rapid economic and social change.

Younger Indians are rethinking traditional notions of success, older generations are reflecting on the personal costs of decades spent balancing professional and family responsibilities, and workplaces are becoming a key arena in which these evolving expectations play out.

As India seeks to unlock the full potential of its demographic dividend, mental well-being may emerge as one of the defining determinants of future productivity, workforce resilience and long-term growth.



Mental Health Moves to the Mainstream

The elevation of mental health and stress among India's top health concerns reflects a broader shift in public consciousness.

Conversations around emotional well-being, stress and mental resilience have become increasingly visible across homes, schools, workplaces and public discourse.

The growing recognition is grounded in lived experience. Data has shown that mental well-being is deeply intertwined with daily functioning, relationships, productivity and quality of life.

Mental health can and is no longer viewed solely through a clinical lens. Increasingly, it is understood as a factor influencing how people learn, work, make decisions, and engage with society.

The question becoming important now is whether India's institutions, workplaces and support systems are evolving quickly enough to respond to a challenge that is becoming increasingly visible in people's everyday lives

The Pressure Behind Progress

The prevalence of stress raises an important question: why are so many Indians feeling under pressure?

Part of the answer may lie in the very forces that have helped transform India over the past few decades.

Rapid urbanisation, rising aspirations, increased educational attainment, technological change and greater economic opportunity have expanded possibilities for millions of Indians. At the same time, these shifts have intensified competition, accelerated the pace of life and created new expectations around performance and success.

For many Indians, success today requires navigating a far more complex landscape than previous generations faced. Students compete for limited opportunities, professionals operate in increasingly demanding workplaces, and families balance rising aspirations with social and economic pressures.

The implications extend far beyond healthcare. The World Health Organisation estimates that mental health conditions could result in economic losses of approximately US$1.03 trillion in India between 2012 and 2030.

As India's economy becomes increasingly knowledge-driven, human capital will be one of its greatest competitive advantages. The ability to sustain that advantage will depend not only on education and skills but also on resilience, adaptability, and well-being.

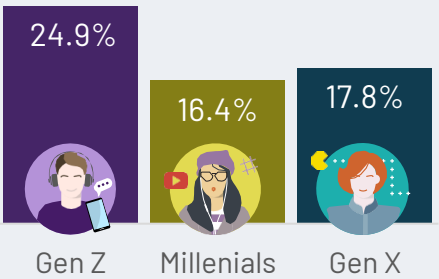


Mental health is therefore no longer simply a public health issue.
It is increasingly becoming a business, workforce and economic issue.

Gen Z: Redefining Success

One of the most striking findings is the emergence of Gen Z as India's most mental health-conscious generation.

Nearly one in four Gen Z Indians (24.9%) say they often think about their mental well-being, significantly more than Millennials (16.4%) and Gen X (17.8%)





At the same time, **younger Indians appear to be carrying a disproportionate burden of stress.**

More than one-third of **Indians under 35 (36.9%)** report that stress became so severe they were unable to work for a period of time.



These findings come at a time when India has one of the world's largest and most educated youth populations. Expectations around education, careers and economic mobility continue to rise, creating both opportunity and pressure.

What is particularly noteworthy is that younger Indians do not appear to be rejecting ambition. Instead, they may be redefining it.

Research globally shows that younger generations continue to aspire to professional success and leadership, but place greater emphasis on work-life balance, well-being and sustainable career growth.

Success is increasingly being viewed not simply through financial achievement or career progression, but through the ability to sustain performance without sacrificing personal well-being.

One possible explanation is that many young adults have grown up observing parents and older colleagues navigate demanding careers, long working hours and significant personal pressures. They have witnessed both the rewards and the costs of traditional success models.

Seen through this lens, Gen Z's emphasis on mental well-being is not a rejection of hard work. It is an attempt to pursue success more sustainably.

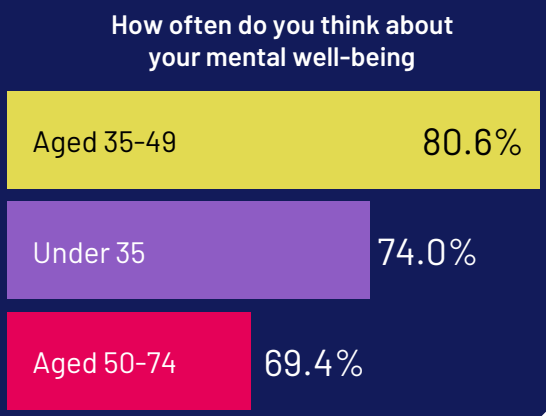
> As India looks to capitalise on its demographic dividend, an important question emerges: how can the country create opportunities that allow young people not just to perform, but to thrive?

An Intergenerational Shift, Not a Generational Divide

If Gen Z represents the leading edge of change, they are not alone.

The data suggests that mental well-being is a concern across generations, although different age groups appear to engage with it in different ways.

Indians aged 35-49 are the most likely to think about their mental well-being (80.6%), ahead of those under 35 (74.0%) and those aged 50-74 (69.4%).



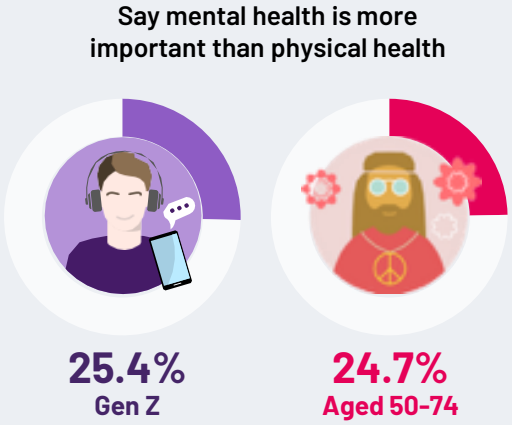
This is perhaps unsurprising. Many in this age group are balancing responsibilities from both directions, progressing through demanding careers while simultaneously supporting children, ageing parents and growing financial commitments.

Often described as the "sandwich generation", they are navigating some of life's most complex and demanding transitions.



Yet a different pattern emerges when priorities are examined. Around one in four Gen Z Indians (25.4%) and adults aged 50-74 (24.7%) say that mental health is more important than physical health,

suggesting that both younger and older Indians place particular emphasis on emotional well-being.



For younger adults, well-being is increasingly becoming a priority as they navigate education and career choices. For older adults, it may reflect lived experience after decades spent balancing professional responsibilities, financial obligations and family commitments.

Viewed together, the findings suggest that mental well-being is becoming a shared concern across generations. Younger Indians may be looking ahead, while older Indians may be looking back. Yet both appear to be arriving at a similar conclusion:

> ***Success cannot come at the expense of long-term well-being.***

The result is not a generational divide, but an intergenerational shift in how Indians define achievement, resilience and well-being

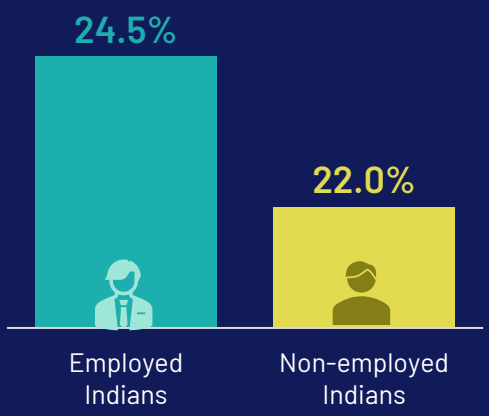


The Workplace Has Become Ground Zero

If this shift in expectations is becoming visible across generations, the workplace is where its consequences are becoming most apparent.

Employed Indians are more likely than non-employed Indians to say that mental health is more important than physical health.

(24.5% versus 22.0%)



This suggests that for many Indians, conversations about well-being are increasingly being shaped by the realities of work

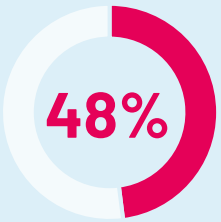
The workplace sits at the intersection of many of the pressures highlighted throughout the research. Rising aspirations, demanding performance expectations, continuous connectivity and evolving career paths are creating new opportunities, but also new forms of stress.

The signs were visible even before the latest findings.

The Silent Struggle:

How Mental Health Impacts the Workforce (2023)

conducted by Mpower in partnership with Ipsos, found that



Nearly **48%** of corporate employees were at risk of poor mental health



While, approximately half reported that stress was affecting their productivity.

Taken together, the studies point to an important shift.

What was once viewed primarily as an employee well-being issue is increasingly becoming a business issue.

For organisations, mental well-being is now closely linked to productivity, engagement, retention and innovation. As expectations around success and well-being continue to evolve, employers may need to rethink not only wellness programmes, but also the design of work itself.

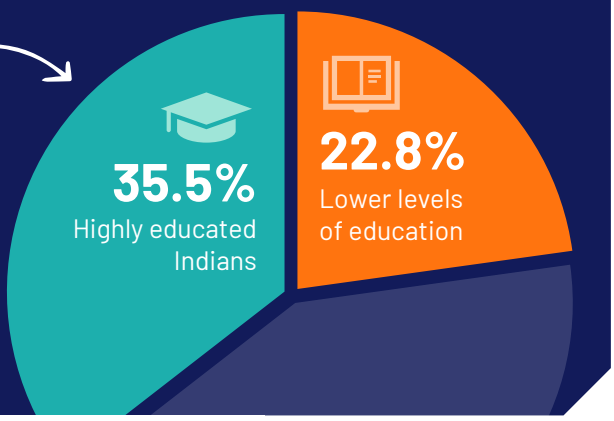
The imperative now is to examine if workplaces are evolving quickly enough to support a workforce whose expectations around success and well-being are changing.

Awareness Is Rising Faster Than Support Systems

Attitudes towards mental health are changing rapidly. Younger generations, in particular, appear more willing to acknowledge challenges and seek support when needed.

Education appears to play an important role in shaping engagement.

More than one-third of highly educated Indians (35.5%) say they have discussed their mental health with a healthcare provider, compared with 22.8% of those with lower levels of education



Yet growing awareness also raises new expectations.

As more Indians recognise the importance of mental well-being, demand for support is likely to increase across healthcare, education, workplaces and communities. The challenge is ensuring that the systems designed to support mental health evolve at the same pace as public awareness.

> The next phase of India's mental health journey may therefore be less about building awareness and more about building capacity.



What This Means for India

India is entering a new phase in its mental health journey. Awareness is growing, expectations are changing and conversations about well-being are becoming increasingly mainstream.

The question now is whether the institutions that shape everyday life can adapt quickly enough to support these changing realities.

For Businesses:
Well-being Is Becoming a Competitive Advantage

As organisations compete for talent, productivity and innovation, the ability to create environments that support sustainable performance may become a source of competitive advantage. The most successful organisations may not simply be those that attract the best people, but those that enable them to thrive over the long term.

For Marketers:
Understanding Stress May Become a Growth Imperative

If stress is becoming a defining feature of daily life for many Indians, it will inevitably influence how people make decisions, engage with brands and evaluate products and services. Consumers may increasingly gravitate towards brands that offer simplicity, trust, convenience and reassurance in an increasingly complex world.

The implications go beyond categories traditionally associated with health and wellness. Financial services, technology, retail, travel and consumer goods brands all operate within the realities of consumers' emotional lives. Understanding stress, resilience and changing definitions of success may become increasingly important for identifying future opportunities, anticipating behavioural change and building stronger consumer connections.

The next generation of consumer insight may require understanding not only what consumers buy, but also the pressures they face and the role brands can play in reducing cognitive and emotional load.



For Researchers:
Understanding People Beyond Demographics

Traditional demographic variables such as age, income and education remain important, but may no longer be sufficient on their own to explain behaviour.

Attitudes towards well-being, stress, resilience, and life priorities are increasingly emerging as important lenses for understanding modern India. As people's expectations of work, success and quality of life evolve, researchers will need to look beyond who people are and better understand how they experience the world around them.

What This Means for India

For Educational Institutions:
Resilience Matters
as Much as Achievement

Young Indians are entering a world characterised by rapid change, uncertainty and constant competition.

Educational success can no longer be measured solely through academic outcomes. Institutions will increasingly need to equip students with the resilience, adaptability and emotional skills required to navigate modern careers and life transitions.



For Policymakers:
Prevention Must
Complement Treatment

As mental health moves into the mainstream, policy responses will need to go beyond healthcare services alone.

The conditions that shape well-being are influenced by education, employment, workplaces, communities and social support systems. Strengthening India's mental health ecosystem will require a broader focus on prevention, resilience and early intervention.

For India:
The Demographic Dividend
Needs a Well-being Dividend

For years, discussions around India's demographic dividend have focused on education, skills and employment.

These factors remain critical. But the findings suggest that another dimension deserves greater attention: the well-being of the people expected to drive future growth.

A workforce that is educated and skilled, but struggling with persistent stress and declining well-being, may find it harder to realise its full potential. Conversely, a mentally resilient population is better positioned to adapt, innovate and sustain performance in an increasingly complex world.

What makes these findings particularly significant is that they reveal converging shifts in how Indians are thinking and behaving across multiple roles. The same individuals who are employees, consumers, students, citizens and caregivers are increasingly prioritising well-being in decisions about work, spending, learning and life choices.

Young Indians appear determined to pursue achievement without sacrificing well-being. Older generations are increasingly recognising the importance of mental health after decades spent balancing professional and personal demands. What emerges is not a story about declining ambition, but a story about changing priorities.

The desire to succeed remains strong. What is changing is the growing recognition that success should be sustainable.



Unlocking India's demographic dividend will require more than education, skills and employment. It will require a well-being dividend as well.

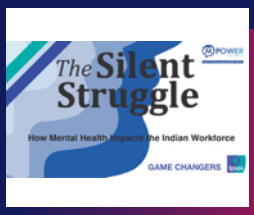
The future of India's growth story may depend not just on what people can do, but on how well they are able to thrive while doing it.

Further Reading:



Ipsos Health Services Monitor 2026

www.ipsos.com/en-in/ipsos-health-service-report-2026



Mpower-Ipsos
The Silent Struggle:
How Mental Health Impacts the Workforce (2023)

www.ipsos.com/en-in/silent-struggle

Additional Sources:

National Mental Health Survey of India 2015-16 (NIMHANS)

World Health Organisation

Deloitte Global Gen Z and Millennial Survey 2026

State of Working India 2026 (Azim Premji University).

How Ipsos can help YOU

The shifts highlighted in this article extend far beyond mental health. They reflect changing attitudes towards success, work, well-being and quality of life, trends that increasingly influence consumer behaviour, employee expectations and public policy.

At Ipsos, we help organisations understand what these changes mean for their brands, businesses and stakeholders. Drawing on expertise across consumer, healthcare, public affairs, and employee research, we connect what people think, feel, and do to help clients anticipate change, identify opportunities, and make smarter decisions.

Because insight is not just about understanding what's changing.

It's about knowing what to do next.

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