

OVERTHINKING GENERATION: The Mental Health

Struggle among Today's Youth

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Abstract

Overthinking is a common problem among young people today, especially university students in the modern digital era. This study focuses on Generation Z students (age 18–23) and aims to describe the main causes, effects, and strategies for overthinking. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and literature review, the results show that social pressure, social media comparison, poor communication, and fear of the future are the main causes. The effects include stress, lack of focus, insomnia, and low motivation. However, practicing mindfulness, self-compassion, and getting social support can help students achieve better mental balance. In conclusion, overthinking in Generation Z has negative impacts on mental health, but it can be reduced through self-awareness, acceptance, and positive social relationships.

Keywords: overthinking, mental health, Generation Z, communication, balance.

Abstrak

Overthinking atau berpikir berlebihan merupakan masalah umum di kalangan anak muda, terutama mahasiswa, pada era modern dan digital saat ini. Penelitian ini berfokus pada mahasiswa Generasi Z (usia 18–23 tahun) dan bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penyebab utama, dampak, serta strategi dalam mengatasi overthinking. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dan kajian pustaka, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tekanan sosial, perbandingan di media sosial, komunikasi yang buruk, serta kecemasan terhadap masa depan menjadi penyebab utama. Dampaknya meliputi stres, kurang fokus, insomnia, dan rendahnya motivasi. Namun, penerapan *mindfulness*, *self-compassion*, dan dukungan sosial dapat membantu mahasiswa mencapai keseimbangan mental yang lebih baik. Kesimpulannya, *overthinking* pada Generasi Z berdampak negatif terhadap kesehatan mental, tetapi dapat diatasi melalui kesadaran diri, penerimaan, dan hubungan sosial yang positif.

Kata kunci: *overthinking*, kesehatan mental, Generasi Z, komunikasi, keseimbangan.

A. Introduction

Mental health has become a serious concern today, especially among Generation Z. Many experts agree that mental health is an important part of human well-being. Bhugra, Till, and (Bhugra et al., 2013) explain that mental health is not only the absence of illness, but also a state where individuals can manage emotions, build relationships, and function well in society. In this modern era, mental health problems have become more visible because young people face many external pressures, such as family issues, academic demands, and social expectations.

Generation Z grows up in a fast-changing digital world, and this generation experiences high levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional pressure. (Muktifada Matilda et al., 2025) found that Gen Z often struggles with digital overload, academic pressure, global uncertainty, and social isolation. These pressures influence how they think, feel, and behave, especially when they cannot manage stress well. Recent research by (Alivia Khoirunnisa et al., 2025) also supports this, showing that overthinking among Gen Z is strongly triggered by excessive social media exposure and emotional instability.

One of the most common mental health problems among Gen Z is overthinking. This condition becomes worse when someone cannot regulate their emotions. Gen Z tends to overthink about mistakes, future worries, academic expectations, or how others see them. This makes them feel confused, stressed, and unable to make decisions calmly. Findings from (Tang et al., 2023) further emphasize that anxiety and depression distort adolescents' ability to think clearly about their future, making them lose motivation and imagine negative outcomes more frequently.

Another major issue is insecurity. Research on social media and Gen Z shows that online platforms often create unrealistic standards of beauty, success, and lifestyle. (Muktifada Matilda et al., 2025) explain that social media increases comparison and lowers self-confidence because young people feel they are "not good enough." When insecurity grows, Gen Z may develop negative beliefs about their appearance, abilities, or achievements.

Recent studies also highlight that biological factors play a role in mental health. (Jain, 2024) found that hormonal imbalances, such as during the menstrual cycle, PCOS, or hormonal instability can significantly increase emotional problems like anxiety, depression, overthinking, and mood swings. These hormonal changes can intensify stress responses among young women, making them more vulnerable to emotional imbalance.

When young people cannot control their emotions well, they become more sensitive to stress, and even small problems can feel very heavy. Their theory suggests that negative thoughts come not only from outside influences but also from difficulty managing emotions internally.

Insecurity and overthinking continue to grow among Gen Z, it is important to understand their causes and find effective strategies to manage them. Strengthening emotional regulation, building self-awareness, and practicing healthy coping skills are essential steps for maintaining mental well-being. Mindfulness-based strategies, as shown by (Alivia Khoirunnisa et al., 2025), can help reduce overthinking by teaching individuals to stay present and manage anxious thoughts more effectively.

Even though many studies discuss mental health issues in Generation Z, some important areas are still not fully explored. Most research explains these problems in general, but it does not clearly show how insecurity, anxiety, emotional imbalance, and overthinking are connected to each other. Studies on social media usually focus on cyberbullying or addiction, but rarely examine how constant comparison, online pressure, and the fear of being judged directly shape Gen Z's negative thinking patterns.

Research on academic stress also leaves a gap. Many studies talk about burnout and heavy workloads, but they still do not explain how academic pressure affects young people's future-thinking ability, decision-making, and emotional stability. This is important because Tang et al. (2023) argue that weakened future thinking is one of the main reasons overthinking happens, yet only a few studies connect this theory to real situations experienced by Gen Z.

Another gap is the lack of connection between psychological, biological, and digital factors. For example, hormonal imbalance (Jain, 2024) can increase mood swings and emotional sensitivity, but this is rarely linked to digital stress or academic expectations. Likewise, while emotional regulation is often discussed, few studies explain how emotional instability, online comparison, and academic pressure work together to weaken mental health. Research that combines these factors, especially in the Indonesian context is still limited.

Because of these gaps, this paper aims to:

1. Explain the main causes of overthinking in Generation Z by looking at emotional, social, academic, and biological factors.
2. Analyze how social media and academic pressure shape emotional stability and future-thinking ability.

3. Show the impact of weakened future thinking on daily life, such as motivation, confidence, and decision-making.
4. Identify strategies to improve mental well-being, including mindfulness, emotional communication, and accessible digital counseling.
5. Provide insights that fit the Indonesian context, where culture, social expectations, and digital habits may influence Gen Z differently compared to other countries.

By addressing these points, this study aims to give a clearer and more complete understanding of why overthinking is becoming more common among Generation Z and what practical solutions can help reduce it.

B. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

B.1 Literature Review

1. Future Thinking Theory (Tang et al., 2023)

(Tang et al., 2023) propose that mental health strongly influences an individual capacity for future thinking, the cognitive ability to imagine, plan, and project oneself into the future. This theory outlines six essential cognitive aspects of future thinking:

- a) Capability means the mental ability to generate and process future oriented thoughts.
- b) Content means the typed of thoughts one imagines about the future (positive or negative).
- c) Frequency means how often a person thinks about the future.
- d) Structure means how organized and logical these thoughts are.
- e) Valence means whether those future thoughts feel hopeful or threatening.
- f) Vividness means how clear and realistic those mental images appear.

According to Tang et al. that depression and anxiety simulation impair all six aspects, leading individual, especially fall into rumination or overthinking. When future thinking declines, individuals tend to dwell on past negative experiences, amplifying anxiety, and reducing optimism. In short, when future thinking becomes weak, overthinking grows stronger.

2. Overthinking as a Cognitive Response (Aghata, 2024)

(Aghata, 2024) describes overthinking as a mental reaction that happens when someone faces too much social and digital pressure. Gen Z often sees the “perfect” lives of others on social media, which creates pressure to look successful all the time. Overthinking

happens when the mind feels uncertain or unable to control the future. This idea fits well with Tang et al.'s concept of future thinking impairment.

3. Communication Skills and Mental Health (M. Shahi & Sharma, 2024)
(M. Shahi & Sharma, 2024) argue that poor communication skills can cause emotional stress in young people. When people cannot express their feelings or ask for help, negative emotions build up inside. This situation leads to rumination and unclear future thinking. Simply put, poor communication causes emotional blocks, which weaken future thinking. This supports Tang et al.'s model that anxiety changes how people see their future.
4. Study Life Balance and Student Well-being (Veluchamy et al., 2016)
(Veluchamy et al., 2016) relate mental distress to academic pressure. Too many school tasks, exams, and activities can cause burnout and loss of motivation. If students do not manage stress well, they lose their ability to plan or imagine a positive future. This supports Tang et al.'s idea that stress affects future-oriented thinking.
5. Mental Health and Emotional Balance (Bhugra et al., 2013)
(Bhugra et al., 2013) explain that mental health is not just the absence of illness, but a condition where individuals can manage emotions, form healthy relationships, and function well socially. They state that emotional balance is influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors. Their explanation supports the idea that insecurity, social pressure, and lack of support can reduce emotional stability and increase negative thinking in Gen Z.
6. Gen Z Mental Health in the Digital Era (Muktifada Matilda et al., 2025)
(Muktifada Matilda et al., 2025) highlight that Generation Z faces unique mental-health challenges because they grow up in a fast-moving digital world. Social media pressure, global uncertainty, academic stress, and peer comparison make Gen Z more vulnerable to anxiety and emotional overload.
7. Hormonal Imbalance and Emotional Instability (Jain, 2024b)
(Jain, 2024) explains that hormonal imbalances among young women, such as fluctuations in estrogen, progesterone, and symptoms related to PCOS, can intensify anxiety, depression, and overthinking. Hormonal instability weakens emotional

regulation, which directly affects how individuals respond to stress and future-related uncertainty. This biological perspective enriches Tang et al.'s model by showing that emotional dysregulation is influenced not only by psychological and social factors, but also by hormonal health. .

8. Mindfulness and Overthinking in Gen Z (Alivia Khoirunnisa et al., 2025)

(Alivia Khoirunnisa et al., 2025) found that overthinking is widespread among Gen Z due to heavy digital exposure and constant academic and social demands. Their study highlights that mindfulness specifically the STOP technique helps reduce overthinking by strengthening present-moment awareness. This supports Tang et al.'s view that improving emotional regulation can enhance future-thinking ability and reduce rumination.

B.2 Hypothesis Development

Based on the grand theory and the supporting theories above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. A decrease in future thinking ability (Tang et al., 2023) is a main cause of overthinking among Generation Z. When people cannot imagine a clear and positive future, they tend to repeat negative thoughts about the past.
2. Social and digital pressures (Aghata, 2024) make the problem of weak future thinking worse and increase overthinking. In short, external stress strengthens internal anxiety.
3. Low communication skills (M. Shahi & Sharma, 2024) lead to rumination because people have no safe way to express feelings, making it harder to think positively about the future.
4. Continuous academic stress (Veluchamy et al., 2016) reduces students' motivation and clarity, increasing their tendency to overthink when making life decisions.
5. Weak emotional balance and emotional instability (Bhugra et al., 2013) make individuals more sensitive to stress and more likely to fall into repetitive negative thinking.
6. Generation Z faces unique mental health challenges, including high emotional sensitivity, digital overstimulation, and identity-related stress, that make them more vulnerable to overthinking (Muktifada Matilda et al., 2025). These challenges increase cognitive pressure, disrupt emotional regulation, and weaken positive future orientation. As a

result, Gen Z individuals are more prone to repetitive negative thinking when dealing with academic, social, or personal demands.

7. Hormonal imbalance significantly contributes to emotional instability among young individuals (Jain, 2024b). When hormonal fluctuations disrupt mood and emotional regulation, individuals become more prone to anxiety and overthinking especially during stressful academic or social situations.
8. Overthinking in Gen Z is strongly influenced by digital exposure and emotional dysregulation. Mindfulness techniques help reduce rumination and strengthen cognitive control (Alivia Khoirunnisa et al., 2025). Thus, individuals with low mindfulness are more likely to experience future-thinking impairment and overthinking.

C. Research Method

Based on the thematic synthesis, the researcher concluded how overthinking develops among Generation Z, how it is linked to weakened future thinking, and what factors intensify it such as academic overload, hormonal imbalance, communication barriers, and digital pressure. The study also identifies strategies that may reduce overthinking, including improved emotional communication, mindfulness practices, supported by (Alivia Khoirunnisa et al., 2025) and cognitive-behavioral interventions aligned with Tang et al.'s theory.

This study uses a qualitative approach with the library research method. This method aims to understand the phenomenon of overthinking among young people based on existing theories, books, and previous studies. A qualitative library method is appropriate because the topic is conceptual and closely related to psychology, sociology, and communication, which require interpretation instead of statistical measurement.

The data were collected from academic journals and books published between 2016 and 2024 to ensure that the materials are current and relevant to Generation Z's mental health issues. The main source of this study is (Tang et al., 2023), which functions as the grand theory. Tang's Future Thinking Theory explains how anxiety and depression influence people's ability to imagine and plan the future. Other supporting sources come from (Aghata, 2024), (M. U. Shahi & Sharma, 2024), (Veluchamy et al., 2016), and one related online book from Google Books.

Research Steps

1. Identifying and Collecting Data

The researcher searched and selected relevant studies using Google Scholar and trusted academic sources. The keywords included:

- a). “overthinking among youth,”
- b). “future thinking theory,”
- c). “mental health of Generation Z,”
- d). “anxiety and depression in adolescents.”

These keywords helped the researcher find studies connected to the main variables of this research.

2. Classifying the Literature

The collected sources were grouped into three main categories:

- a). Theoretical studies : Focused on cognitive psychology and future thinking, mainly (Tang et al., 2023)
- b). Empirical studies : Containing real findings about academic stress, communication barriers, and study-life balance, such as (Veluchamy et al., 2016).
- c). Interdisciplinary studies : Exploring how communication, social media, and emotional expression affect mental health, such as (M. U. Shahi & Sharma, 2024) and (Aghata, 2024).

This classification helped the researcher connect ideas across psychology, sociology, and communication to build the conceptual framework.

3. Data Analysis and Thematic Synthesis

The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Each study was read carefully to identify important concepts, patterns, and repeated ideas. The themes were then connected to (Tang et al., 2023). Four major themes were identified:

- a). social pressure,
- b). academic stress,
- c). communication and emotional barriers, and
- d). problems with future thinking.

4. Validation and Theoretical Interpretation

To ensure accuracy, the researcher compared concepts across different sources and checked similarities or contradictions. A deductive approach was used: starting from the general theory of (Tang et al., 2023), then connecting it to social and psychological findings from the other studies.

5. Conclusion and Implication

After analyzing the themes, the researcher concluded how overthinking develops, how it is linked to weak future thinking, and what strategies can reduce it. These strategies include better emotional communication, expression, mindfulness, and cognitive-based interventions.

D. Discussion

1. What factors cause mental health problems in Generation Z?

Generation Z experiences rapid emotional and developmental transitions that influence their mental health. Internal insecurity, identity exploration, and heightened sensitivity to social judgment make them more vulnerable to psychological distress. This aligns with (Bhugra et al., 2013), who explain that emotional balance and social environment significantly shape mental well-being. Among college students, mental disorders such as anxiety and depression commonly appear when young people transition into independent living. (Jain, 2024b) found that hormonal imbalance intensifies emotional instability, making young individuals, especially young women more sensitive to stress, anxiety, and overthinking. Furthermore, (Muktifada Matilda et al., 2025) show that digital overload, global uncertainty, and peer comparison place continuous pressure on Gen Z. Combined with weakened future-thinking abilities (Tang et al., 2023), these factors make mental health problems more likely.

2. How does social media contribute to anxiety and overthinking?

Generation Z spends a significant portion of their daily life online. Excessive social media use leads to comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), cyber stress, and insecurity. (Muktifada Matilda et al., 2025) note that unrealistic standards of beauty and success on digital platforms undermine self-confidence and emotional stability. According to (Tang et al., 2023), continuous negative thoughts derived from online comparison weaken future-thinking abilities. When individuals cannot imagine positive outcomes, they become trapped in cycles of anxiety and rumination. Additionally, (Alivia Khoirunnisa et al., 2025) show that overuse of social media increases cognitive overload, which contributes to overthinking. Their study reveals that mindfulness techniques are effective in helping Gen Z break the cycle of online-related rumination.

3. What is the role of stress and academic pressure in worsening mental health?

Academic life exposes students to heavy workloads, tight deadlines, financial struggles, and uncertainty about the future. Biologically, (Jain, 2024b) adds that hormonal fluctuations can heighten stress responses, causing emotional dysregulation and making students more vulnerable to academic burnout.

4. What are the impacts of mental health problems on daily functioning?

Poor mental health affects productivity, concentration, sleep quality, and decision-making skills. (Bhugra et al., 2013) emphasize that emotional stability is essential for functioning effectively in social and academic contexts. College students experiencing anxiety or depression may withdraw from campus activities, experience low motivation, or develop poor academic performance. According to (Tang et al., 2023), repetitive negative thinking disrupts future imagining and creates mental fatigue. Persistent stress may even lead to symptoms such as insomnia, panic attacks, or suicidal thoughts if not properly addressed.

5. What strategies are effective to improve mental well-being in Generation Z?

Effective mental health strategies for Gen Z involve early intervention, emotional support, and environments that promote psychological resilience. (Muktifada Matilda et al., 2025) suggest that educational institutions must provide holistic support involving academic guidance, peer support, and emotional counseling. (Alivia Khoirunnisa et al., 2025) emphasize that mindfulness techniques, such as the STOP method, significantly reduce rumination and help individuals regulate emotions. These techniques strengthen attention control and reduce the intensity of overthinking. Other effective strategies include balanced technology use, self-care routines, open communication with trusted individuals, and emotional expression. From a biological perspective, (Jain, 2024b) highlights that regulating hormonal balance and maintaining physical health also support emotional stability. Furthermore, (Tang et al., 2023) suggest that strengthening future-thinking skills, such as goal-setting and positive visualization can reduce the cognitive triggers of overthinking.

E. Conclusion

According to (Tang et al., 2023) and other supporting studies, it can be concluded that overthinking among Generation Z is a result of problems in future thinking caused by social pressure, anxiety, and depression. Depression makes it difficult to imagine a positive future (future vividness), while anxiety caused threat bias, making people think more about bad possibilities (negative valence). As

a result, teenagers lost a motivation and direction in life and get stuck in repetitive thoughts without solutions.

Interpersonal communication skills are very important to break this cycle. When teenagers can express emotions openly and receive social support, they are more able to think clearly about their future. Institutional support such as campus counseling programs digital counseling platforms are also adaptive and relevant for the digital generation.

This study suggests that effective interventions to reduce overthinking should focus on three main approaches:

1. Cognitive based intervention, developing reflective and future oriented cognitive training to increase clarity and optimism in future thinking.
2. Communication based support, strengthening interpersonal communication and social support systems in families and schools.
3. Digital mental health platforms, providing technology-based counseling services that are easy for Generation Z to access.

By improving positive future thinking and open communication, young people can reduce overthinking and build stronger mental resilience future studies are recommended to explore how digital interventions using future thinking therapy can work effectively in the Indonesian cultural context, fitting local values and the characteristics of today's youth.

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