MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: REASONS AND STRATEGIES FOR ACTION FROM THE LENS OF YOUNGSTERS IN SINDH.

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Abstract

Mental health illnesses start in late childhood or early adolescence and worsen as someone becomes older. An important independent contributor to the global disease burden is mental diseases. Neuropsychiatric illnesses lead to the world's disease burden, depression, and other prevalent mental disorders that can be permanently incapacitating. These projections highlight the significance of mental illnesses for general health. The research aims to explore the reasons for mental stress in youngsters in Sindh and to analyze the effectiveness of the strategies they use to cope with their mental stress. The qualitative phenomenological study design was used with a sample size of 30 youngsters aged between 16 -25 years from varied socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to extract in-depth data through semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions. The ethical guidelines are followed as per the BERA framework. The participants signed the written consent letters and their true identity is kept secret as per the BERA framework. The theoretical framework that underpins this research is Cox's theory of stress (1985). The data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The themes were created after a careful coding and chunking process. The two basic emerging factors that are responsible for mental stress are family-related factors and social factors. The major themes that erupted from data regarding coping mechanisms are socioemotional support, lifestyle factors, and professional support. The major findings of the research reveal that family issues and financial crises lead to mental stress in youngsters and the coping strategies utilized by them are family support and meditation. Some of the participants were in Favor of seeking mental health professional guidance. The recommendations are proposed based on the findings suggest that there should be more mental health professionals with cheaper fee charges so the general public can access them conveniently. Research can benefit youngsters, parents, guardians, educators, Mental health professionals,

and policymakers.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Ahmad, 2024). The mental health status of youngsters in Pakistan is concerning, with high prevalence rates of anxiety, depression, and stress among adolescents and young adults (Tharani, 2024). Approximately 53% of adolescents in Pakistan experience anxiety and depression (Ghazal, 2022). The limited availability of mental health services, coupled with cultural stigma and economic challenges, exacerbates these issues (Noorullah, 2024; Zehra, Lashari & Naz, 2023). Mental health morbidity worldwide is increasing, affecting society with psychiatric disorders like depression, substance abuse, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicides in developed and developing countries (Khalily, 2011; Buriro et al., 2024). Globally, child and adolescents comprise 2.2 billion people, with neuropsychiatric disorders causing disability-adjusted life years loss. Addressing mental health issues early is crucial, but data and research gaps exist in child epidemiology, intervention, and implementation techniques. In the 19th and 20th centuries, mental illness treatment and management were conducted in large institutions, but over time, it became evident that patients required community care. This situation necessitates immediate attention and intervention to improve mental health outcomes for the youth in Pakistan. It is essential to understand the factors contributing to these challenges and the importance of early intervention

Mental Health:

In the UK, the government has made meeting the mental health needs of children and youth a top priority. In order to address mental health issues early in life, through prevention and early treatments, the mental health outcomes strategy "No health without mental health" continues to address disparities in access to mental health treatments and mental health (Department of Health, 2011). Social, educational, and economic circumstances are among the risk factors that impact the emergence of mental health problems in Pakistani youth (Wahid, Ghazi & Lashari, 2023). These elements play a major role in the startlingly high prevalence of anxiety and depression in teenagers (Lashari & Umrani, 2023). It is essential to comprehend these risk variables in order to create therapies that work.

According to Hassan et al. (2012) and Abdullah et al. (2018), there is a correlation between a rise in mental health problems and the lack of a father role and family conflicts. Mirza and Jenkins (2004), stated that female teenagers are especially at risk due to relationship issues and social pressures. School Environment: Higher mental health issues are correlated with poor attendance and academic performance as well as worse teacher qualities (Hassan et al., 2012).

Lack of Support Services: These problems are made worse by schools' restricted access to mental health resources (Ghazal, 2022). Mirza and Jenkins (2004), proposed that youth anxiety and depression are greatly exacerbated by economic hardships. Because of the pressures associated with city life, living in an urban area is linked to an elevated risk of mental health issues (Hassan et al., 2012; Khan, Lashari & Iqbal, 2023). Although these elements draw attention to the difficulties Pakistani adolescents experience, it is also critical to take into account the possibility of community-based initiatives and legislative changes to successfully address these problems.

Mental health consists of social, psychological, and emotional components. Social well-being refers to community functioning, while psychological well-being involves achieving well-being. The World Health Organization defines mental health as a state where individuals realize their potential, cope with stress, work productively, and contribute to their community (IRFAN, 2016) A dynamic condition of internal balance, mental health allows people to apply their skills in a way that is consistent with societal norms (Galderisi, 2015).

Mental Health Issues in Pakistan:

Pakistan, the ninth most populated country in the world and one of the developing nations, is seeing a sharp rise in the incidence and prevalence of mental health issues. (Gadit, 2007) (Taj, 2015) .Mental

health issues among university students, affecting up to 20%, are a growing concern globally (Pillay, 2022). Financial struggles and lack of family support can trigger depression and anxiety, leading to suicidal behavior and lower academic achievement. Despite this, research in developing countries is limit (IRFAN, 2016).With high prevalence rates of anxiety, sadness, and suicidal thoughts, Pakistan's youth face serious and complex mental health challenges (Shafiq, 2020) . Cultural stigma, restricted access to mental health care, and a lack of knowledge about mental health concerns all contribute to these difficulties. In Pakistan, anxiety and sadness affect over 53% of teenagers (Ghazal, 2022; Siming, Asad & Lashari, 2015). Among psychology students, 51.6% experienced depression, 62% anxiety, and 41.4% tension. Anxiety and depression affected 46.1% of students. Significant rates of suicidal ideation have been recorded, making suicide one of the top causes of death among young people (Naser, 2021; Bibi et al., 2021). Major depressive illness is often cited as a contributing factor in suicides, which commonly involve weapons and self-poisoning (Abdullah et al., 2018).Obstacles to Mental Health Treatment. The stigma associated with mental illness in society deters people from getting care (Ghani & Bano, 2024).

Mental health specialists are in short supply, especially psychiatrists who specialize in treating children and adolescents (Ghazal, 2022).

Problem Statement

In industrialized nations, it has been demonstrated that school-based treatments that incorporate teacher training programs improve teachers' capacity to recognize and address mental health issues in children. (HUSSAIN, 2013) The effects of social media on mental health and how excessive use can result in adult depression and antisocial conduct. (NAZ, 2013) With over 1 billion individuals afflicted with mental, neurological, and drug use illnesses, the expanding mental health crisis has impacted around 14% of the world's population. (Ahmad N. , 2024). In order to bridge this gap, our study will provide theoretical insights and practical suggestions for physicians, mental health specialists, and community leaders who wish to enhance mental health. My study helps to identify mental health concerns and suggests coping mechanisms to address them.

Research Objective:

1. To explore the reasons for mental stress in youngsters in Sindh
2. To analyze the effectiveness of the strategies they use to cope with their mental stress.

Research Questions:

Q1. What are the main causes of mental stress in Pakistan's Sindh Province among teenagers and young adults?
Q2. How effective are the coping strategies used by youngsters in Sindh in managing their mental stress?

Theoretical Framework:

Cox Theory:

Cox theory was presented in 1985, According to Cox psychological model which is also known as Cox's theory of stress, stress arises when there is an imbalance between an individual's perceived capacity to handle demands and the perceived magnitude of those demands. It leads to disparity between the apparent ability to coping and the perceived demand. When a person's resources are not adequately aligned with the degree of demand, coping mechanisms are limited, and social support is minimal, this is the quintessential stressful scenario (Cox, 1985).

According to Cox (1987,1985) When there is a difference between the perceived level of the stressful demands and the person's perceived capacity to respond to and manage the demands, the person experiences stress, and there is a mismatch between a perceived need and a perceived ability to handle things. According to Cox (1985), a classic stressful circumstance is one in which a person's resources are not well aligned with the amount of demand, and there are social support and coping limitations. Stress is a personal psychological state in and of itself. It has to do with how an individual feels about their workplace and how they perceive it, perception is crucial for identifying stressors. The person's capacity for handling.An individual's stress phases are a complicated dynamic process with varying levels of assessment, emotion, and response. The first reaction to a stressful event is unpleasant emotion, which drives the person into a fight-or-flight response.

Stress results from an imbalance between perceived competence and perceived demand, with the demands fluctuating at different assessment levels during the stress process. In evaluating skills, both internal and external resources are considered. To

cope with the stressor, the person uses their "capabilities" to evaluate their internal strengths and limitations as well as the social support that is accessible.
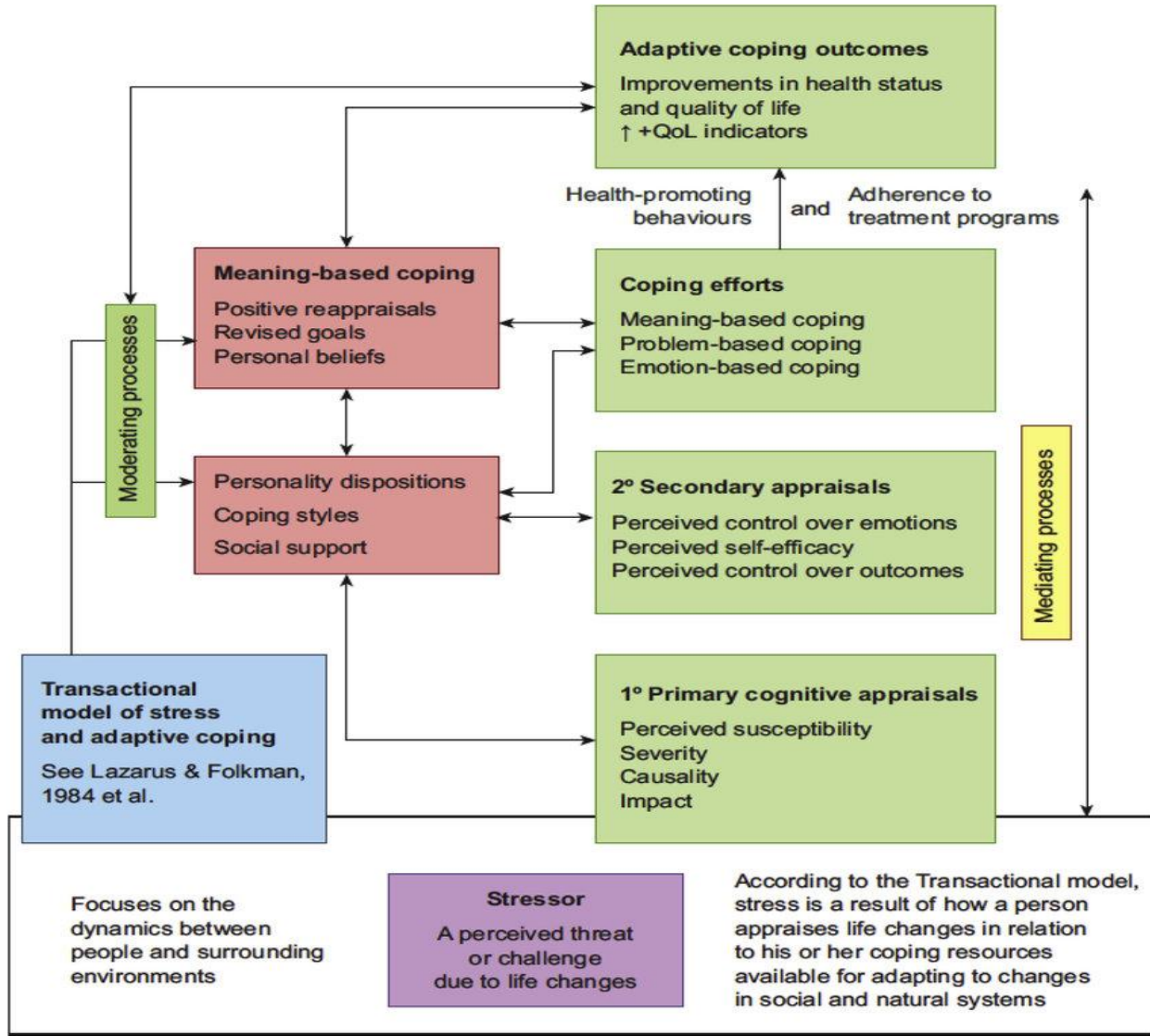

Fig 1: Cox Framework.

Methodology:

Research Design:
A qualitative phenomenological research design is used. "Phenomenological research" aims to comprehend and characterize people's actual experiences with a specific event. Through in-depth interviews, participant-written reports, and observations, it focuses on examining the content and significance of these experiences (Choudhry,

2013) .Research took place in the youngsters of Sindh.

Population:
In this study, 30 youngsters participated in semi structured interviews and focused group discussion using a snowball sampling approach. This strategy was chosen due to its effectiveness with a certain demographic, such as those aged 16 to 25, who have encountered emotional, social, and financial

difficulties. After talking to a small number of youngsters, researcher asked them to recommend more adults consequently, snowball sampling led to an increase in the number of participants. This allows information to be gathered from a particular group of people that would be difficult to reach using traditional sampling methods.

Data Collection Method
Semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions were conducted. They were asked about mental health issues, strategies, and their opinions on mental health. The use of semi-structured interviews permitted flexibility in answers while making certain to meet the research objectives.

Ethical Consideration:
In order to ensure the ethical consideration of my research, I conducted my study on mental health in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) 2018 Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, I obtained each participant's informed consent before conducting any interviews. Additionally, I made sure that the data was safely kept and that only authorized individuals could access it. I also gave the participants some honor

ability to discontinue research at any time without facing repercussions. I managed to carry out my investigation responsibly and morally, protecting each participant's rights and welfare by carefully considering and putting BERA Frame Work into practice.

Data Analysis:
Thematic Analysis:
(Reyes, (2024) Supports theme analysis as a method for assessing qualitative data. Transcripts, interviews, and other types of texts are typically utilized with it. The data was closely examined to identify recurring common themes, concepts, and meaning patterns.

Based on the participant's replies, the data analysis yielded conclusions and the findings were grouped into themes.There are three major findings of the study. The first theme is social factors, which is further subdivided into peer pressure and social isolation. The second theme is financial issues, which are further subdivided into two subthemes: inflation and poverty; the third major theme is family factors, which are further subdivided into two subthemes: competition and neglect.
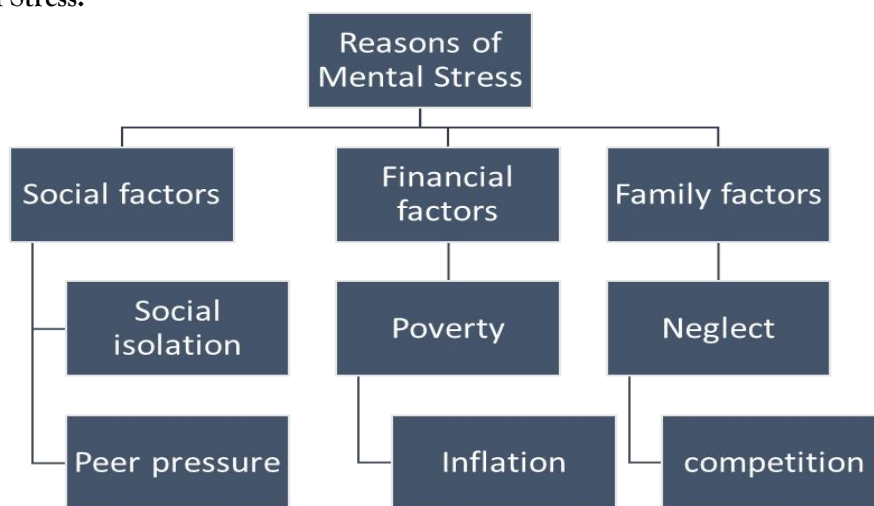
Reasons of Mental Stress:

Fig 2:Graphic Representation of theme 1

Social factors
Individuals who are exposed to more unfavorable social situations are more likely to experience poor mental health throughout their lives, and this vulnerability is frequently influenced by structural

factors that create and sustain intergenerational cycles of health and disadvantage.   people who are exposed to more unfavorable social conditions are more susceptible to poor mental health throughout their lives (Kirkbride, 2024).

Isolation

Young individuals are more likely to experience loneliness, and are more vulnerable to the start of depression, and social interactions have an influence on their social and personal development during this period ((prizeman, 2023) . A rising public health concern, social isolation is linked to detrimental effects on both mental and physical health. (Brandt, 2022)Mental health issues in children in elementary and secondary school are linked to social isolation. (Matthews, 2015).The main causes of isolation found by data were excessive screen time, lack of communication since kids prefer digital friendships over real-life friend's.Digitalization stooped them to introversion.

P1: I am always under pressure to live up to other people's expectations, yet it's never enough. Even in social situations, I feel isolated, and the urge to blend in is too much. Stress and self-doubt are difficult to avoid, and I wish people would accept me for who I am rather than passing judgment on me.

It is found that because of excessive screen time and less awareness of community culture, adults have difficulty managing community gatherings as they find them misfit in their gatherings and eventually suffer from scial isolation.

Peer pressure:

Adolescents who experienced more peer pressure were more willing to seek professional psychiatric assistance. (Nguyen Thi, 2024)Peer pressure might be the cause of the reciprocal connections between depressed symptoms and cyber victimization (Gao, 2021) Adolescents may experience anxiety, despair, and low self-esteem as a result of peer pressure to behave in ways they are uncomfortable with. (Gautam, 2020)

One of the reason for mental stress among kids is peer pressure which is caused by the comparison of status differences among friends in addition, hard and fast boundaries set by relatives. Breaking those boundaries can lead to social stigmatization. Dealing with all these circumstances lead to mental health issues,

Financial Factors:

10-20% of global youth experience mental disorders, with similar risk factors across low- and high-income countries. Higher levels of anxiety and depression symptoms were linked to job uncertainty and financial worry. (Wilson, 2020)

Poverty

Family poverty and caregiver mental health issues combine to significantly harm the mental health of the following generation. (Adjei, 2024) Adolescent mental and behavioral health outcomes were significantly impacted by poverty. (Adjei,2024) People who live in poverty frequently have poor mental health results. (Kerschbaumer, 2024)

P2: I m constantly concerned about money, and despite my best efforts, nothing seems to get better. My mental health is suffering as a result of the enormous stress of making ends meet and paying my expenses. I'm worn out and feel stuck.

As inflation is rising day by day, Adults ,who are trying to meet both ends meet are in hot waters. They are tired of their futile drudgery as things are becoming worse rather than getting better.

Inflation

Families in the lower-middle income category reported the highest level of mental stress as a result of a general increase in costs. (Movsisyan, 2024) Economic inflation at high levels may have a variety of negative effects on people and society . Compared to males, women are more likely to experience mental strain as a result of inflation (Sultana, 2024) .The cost of living is rising significantly in the UK and other wealthy nations. Both now and in the future, physical and mental health are at risk due to a number of overlapping economic issues. (Broadbent, 2023)

Family Factors

Neglect

Children who see parental conflict regularly especially when it involves aggressiveness and hostility have greater stress, anxiety, and depression levels. (Ani, 2024). Neglect is a common background element in instances and can occasionally be the cause of death, such as an adolescent's suicide or an infant's unexpected, untimely death. (Taylor, 2024)

Competition

Children's good energy are spoiled and the cause is undermined in a conflictual household setting. (Ahmad R. H., 2024) Interpersonal conflicts and parental support have an impact on adolescents' acute stress levels (Usman, 2024)

P2: High expectations from school, family, and society to perform well academically often lead to anxiety and stress.

P3: Pressures from family to meet certain career, behavioral, or academic standards can lead stress and anxiety

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are cognitive and behavioral techniques used to deal with demands, circumstances, and crises that are deemed upsetting. (D. Carr, 2007).
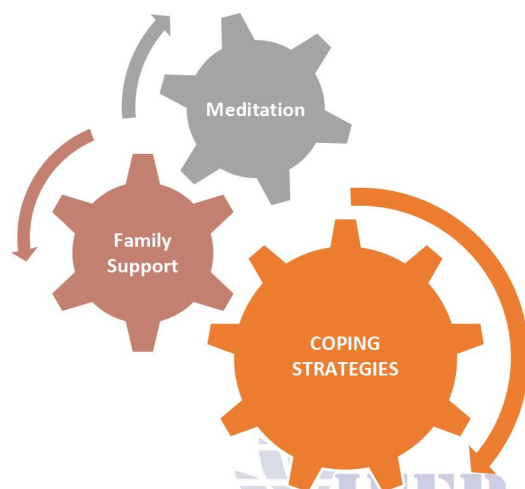

Fig 3: Graphic Representation of major theme 2

Family support

The ways that families communicate, resolve conflicts, and work together allow people to reach their full potential, become more productive, form relationships with others, and support their families, communities, and nation. (Dayani, 2024) Support from friends and family can help students' mental health. (Yang, 2022) Both coping mechanisms and perceived social support seem to play a role in how well people handle stress. (Mariani, 2020). Empathy with a minimum communication gap helps kids to improve their socioemotional well-being, and opened communication channels boost up kids' mental health as they vent out their stress (Bukhari, Ali & Ashiq, 2024).

P1: I found that talking things through with supportive people made a huge difference. They provided reassurance, new perspectives, and emotional support. Sometimes just knowing someone is there made me feel less alone.

Having people to turn to—whether friends, family, or professionals—can make managing stress feel less daunting.

Meditation

Practicing mindfulness in daily life can promote peace and relaxation. With our minds racing constantly, mindfulness, with regular practice can help slow down our thoughts and also aid in the holistic improvement of self-esteem and the development of a more positive mindset (Gaur, 2024) Programs for mindfulness meditation on mobile devices provide a flexible approach to improving mental health. (Lee, 2024)

P2: I managed my stress with listening music, reading book and some kind of activities who divert my mind.

Conclusion:

This study highlights the serious mental health problems that young people encounter, with peer pressure, social isolation, family neglect, and financial problems appearing as major causes of their suffering. These difficulties can take many different forms, ranging from despair and poor self-esteem to anxiety and depression. It has been demonstrated

that social isolation in particular can worsen mental health conditions by resulting in a sense of alienation from other people and a lack of emotional support. Similar to this, peer pressure can lead to inflated expectations, which exacerbates stress and feelings of inadequacy, particularly in the social media age. Financial challenges make things much more difficult since they add more sources of anxiety and uncertainty that affect a young person's capacity to prioritize their own development and well-being.

The study emphasizes the value of coping strategies that can greatly enhance mental health outcomes despite these urgent issues. A key component in assisting young people in overcoming these challenges is family support. A solid, nurturing home environment serves as a protective barrier against the challenges kids encounter by offering direction, stability, and emotional certainty. It is impossible to overestimate the significance of open communication, understanding, and positive reinforcement in families as these elements provide young people the confidence to ask for assistance when necessary and create a sense of security and belonging.

Meditation is a successful coping mechanism that helps young people develop emotional resilience, improve self-awareness, and manage stress. It has been demonstrated that meditation techniques like mindfulness and deep breathing exercises reduce anxiety, elevate mood, and encourage a balanced approach to life's obstacles. Including these rituals into everyday life may be a very effective way to preserve emotional stability and mental clarity.

This research calls for a multi-faceted approach to supporting the mental health of young people. It is essential for families, schools, and communities to create environments where young individuals feel safe, supported, and understood. Policies that promote mental health education, accessibility to mental health services, and the development of coping strategies should be prioritized. By fostering strong familial relationships and encouraging practices like meditation, young people can be better equipped to face the pressures and challenges of modern life.

Ultimately, addressing mental health from a holistic perspective, which combines emotional, social, and practical support, is crucial for the well-being of future generations. Only through collaborative efforts can we ensure that young people are not only surviving but thriving in an increasingly complex world

Recommendation:

To address mental health issues in youngsters,it is suggested to follow the given recommendations

1.There should be more mental health professionals with cheaper fee charges so the general public can access them conveniently.

2. SEL workshops should be conducted in communities to help adults learn the coping strategies.

3. Policymakers need to make comprehensive economic policies to curb inflation and to improve employability chances for youngsters to eradicate the root causes of mental stress.

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