



ROLE OF CBT IN STRESS MANAGEMENT & PROMOTING WELLNESS AMONG GEN Z IN CHENNAI: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THERAPISTS' EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Gen Z is a population cohort born between 1997–2012 (Pew Research Center, 2023). Deloitte's Millennial & Gen Z Survey, 2021 for India states that Gen Z feel as anxious and stressed as their global average (46 percent). Fiama Mental Wellbeing Survey (2022) reported that Gen Z is more proactive in seeking professional help for their mental health. Around 47% of those surveyed in this age group reported seeking professional help. Understanding CBT for stress management from an experiential perspective of therapists can offer valuable insights that enrich our conception of the difference between theory and its practical application for the Gen Z population. Thus, the study aimed to understand the role of CBT in stress management and promoting wellness among Gen Z in Chennai from therapists' perspective. A qualitative research method was adopted to the study and purposive sampling method was used to select the participants for the study. The sample size for the study was 8 therapists. The inclusion criteria included: (1) Psychotherapist who has worked with CBT for at least a year and (2) Active therapists who have experienced working with Gen Z to manage stress and promote wellness using CBT and/or its derivatives. The exclusion criteria: Those who are not certified CBT therapists from an accredited institution and CBT therapists who have not worked with Gen Z in Chennai. Semi-structured interview was conducted to collect the data from the participants. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed during the study. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the collected data. 11 themes were drawn from the data: definition of stress, wellness, and common stressors, risk and protective factors, coping strategies, generational differences, techniques, clients' expectations, type of therapy, flexibility of structure, therapists' challenges, barriers to seeking help, and upcoming trends..

Key Words – CBT, stress management, promoting wellness, thematic analysis, therapist experience, Gen Z

In today's world, growing awareness around mental health, driven by public discourse and social media, has led Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) to become more attuned to their psychological well-being compared to previous generations. In a 2018 APA survey, 68% reported significant stress about the future, and over 90% experienced at least one stress-related symptom, including depression (58%), lack of motivation (55%), and anxiety (54%). In India, Gen Z constitutes over 20 crore people (Shakuja, 2023), largely comprising students and young professionals. Mental health in Indians aged 18–24 has declined sharply due to unemployment, isolation, and excessive internet use—factors exacerbated by COVID-19 (Sapien Labs, 2023). As digital natives, Gen Z's lives are deeply shaped by technology, social media, and online culture (McKinsey, 2023). Globally and in India, they face stressors related to academics, careers, finances, relationships, and life transitions (Ernst & Young, 2022), with women reporting greater pressure from relationship and family expectations (ITC Fiama, 2022).

Gen Z views wellness holistically—encompassing physical, mental, and social health—and often uses music, gaming, online content, and creative outlets to cope (Jafar, 2020). While more open than older generations to therapy and peer discussions (Spence, 2021), barriers remain, including stigma, lack of access, and hustle culture. Therapists note that effective work with Gen Z requires understanding their cultural and digital contexts (Hicks et al., 2018). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an

evidence-based approach effective in stress reduction (Van der Klink et al., 2001; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Estevez Cores et al., 2021), and has informed newer therapies such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT).

A qualitative follow-up to a randomised controlled pilot trial by Asplund et al. (2019) on internet-delivered work-focused CBT for stress found participants reported positive effects on mental health and work life. Ningthoujam et al. (2021) reported that perceived stress among Gen Z postgraduate students correlated positively with maladaptive coping (self-distraction, denial, substance use, disengagement, venting, self-blame, humour) and negatively with adaptive coping (active coping, positive reframing, acceptance). Key stressors included academic/career, financial, environmental, interpersonal, and relocation challenges.

Takács et al. (2021) found a decline in psychological immune capacity among first-year students over time, highlighting the need to build self-regulation skills to counter stress effects. Kassymova et al. (2023) identified CBT as the most effective approach for improving behaviour, reducing anxiety, and enhancing learning among Gen Z, recommending adapted communication methods for this digital era. In the Indian context, Sidharth et al. (2023) found major post-pandemic stressors to be career uncertainty, academic pressure, time management difficulties, and low self-confidence. Common coping strategies included hobbies, socialising,

and informal conversations– preferred over professional counselling.

To summarize, the psychological immune capacity of students who belong to the generation Z seems to decrease through the years and the main sources of their stress are academic/career, financial factors, environmental factors, interpersonal factors, moving to a new place for college and miscellaneous sources which they tend to cope up with problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. Moreover, enjoying hobbies is found to be the key stress buster along with having fun time online/ with family/ friends, or simply talking to them about the issues that causes stress rather than seeking professional counselling or engaging in relaxation exercises. On the other hand Cognitive - Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is highlighted as an appropriate strategy for improving personality construct components related to executive function and managing stress. But, an apparent evidence gap lies in the determination of the role of CBT in stress management and promoting wellness from a therapist's point of view. Thus, the study aims to explore the role of CBT in stress management and promoting wellness among Gen Z in Chennai from an experienced therapists' perspective.

METHOD

The objective was to understand the role of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for stress management and promoting wellness from a therapists' point of view in order to obtain insights to enrich conception of difference between theory and its practical application for Gen Z population. The variables adopted for

the study were CBT, stress management and promoting wellness. The research design adopted for the study was qualitative research design. Purposive sampling, a non- probability sampling method was used to select the participants for the study. The tool used in the study was a self constructed semi-structured questionnaire consisting of 20 open ended questions to explore the role of CBT in stress management and promoting wellness among Gen Z in Chennai from an experienced therapists' perspective (Appendix I). The sample consisted of 8 psychotherapists actively practicing CBT and/or its derivatives across Chennai. The inclusion criteria for the study were: (i) psychotherapists who are working with CBT for at least a year and (ii) active therapists who had experienced working with Gen Z to manage stress and promote wellness using CBT and/or its derivatives. The exclusion criteria was those who were not certified CBT therapists from an accredited institution and CBT therapists who have not worked with Gen Z in Chennai. The sample included psychotherapists ranging from early twenties to mid-sixties in age. These individuals hailed from diverse professional backgrounds, including counselling, psychology training, life coaching, clinical psychology, applied psychology, and PhD pursuers. Their work experience as CBT therapists spanned from one year of experience to over a decade.

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the collected qualitative data obtained through semi structured interviews on the basis of COREQ (Consolidated criteria for REporting Qualitative research) checklist. Some of



the themes were identified in advance. Relevant themes and subthemes were revised and extracted using thematic analysis after identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data by the researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The following six steps formulated by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed to analyse the data:

Step : 1 Familiarisation with the data - The transcript was read and reread to become familiarised with the data.

Step : 2 Initial coding generation - The data was organised in a meaningful and systematic way and semantic analysis was used to determine the code by all three researchers.

Step : 3 Searching for themes based on the initial coding - The codes were organised into broader themes to say something specific about the research question.

Step : 4 Review of the themes - The data associated with each theme was read again to check whether the data really did support it and worked in the context of the entire data set.

Step : 5 Theme definition and labelling - The final refinement of the themes was done to identify the essence of what each theme is about and data saturation was discussed.

Step : 6 Report writing - a conceptual model was developed to answer the research question and all the findings and insights derived from the data were encapsulated.

Informed consent form was given to the participants. Participation in this study was completely voluntary. Even after the participants signed the consent form, they were still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Debriefing was done once the data was collected from the participants. The collected data was preserved anonymously and with confidentiality by assigning code names/numbers for the participants which was used on all research notes and documents and also, the interview transcriptions or any other identifying participant information were kept in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher. The collected data was not falsified and the report is free from plagiarism.

RESULTS

From the data, codes were organised into broader themes (Table 1) and relevant subthemes were identified (Figure 1).

Theme 1 : Defining stress, wellness and stressor - It seeks to identify the way Gen Z clients define stress, wellness and stressor during their therapeutic session.

Sub-theme : Stress - Gen Z clients are vulnerable to stress and face difficulty in managing stress. From therapists' point of view Gen Z clients define stress in terms of: slighted change, insecurity, social comparison, identity needs, maximising tendency, presence of social media, being active in social networking world and difficulty in socialising and something that troubles them for a long period of time.

Sub-theme : Wellness - Gen Z clients are open to work on to work on themselves even though they are vulnerable to several issues.

“In terms of wellness, they are pushing it in a new direction. Trying new things or manifesting more luck, they want wellness to be at the centre of their lives.” (P.V)

Sub-theme : Stressors - Most common stressors are relationship issues (like toxic relationships, getting into relationships too quickly without preparedness and marital conflict) which is the predominant stressor among Gen Z clients, workplace (like responsibilities, performance expectation, inability to adjust to workplace and work pressure) and conflicts with parents.

“Parents are having a huge challenge accepting their kids as they are. parents feel their kids are too open minded. the way they think and the way they act is out of culture. kids expect freedom and independence from parents which is affecting the parents.” (N.P)

Theme 2 : Risk and Protective factors - It seeks to identify the key elements or circumstances that make the individuals of the Gen Z population vulnerable to stress and it explores elements that help alleviate or protect against stress among this population.

Sub-theme : Risk factors - Risk factors unique to Gen Z, as reported by the participants include mainly childhood traumas, maladaptive social media's usage; unhealthy coping mechanisms exacerbate stress, as does the relentless pace of technological advancements; complicated relationship dynamics including casual relationships, situationships, and hookups; risky behaviors like unsafe sex and drug use pose additional threats; factors such as

being a single child or experiencing a significant age gap with siblings can increase feelings of isolation, negatively affect social skills, further compounding stress in the workplace and relationships. With limited support systems, in terms of parental and peer support, a low tolerance for adversity, increasing insecurities from social comparison have also been pointed out.

Sub-theme: Protective factors - Individuals benefit from various protective factors that mitigate stress and promote well-being. For some supportive parental figures provide a crucial source of comfort and guidance, enabling Gen Z clients to confide in trustworthy adults about their concerns. Strong bonds with friends and family offer additional sources of support and understanding, fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness. Positive representation in media and on-screen portrayals of diverse experiences validate their identities and promote a sense of acceptance. Furthermore, Gen Z's openness about mental health and their trust in therapy reflect a progressive attitude towards seeking help and addressing emotional challenges. Their open-mindedness and willingness to consider new ideas and suggestions enhance their resilience and adaptive coping strategies, contributing to their overall mental health and well-being.

“They are open-minded and are open to suggestions.” (A.P)

Theme 3 : Coping strategies - It seeks to explore how thoughts, feelings & behaviors are mobilised to manage internal and external stressful. Gen Z involves over identification of the inner experience that was not there in the older generation.

Sub-theme : Adaptive - Seeking support from family and friends, creating group for themselves, self talk and engagement in physical exercise are some of the coping strategies used by Gen Z clients as stated by the therapists.

“I will give them activity scheduling to follow from the morning to evening.”(A)

Sub-theme : Maladaptive - The participants stated that clients themselves do activities such as watching porn and other videos, engaging in sexual practices, games, taking drugs, weed and alcohol to cope with stressful life events.

“Gen Z engages in taking weed, alcohol and creates WhatsApp groups for oneself and do self talk which gives them self understanding” (P).

Theme 4 : Generational difference- It seeks to identify any generational differences in the way Gen Z clients approach and engage with CBT compared to other age groups and the influence of generational differences on application of therapeutic strategies.

Sub-theme : Approach and engagement with CBT - Gen Z values authenticity a lot and have an awareness and acceptance towards therapy when compared to clients from other generational cohorts.

“The older generation used to say that, ‘we went through what Gen Z undergoes, it’s part of life; we didn’t go to therapy; they generalise’ but this

generation, they are aware and have acceptance towards therapy” (N.P)

Sub-theme : Influence on therapeutic strategies - There aren't a lot of differences in therapeutic strategies but it goes back to their understanding of the clients and it has evolved from moment focused to emotion focused therapy. If they are educated on the therapeutic process, they are more open and understanding and since most of the Gen Z use online sources to know information, at times clients from this generation have prior knowledge about the therapies in the field and are open to suggestions to work on themselves which makes the process easier. However, CBT is a more long term process with respect to client’s needs and Gen Z does not have enough financial resources for long-term therapy.

“Former generations may not have an idea of how therapy will go, what it is. They might think if I go to therapy, the therapist might give me solutions. With this generation, they already have some information and then ask for those customizations.” (P.V)

Theme 5 : Techniques - It seeks to explore the techniques used by the therapists to build rapport, manage stress and promote wellness and also, to understand the influence of therapist’s inner experience on selection and application of techniques.

Sub-theme : Rapport building - Rapport building is an essential process to build a therapeutic relationship between the therapist and a client usually in the initial period of time and is a space where at times the client’s resistance breaks upon

assurance of safety and provision of sense of comfort. Some techniques or strategies used to build rapport are to let clients to ask questions as it flashes within them, insisting confidentiality, taking case history, conduction of Mental Status Examination (MSE), enquire about their daily routine, humour, being non-judgemental, acceptance of resistance and also, to validate their concern to assure their comfort and security. But, still cliché conversations end up in getting into work without building rapport. However, asking the clients to talk about something good about themselves (like on their interest, hobby, talent, achievement and so on) and to talk about things that they are comfortable with works well among Gen Z clients in specific because when these questions were asked to clients from the previous generation they tend to become reluctant.

Subtheme : Stress management and promoting wellness - Therapists emphasised that when the client's develop the ability to manage stress they also experience an improvement in their wellness. Mindfulness is the predominantly used technique to manage stress among the Gen Z clients and other techniques are cognitive restructuring, distracting, journaling, self-love practices, positive affirmation, self-talk, disputing and diffusing thoughts

Sub-theme : Influence of inner experience - There tends to be an influence of the therapist's inner experience on technique selection and application. When the technique works well on the therapist, it is applied by the therapist on their clients with confidence and that technique is also believed to work

more effectively. For instance: If the therapists had experienced a positive result while applying a technique on themselves, they provide the rationale to their clients while applying the techniques or when questioned upon the techniques' effectiveness.

"Yes, I strongly agree. I have my personal strengths when applying certain techniques, which I may use more dominantly, sometimes without even my conscious knowledge." (P.V)

Theme 6 : Clients' expectations -

It is known as with what expectations that the clients have come and what they want to achieve at the beginning, during and at the end of sessions from the therapy. The participants said that the clients expect the therapists to be on trend with the terms and open about it, ask for customization, medications and they have information about the therapy so that they themselves ask for some counselling approaches, want others to change, have an urge to get quick solutions with one or two sessions or even within an hour and are curious to know how long it will take or what will happen in the sessions and eager to try therapy or its techniques in the sessions. Participants also stated that the Gen Z wanted symptom resolution and they are more of a solution focused.

"Compared to other generations, former generations may not have an idea of how therapy will go, or what it is. They might think if I go to therapy, the therapist might give me solutions. With this generation, they already have some information and then ask for those customizations." (S. L)

“Wanting the therapist to know trends and terms of today; to be understanding and open about them so that they don’t have to explain all of it to the therapist like about relationship trends, sexuality, etc.”(R.A)

Theme 7 : Type of therapy - It explores the format or setting in which therapy sessions are conducted. In this case, individual therapy (one-on-one sessions between a therapist and a client) is compared with group therapy (sessions involving multiple clients with one or more therapists facilitating). It focuses on the effectiveness of the type of therapy specifically for addressing the stressors or challenges commonly experienced by the Gen Z.

Sub-theme : Individual therapy - Some participants expressed that individual therapy would be more suitable for clients of Gen Z. They noted that Gen Z individuals often prefer one-on-one sessions due to a tendency to be more reserved when it comes to therapy. Even though they may use layman terms or social media-influenced language to express themselves, they are generally more inclined towards individual therapy. One participant reasoned that some individuals within this generation may not prefer socialising and often mention that their “social battery is low”.

“Gen Z are more closed when it comes to therapy. Even though they use layman terms or terms they see on social media, and they are open to it, they are more inclined towards individual therapy.” (P.V)

Sub-theme : Group therapy -

Though it was also noted that group therapy is relatively uncommon compared to individual therapy options, some participants advocated for group therapy, highlighting its effectiveness in facilitating interaction and mutual support among peers. They emphasised that in group settings, individuals can bounce ideas off each other and engage more readily with others. Group therapy could serve as a beneficial early intervention, but individuals with additional needs could benefit from transitioning to individual therapy. Additionally, one participant mentioned that group therapy could be useful for addressing specific populations facing similar challenges, allowing for brainstorming and peer support.

“Group therapy has a lot of potential, where early intervention can happen. If they have more problems, individual therapy can be taken up.” (S.L)

Theme 8 : Flexibility of CBT structure – It refers to the ability of the therapy to adapt to the individual needs, preferences, and circumstances of the client while still adhering to the core principles and techniques of CBT. The therapeutic approach offers a range of techniques and strategies for addressing cognitive and behavioural patterns. Flexibility means selecting and modifying these techniques based on what is most effective and appropriate for the client. For example, if a particular cognitive restructuring technique is not resonating with the client, the therapist might try a different approach or adapt the technique to better suit the client's style of thinking. The majority of participants provided a rating of 7 out of 10 for the flexibility of

their therapeutic approach. They highlighted that while Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) offers a structured framework, it can also be adjusted and personalised to meet the individual needs of clients. As one therapist noted, "*CBT has a structured framework, but can be adapted and tailored to suit clients' needs*". Therapists emphasised that adherence to a strict protocol may not always be practical and the degree of flexibility in applying CBT techniques is contingent upon the therapist's competence and skill in adapting them to suit each client's unique circumstances. This underscores the importance of therapists' proficiency in implementing CBT principles while also remaining responsive to the individual needs and preferences of their clients.

"Theory is important. There is a script. But it may not align with reality. You have to alter it to adapt to the client"
(N.P.)

Theme 9 : Therapists' Challenge –

It seeks to explore the major root causes for resistance and / or reluctance of Gen Z clients in general during the initial phase or in the process of therapy along with the challenges faced by therapists while integrating different therapeutic modalities of CBT.

Sub-theme : Resistance -

Resistance shown by the clients is one of the challenges faced by the therapist either during the initial period of the therapy or in the process and remains subjective in nature. However, some of the major causes for the client's resistance were difficulty to connect when referred by parents or school, when they don't want to change,

when they are not able to accept and when they are in a confused state. However, therapists specify that the clients don't resist when they voluntarily turn up for the session. For instance: When a young couple book for a therapy session, the one who didn't book the session shows resistance when called for a joint session. On the other hand it is emphasised that resistance does not always inherently come out and it also comes from an issue in the process (i.e) they may be apprehensive to work out a therapy or technique.

Sub-theme : Integration of therapy -

Majority of the therapists highlight that there are no challenges while tailoring therapy by integrating techniques from other approaches as they tend to choose supportive therapies but at times few techniques in CBT don't get bound with techniques from other approaches.

"This can be a little challenging; sometimes a few techniques under CBT that work well but then don't gel well with ACT techniques." (P.V)

Theme 10 : Barriers for clients to seek help –

It explores the obstacle or the difficulties that the clients internally and externally have which affects them to seek professional help. From their experience the participants say that the stigma about seeking help for mental health is still there, also Gen Z's fear that they have any mental health issue. Clients feel parents consent is very important for this matter but it ends up being a barrier. Since the clients are young adults they have financial constraints and concerns. Among Gen Z, LGBTQ and other low income groups suffer more from mental health

issues and they also have a fear of facing reality.

“Stigma is not lost, it is there in different ways.” (S. L)

Sub theme : Ways to overcome -

This theme explains how a therapist plays an important role in addressing the barriers and facilitates help seeking behaviour and to overcome the barrier. The participants give information such as that as a therapist they have to build more awareness about seeking help to bring societal changes, and society must be educated, public awareness on the mental health issues and to seek professional help. Can bring the government initiatives, giving clarity on the counselling process and the basic details about it since many people does not have an understanding about it.

“We have to build more awareness, bring societal changes, have open talk about it. barrier because people do not understand what therapy is and to tell them it is not a strange thing to do so.” (S. L)

Theme 11 : Upcoming Trends - It addresses the challenges that therapists may encounter when working with Generation Z clients in the context of trends such as technological advancements, online therapy, changing societal norms in terms of gender, sexuality, etc., and integrating technology with CBT.

Sub-theme : Technological advancement - In terms of technology, clients often lead the way in digital trends. Therapists must stay updated on reliable apps and online resources to meet client needs effectively. While online therapy

offers convenience, some clients show less respect for structure and are easily distracted preferring the interpersonal dynamics of in-person sessions. Despite the prevalence of online interactions, therapists emphasize the importance of non-verbal cues in face-to-face therapy for effective communication. Most prefer online at first, and then opt for in-person. They observed that clients tend to be more open and happy during online sessions, possibly due to the sense of comfort and security offered by the virtual environment. Integrating technology with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) involves using digital tools and platforms to enhance the delivery and effectiveness of CBT interventions. Some participants viewed it as an additional option that offers convenience and flexibility. However, while acknowledging its utility, a preference for traditional face-to-face sessions.

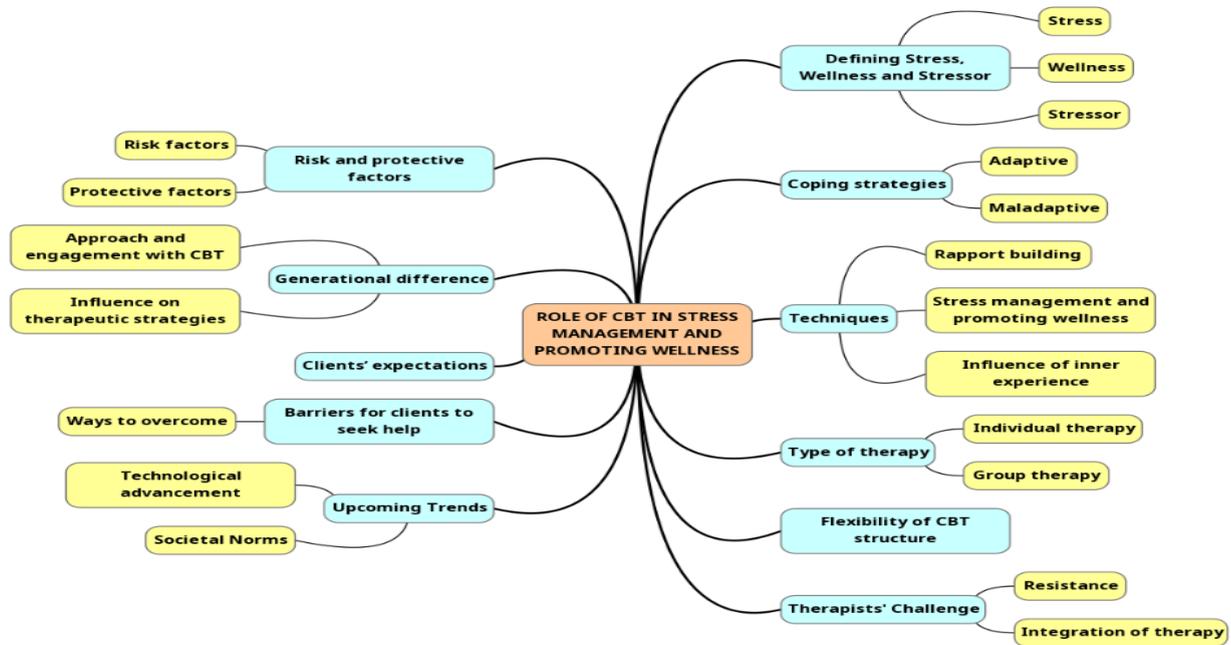
“I won’t prefer it because I don’t feel the warmth. if people ask online, I would rebel” (N.P.)

Sub-theme : Societal Norms - In navigating changing societal norms, therapists address issues such as blurred boundaries between friendships and relationships, fear of attachment and the prioritisation of chemistry over compatibility in relationships. Representation in media has influenced younger generations' acceptance of varied identities but still Challenges exists when lack of acceptance and support persist among close circle of LGBTQ children. However, therapists must adapt to clients' diverse perspectives and pace of engagement, prioritising confidentiality and non-judgmental attitudes. While some

challenges, like navigating gender transitions, require adaptation and

learning, most therapists view these encounters as opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Figure 1
Conceptual model of thematic analysis



DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored how Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and its derivatives support stress management and promote wellness among Generation Z (Gen Z). The research identified themes such as definitions of stress and wellness, common stressors, risk and protective factors, coping strategies, generational characteristics, therapeutic techniques, client expectations, therapist challenges, therapy structure, barriers to help-seeking, and emerging trends. Gen Z often associates stress with insecurity, the pressure to gain social media approval, and difficulties in socializing. They place a high value on wellness and health, yet frequently experience burnout. Common

stressors include academic and work pressures, relationship issues, parental expectations, low self-esteem, and overexposure to technology. These findings align with earlier studies that identified academic, financial, environmental, and interpersonal stressors as key concerns for students (Ningthoujam, 2021).

Unique risk factors for Gen Z include childhood trauma, maladaptive social media use, unhealthy coping mechanisms, and the fast-paced evolution of technology (Ninaus et al., 2015; O'Driscoll et al., 2010). Other contributors to stress include complex relationship dynamics, risky behaviors such as substance use, and the effects of being an only child or having large age gaps

between siblings, which can lead to social isolation (Bedford & Volling, 2004; Cicirelli, 1989; Buist, 2010). Protective factors include supportive parents, strong peer connections, and exposure to positive media representation (by promoting a positive self-image and challenging stereotypes). A growing openness toward therapy and mental health awareness also helps improve outcomes (Thoits, 2011; Burns & Rapee, 2006). Gen Z's coping strategies range from healthy habits like physical activity, creative hobbies, and social interaction, to potentially harmful behaviors such as substance use, excessive screen time, and unhealthy consumption of online content. These behaviors reflect both the risks and resources available in a digital-native generation (Coyne et al., 2020). While some use exercise, yoga, or therapy, many turn first to friends, music, or entertainment for relief (Sidharth et al., 2022).

Therapists reported challenges in connecting with clients who were referred by others, as well as dealing with financial constraints and high expectations for quick results. Therapists emphasized the importance of flexibility in structuring therapy, noting that while CBT provides a strong foundation, techniques from approaches like ACT and SFT are often incorporated based on individual needs. Many therapists choose techniques based on either their personal experience of what works or by assessing the emotional state of the client. Gen Z clients value authenticity and expect therapists to be familiar with modern social issues, including evolving relationship dynamics and gender identities. They often show a willingness to engage in therapy but may struggle with commitment or expect quick

fixes (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Despite financial limitations, they demonstrate growing acceptance of professional help, especially following increased awareness during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding therapy format, individual therapy was generally preferred, though some participants supported starting with group sessions and transitioning to individual therapy as needed. Group therapy may benefit certain populations like students, but its effectiveness varies based on the individual's comfort with social interaction. Budget concerns and lack of personalization were seen as drawbacks. This aligns with Indian research emphasizing the need for accessible and well-planned mental health services (Garg et al., 2020). Also, participants rated therapy structure flexibility at around 7 out of 10, indicating a need for balance between structure and adaptability. While CBT provides a strong base, therapists often tailor sessions using other approaches like ACT or SFT, adjusting techniques based on each client's unique context. Therapeutic techniques mentioned by participants include mindfulness, journaling, emotional regulation, self-love, cognitive reframing, positive affirmations, and metaphors from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Foundational tools such as mental status examination (MSE), history taking, validation, and Socratic questioning were frequently used. Building trust through humor and affirming the client's strengths were seen as essential during the initial sessions. Research suggests humor, in particular, can be an effective coping mechanism for stress (Morán & Hughes, 2006). Emerging trends in therapy



highlight the growing impact of technology, online sessions, and changing social norms. While online therapy offers convenience, some clients prefer in-person sessions for deeper emotional connection. Therapists must stay updated on apps and digital tools to remain relevant, while also ensuring therapeutic rapport isn't compromised. Studies suggest online and in-person counseling can be similarly effective (Jerardi, 2022), but preferences vary.

Despite increased awareness of mental health issues, barriers such as stigma, financial constraints, unsupportive peers, and concerns about parental consent hinder their access to professional help. Marginalized groups within Gen Z, including LGBTQ individuals and those from low-income backgrounds, face additional challenges due to systemic inequalities and lack of inclusive resources (Wandrekar & Nigudkar, 2020). Addressing these barriers requires tailored intervention frameworks to support the unique needs of these special groups. The findings of the study would help the mental health professionals to understand the application of CBT and its derivatives as an individual therapy as well as in combination with other supportive therapies to manage stress and promote wellness among Gen Z clients. They can also gain an insight about the barriers that inhibit clients from seeking professional help and some ways to overcome it. The emphasis on the coping strategies that resonate well with individuals from Gen Z would help professionals in the educational sector to tap the adaptive coping strategies in students in order to encounter stressful events in a healthy way. However the study has a few

limitations in terms of sample size and geographic specificity.

CONCLUSION

The study identified 11 major themes. These encompassed the definition of stress, wellness, and stressors, as well as coping strategies (both adaptive and maladaptive). Techniques such as rapport building, stress management, and promoting wellness were explored, along with the influence of inner experiences. Additionally, the study delved into the types of therapy (individual or group) and the flexibility of CBT structures. Therapists' challenges, including resistance and therapy integration, were highlighted, as were risk and protective factors. Generational differences in approach and engagement with CBT, along with their influence on therapeutic strategies, were also noted. Clients' expectations and the barriers they face in seeking help, along with potential solutions, were discussed. Finally, upcoming trends, including technological advancements and shifting societal norms, were explored as key considerations for therapy moving forward. By recognizing the distinct characteristics of this generation therapists can tailor interventions to foster meaningful engagement and positive outcomes in therapy.

The future study can include the client's perspective on the effectiveness of CBT and its derivatives can be included, the objective can be narrowed down to explore the role of CBT on specific stressors like relationship issues, academic pressure, work pressure, and so on and also can be explored among Gen Z in clinical population like those diagnosed



with stress disorders etc and special populations like those diagnosed with LD, ADHD, ASD etc to get an insight on a diverse spectrum. Moreover, a

comparative study would help in clear understanding of the evolution of the CBT approach among individuals from different generational cohorts.

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