**When Mental Health Becomes a Trend**

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In recent years, mental health has become a prominent topic in social media and popular culture. While increased awareness is beneficial, the romanticization of mental health struggles through trends like the “sad girl aesthetic” raises questions about its impact on teenagers.

#### **The Rise of Mental Health Trends**

Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram have played a pivotal role in making mental health discussions more accessible. Hashtags like #MentalHealthMatters have amassed millions of views, enabling teens to share their stories and find community. However, some trends unintentionally glorify conditions like depression or anxiety, often reducing them to aesthetic elements. For instance, videos with melancholic music, dim lighting, and captions about emotional pain frequently go viral, especially among teenagers seeking validation.

A 2022 Pew Research Center study found that 37% of teens feel social media provides support for mental health issues, but 25% reported that it made their struggles worse due to unrealistic portrayals and comparison.

#### **The Danger of Romanticizing Pain**

Romanticising mental health struggles can normalise unhealthy behaviours. A 2021 study published in *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* found that teens exposed to content glamorising self-harm were twice as likely to report engaging in such behaviour themselves. This suggests that trends may inadvertently reinforce negative coping mechanisms.

Moreover, when mental health is treated as a trend, it risks trivialising serious conditions. Teens may adopt a performative attitude, claiming struggles they don’t experience, which can dilute genuine advocacy efforts.

#### **The Positive Side of Awareness**

Despite its risks, the visibility of mental health on social media has also reduced stigma. A survey by the American Psychological Association (2023) indicated that 54% of teens feel more comfortable seeking help after seeing others openly discuss mental health online. Online influencers and campaigns like #EndTheStigma have created safe spaces for teenagers to seek guidance and resources.

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While the increased visibility of mental health issues in media and online platforms has potential benefits, the trend-driven nature of these discussions can lead to harm. Moving forward, it is crucial to promote authentic, educational, and responsible portrayals of mental health to ensure that awareness efforts lead to positive outcomes rather than glorification.

#### **References**

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