Health and Environmental Drivers of Wellbeing: A Mental Health Mediation Model in Generation Z

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how healthy living factors such as health awareness, healthy living behavior, haze pollution, healthy food choices, and physical activity influence wellbeing of Generation Z. Furthermore, the study assesses how mental health mediates the relationship between healthy living factors and wellbeing. This is a quantitative research method with correlational and causal research design. Primary data for this study were obtained through a structured, self-administered questionnaire, developed to capture comprehensive quantitative insights from Generation Z. Data were collected from 247 respondents via google form. The prepared dataset was then imported into SPSS version 20 for comprehensive statistical analysis. The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the changing well-being dynamics of Generation Z in Nepal. The results indicate that health awareness, healthy lifestyle practices, healthy food choices, and engagement in physical activities positively contribute to Gen Z's overall well-being, while haze pollution has a significantly negative impact. Furthermore, mental health plays a moderating role in shaping this relationship. As a generation influenced by digital connectivity, easy access to information, and environmental challenges, their well-being is largely grounded in mental health, health literacy, and dietary habits. The research indicates that general lifestyle habits and environmental awareness have a lesser direct impact than expected. The study highlights that improving their well-being requires focusing on building mental resilience, providing credible health education, and supporting informed lifestyle choices. Addressing deeper psychological and informational needs is essential for enhancing the overall well-being of Nepali youth. Need for Mental health support, better health communication strategies, Holistic well-being policies. Future studies should focus on Information behavior, Perception-based health models.

Keywords – Generation Z, Health awareness, Healthy food choices, Physical activities, Wellbeing.

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1. Introduction

Generation Z, also called Gen Z, grew up in an era marked by the 2008 global financial crisis, climate change anxiety, and political polarization (Twenge et al., 2017). These events have shaped their worldview, making them risk-aware, cautious, and mentally burdened. As a result, Gen Z views mental health and overall well-being as essential, not optional. Castellini et al. (2023) conceptualize health awareness as an individual's evaluation of their health status and active engagement in its maintenance, including adopting healthy lifestyles and seeking and utilizing health-related information. Synthesizing these perspectives, health awareness denotes a condition wherein individuals possess heightened understanding and consciousness regarding their health and surroundings, empowering them to undertake appropriate measures to sustain and enhance their well-being. According to the World Health Organization (2021), air pollution is responsible for approximately 7 million premature deaths per year, and children and young adults are among the most vulnerable. The mental health condition of the Z Generation is based on data that 40% of Gen Z feel stressed or anxious all the time (Deloitte, 2023).

This generation is more likely to report feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness than any previous generation (Twenge et al., 2017). Rosen et al. (2013) and Vaterlaus et al. (2015) argue that Gen Z's constant connection to social media (Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat) contributes to social comparison cyberbullying, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and Sleep disturbances. The research published in the Environmental Health Perspectives stated that exposure to PM2.5 and NO_2 has measurable impacts on youth cognition, memory, and mood regulation (Berman et al., 2019). According to a Tribhuvan University public health study (2021), more than 35% of food samples collected from Kathmandu roadside vendors showed excess levels of airborne contaminants.

The word generation is defined as a group of people who come to share a similar culture, the purpose of which is to provide them with a collective consciousness that seeks to integrate the generation over a predefined timeframe. Generation Z places a high value on mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being, more so than previous generations. This shift is deeply rooted in their unique upbringing, exposure to technology, socio-economic challenges, and evolving social norms. This exposure has heightened Gen Z's awareness of the mental health consequences of digital life, leading to increased demand for digital detox, therapy apps, mindfulness, and mental health resources.

Many members of Gen Z, especially those in urban or developing regions (like parts of South Asia, including Nepal and India), are growing up with consistently poor air quality. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), air pollution is responsible for approximately 7 million premature deaths per year, and children and young adults are among the most vulnerable. Health enables individuals to maintain optimal bodily functions and engage in diverse and sustained activities (Lazaroiu et al., 2019) ensuring happiness and productivity. Ultimately, health constitutes a dynamic balance between risk factors and the environment (Adhikari et al, 2025). Sustainable consumption of healthy foods should align with daily lifestyles and habits (Reisch et al., 2013).

Given the complex interplay of Health awareness and environmental factors, this paper examines the determinants of wellbeing of Generation Z among universities student of Nepal. Specifically, it investigates the mediating role of mental health in shaping wellbeing of Generation Z. This research advances the existing literature by offering a context specific examination of how health awareness and environmental factor jointly influence wellbeing of Generation Z. Its outcome provides valuable insights for educational institutions, public health agencies and youth organization in designing targeted health literacy campaigns, emphasizing practical knowledge, mental health care, and nutritional awareness. Ultimately, the study's finding aims to contribute to improve the wellbeing of Nepalese youth on building mental resilience, promoting creditable health education, and enabling informed lifestyle choices.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Theoretical Background

The dimension of lifestyle choices is informed by Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). SCT (Bandura, 1986) emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behavior, and environment, highlighting the importance of observational learning, self-efficacy, and reinforcement in shaping health behaviour (Chaudhary et al, 2024). This theory is particularly useful in understanding how peer influence and media exposure affect Generation Z's lifestyle choices. This framework has been widely used to explore and influence health related behavior. Aryal (2022) utilized Social Cognitive Theory to examine how teachers' health behaviors serve as role models for students, impacting their health choices in secondary schools of Bagmati Province, Nepal. Lives of people, whether they are employees or general public, can be made enrichment by creating healthy or stress-free environment (Pokhrel et al., 2022). Similarly, Adhikari et al. (2018) conducted a rapid review highlighting the effectiveness of Social Cognitive Theory based interventions in obesity prevention, emphasizing constructs like self-efficacy and social support in developing countries, including Nepal. Organizations can enrich their employees' lives be creating a bullying-free work environment.

Variables Used (Healthy Living Factors)

Health Awareness

Nutbeam (2008) emphasizes that health literacy, a concept closely linked to health awareness, is critical for enabling individuals to navigate healthcare systems effectively and engage in behaviors that promote long-term health outcomes. Sorensen et al. (2012) further highlight that enhanced health awareness can lead to healthier behaviors, reducing susceptibility to chronic diseases and improving quality of life. In the context of Generation Z, who face unique challenges such as digital overload and increased mental health concerns, heightened health awareness can foster proactive health management, thereby enhancing well-being (Cutilli & Bennett, 2009). The empowerment derived from knowledge enables youth to adopt self-care strategies, seek timely medical support, and mitigate risks related to unhealthy behaviors, which collectively contribute to improved life satisfaction and psychological resilience (Pleasant, 2014).

Healthy Living Behavior

The adoption of healthy living behaviors contributes directly to physical health by enhancing cardiovascular function, strengthening immune response, and improving metabolic health, which are essential for sustaining energy and vitality during adolescence and young adulthood (Warburton & Bredin, 2017). Moreover, Biddle et al. (2019) discuss how healthy lifestyle practices positively influence psychological well-being by reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. For Generation Z, whose lifestyles are increasingly sedentary and screen-focused, encouraging healthy living behaviors is particularly important to counteract negative health trends. Consistent engagement in healthy routines supports better mood regulation, cognitive functioning, and social interactions, thereby contributing to a holistic sense of well-being (Biddle & Asare, 2011).

Healthy Food Choices

Nutrition directly affects not only physical health but also cognitive performance and emotional stabil[i]ty. Jacka et al. (2017) highlight that diets rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins are associated with reduced risks of depression and anxiety, common mental health

issues among youth. Nutrient-dense foods provide essential vitamins and minerals necessary for brain function and hormonal balance, which in turn support mood regulation and stress resilience. Additionally, poor dietary patterns, such as high consumption of processed foods and sugars, have been linked to increased inflammation and oxidative stress, factors that negatively impact mental and physical health (Jacka et al., 2017). Given the rapid urbanization and lifestyle shifts affecting Generation Z, fostering healthy eating habits is critical to prevent long-term health complications and enhance their subjective well-being.

Haze Pollution

Environmental stressors like air pollution negatively affect respiratory and cardiovascular health, and have been linked to increased psychological distress (Kim et al., 2016). However, heightened perception and awareness of pollution can motivate adaptive behaviors such as the use of protective masks and avoidance of outdoor activities during high pollution periods, potentially mitigating health impacts (Evans & Kantrowitz, 2002). In the context of Generation Z, who are increasingly concerned with environmental sustainability and climate change, this awareness may translate into behaviors and attitudes that contribute positively to their well-being by fostering a sense of agency and proactive health management.

Mental Health

Good mental health allows individuals to cope effectively with the demands and stressors of daily life, facilitating positive relationships, productivity, and emotional balance (World Health Organization, 2013). Keyes (2007) emphasizes that positive mental health is more than the absence of illness; it encompasses flourishing and the presence of psychological well-being, which predicts life satisfaction and social engagement. For Generation Z, mental health challenges are particularly salient due to pressures from social media, academic expectations, and uncertainties about the future (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Physical Activity

Regular physical activity improves cardiovascular health, muscular strength, and endurance, which contribute to greater energy and reduced risk of chronic diseases (Biddle & Asare, 2011). Psychologically, exercise promotes the release of endorphins and neurotransmitters such as serotonin, which help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and elevate mood (Reiner et al., 2013). For Generation Z, maintaining an active lifestyle can counterbalance sedentary habits related to digital device use, thus improving both physical health and mental resilience. Additionally, participation in physical activities often facilitates social interactions and community engagement, further enhancing subjective well-being (Biddle et al., 2019).

Relationship between Variables

Health Awareness and Wellbeing of Gen Z

Nutbeam (2008) emphasizes that health literacy, a concept closely linked to health awareness, is critical for enabling individuals to navigate healthcare systems effectively and engage in behaviors that promote long-term health outcomes. Sorensen et al. (2012) further highlight that enhanced health awareness can lead to healthier behaviors, reducing susceptibility to chronic diseases and improving quality of life. In the context of Generation Z, who face unique challenges such as digital overload and increased mental health concerns, heightened health awareness can foster proactive health management, thereby enhancing wellbeing (Cutilli & Bennett, 2009).

The empowerment derived from knowledge enables youth to adopt self-care strategies, seek timely medical support, and mitigate risks related to unhealthy behaviors, which collectively contribute to improved life satisfaction and psychological resilience (Pleasant, 2014). Based on the argument, the paper hypothesized that;

Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant positive relationship between health awareness and the wellbeing of Generation Z.

Healthy Living Behavior and Wellbeing of Gen Z

The adoption of healthy living behaviors contributes directly to physical health by enhancing cardiovascular function, strengthening immune response, and improving metabolic health, which are essential for sustaining energy and vitality during adolescence and young adulthood (Warburton & Bredin, 2017). Moreover, Biddle et al. (2019) discuss how healthy lifestyle practices positively influence psychological wellbeing by reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. For Generation Z, whose lifestyles are increasingly sedentary and screen-focused, encouraging healthy living behaviors is particularly important to counteract negative health trends. Consistent engagement in healthy routines supports better mood regulation, cognitive functioning, and social interactions, thereby contributing to a holistic sense of wellbeing (Biddle & Asare, 2011). Based on the argument, the paper hypothesized that;

Hypothesis (H2): There is a significant positive relationship between healthy living behaviors and the well-being of Generation Z.

Healthy Food Choices and Wellbeing of Gen Z

Nutrition directly affects not only physical health but also cognitive performance and emotional stability. Jacka et al. (2017) highlight that diets rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins are associated with reduced risks of depression and anxiety, common mental health issues among youth. Nutrient-dense foods provide essential vitamins and minerals necessary for brain function and hormonal balance, which in turn support mood regulation and stress resilience. Additionally, poor dietary patterns, such as high consumption of processed foods and sugars, have been linked to increased inflammation and oxidative stress, factors that negatively impact mental and physical health (Jacka et al., 2017). Given the rapid urbanization and lifestyle shifts affecting Generation Z, fostering healthy eating habits is critical to prevent long-term health complications and enhance their subjective well-being. Based on the argument, the paper hypothesized that;

Hypothesis (H3): There is a significant positive relationship between healthy food choices and the well-being of Generation Z.

Haze Pollution and Wellbeing of Gen Z

Environmental stressors like air pollution negatively affect respiratory and cardiovascular health, and have been linked to increased psychological distress (Kim et al., 2016). However, heightened perception and awareness of pollution can motivate adaptive behaviors such as the use of protective masks and avoidance of outdoor activities during high pollution periods, potentially mitigating health impacts (Evans & Kantrowitz, 2002). In the context of Generation Z, who are increasingly concerned with environmental sustainability and climate change, this awareness may translate into behaviors and attitudes that contribute positively to their well-being by fostering a sense of agency and proactive health management. Based on the argument, the paper hypothesized that;

Hypothesis (H4): There is a significant negative relationship between haze pollution exposure and the well-being of Generation Z.

Mental Health and Wellbeing of Gen Z

Good mental health allows individuals to cope effectively with the demands and stressors of daily life, facilitating positive relationships, productivity, and emotional balance (World Health Organization, 2013). Keyes (2007) emphasizes that positive mental health is more than the absence of illness; it encompasses flourishing and the presence of psychological well-being, which predicts life satisfaction and social engagement. For Generation Z, mental health challenges are particularly salient due to pressures from social media, academic expectations, and uncertainties about the future (Pew Research Center, 2019). Based on the argument, the paper hypothesized that;

Hypothesis (H5): There is a significant positive relationship between mental health status and the well-being of Generation Z.

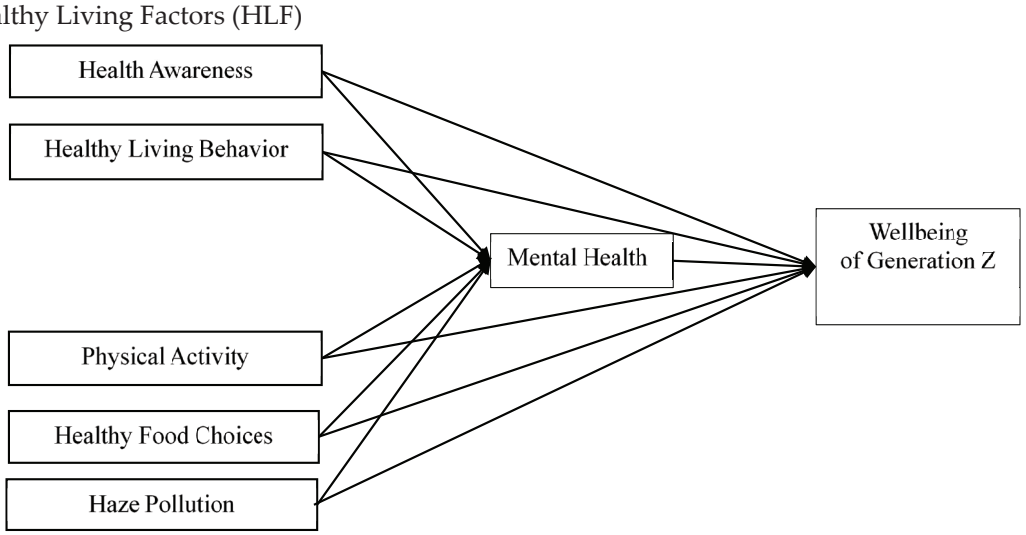
Physical activity and Wellbeing of Gen Z

Regular physical activity improves cardiovascular health, muscular strength, and endurance, which contribute to greater energy and reduced risk of chronic diseases (Biddle & Asare, 2011). Psychologically, exercise promotes the release of endorphins and neurotransmitters such as serotonin, which help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and elevate mood (Reiner et al., 2013). For Generation Z, maintaining an active lifestyle can counterbalance sedentary habits related to digital device use, thus improving both physical health and mental resilience. Additionally, participation in physical activities often facilitates social interactions and community engagement, further enhancing subjective well-being (Biddle et al., 2019). Based on the argument, the paper hypothesized that;

Hypothesis (H6): There is a significant positive relationship between physical activity and the well-being of Generation Z.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Source: (Agustian et al., 2024; Zhou et.al., 2019)

3. Research Method

This study adopted a quantitative research approach employing both descriptive and causal research designs to examine the relationship between healthy living factors such as health awareness, lifestyle choices, environmental factors, and the well-being of Generation Z. Generation Z has shown a higher tendency to talk about and seek help for issues such as anxiety, depression, stress, and burnout compared to previous generations (Twenge et al., 2019). A study by Seemiller & Grace (2016) found that Gen Z students often feel isolated, overwhelmed, and disconnected from traditional support systems. The descriptive component aimed to summarize the patterns and characteristics of these variables within the target population, while the causal design sought to determine the extent to which specific independent variables influence the dependent variable that is well-being. Data were collected through a structured, self-administered online questionnaire, allowing for broad participation and minimal researcher interference. This design was selected for its ability to generate statistically generalizable results, support hypothesis testing, and provide empirical insight into the health-related behaviors and perceptions of Nepali youth aged 16 to 25 years. Individuals aged 16 to 25 years are accessible for surveys and interviews, especially in schools, colleges, and workplaces. Following data collection, responses were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 20, with appropriate statistical techniques including descriptive analysis, correlation, and regression.

Generation Z of Kathmandu valley is the target population for the study. Kathmandu is the most populous city in Nepal, with a population of 2,017,532 as per the 2021 Census. Approximately 20% of Nepal's total population is between the ages of 16 and 25 years, making Kathmandu a significant urban center for this demographic characteristics. The sampling is purposive sampling because for in-depth understanding and time frame of the study. Hair et al. (2016) recommend that the sample size should be five times (minimum) or ten times (maximum) larger than the items to be used. This study used 37 items to assess six variables. Based on the recommendations of Hair et al. (2016), the sample size could range from 185 to 370. A total of 247 respondents participated in the survey.

Measurement Instrument

The assessment of health awareness and environmental factors in relation to Gen Z's well-being was guided by prior studies, adopting similar items to evaluate the variables of interest. A five-point Likert scale was employed, where a rating of 1 indicated "Strongly Disagree" and a rating of 5 represented "Strongly Agree."

4. Analysis and Results

Demographic Information

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
16-18	27	10.9
19-21	69	27.9
22-24	99	40.1
24 and above	52	21.1
Gender		
Male	113	45.7
Female	134	54.3
Education Level		
+2 (Higher Secondary)	40	16.2
Bachelor's	177	71.7
Masters	30	12.1
Occupation		
Student	168	68.0
Self-employed	40	16.2
Employed (full time)	27	10.9
Others	12	4.9

A total of 247 responses were considered for analysis. The gender demographics of the data consisted of 45.7% male and 54.3% female. The majority of the respondents were from the age group of 22 – 24 years, which is 40.1% of the total sample.

Reliability Testing

Table 2

Reliability Analysis

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Items	Adapted From
WB	0.753	6	Agustina et.al (2024); Zhou et. al (2019)
HA	0.915	5	Agustina et.al (2024)
HLB	0.768	6	Agustina et.al (2024)
PA	0.791	5	Bencsik et. al (2019)
HP	0.828	5	Zhou et. al (2019)
MH	0.746	4	Akbar et.al (2024)
HFC	0.615	6	Agustina et.al (2024)

Note: WB= Well-Being of Gen Z, HA= Health Awareness, HLB= Healthy Living Behavior, PA= Physical Activities, HP= Haze Pollution, MH= Mental Health, and HFC= Healthy Food Choice.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to ensure the internal consistency for each construct. As shown in Table 3, the overall Cronbach's alpha for the instrument was 0.831, which is a good internal consistency. Most constructs demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency, with alpha values exceeding the widely accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Notably, Health Awareness (α = 0.915) and Haze Pollution (α= 0.828) exhibited excellent reliability, suggesting strong coherence among their respective items. Similarly, Physical Activity (α = 0.791) and Healthy Living Behaviors (α = 0.768) showed good internal consistency, confirming the reliability of their measurements. The slightly lower coefficient for Healthy Food Choices (α = 0.615) falls just below the conventional 0.70 benchmark; however, it remains within the acceptable range for exploratory research. Pallant (2001) and Hair et al. (2010) suggest that Cronbach's alpha values above 0.60 are deemed sufficient for preliminary or exploratory studies, particularly when dealing with complex human behaviors and attitudinal constructs. Taken together, these results affirm that the measurement scales used in this study demonstrate a high degree of internal reliability, allowing for confidence in the consistency of the responses. Therefore, the instruments are considered robust and appropriate for further statistical procedures, including descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 3

Descriptive statistics

Construct	No. of Respondent	Mean Value	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
WB	247	4.1586	.58274	-.919	.540
HA	247	4.1231	.63279	-.642	-.106
HLB	247	3.9528	.67623	-.664	-.185
PA	247	3.7636	.75350	-.306	.096
HP	247	3.8235	.67234	-.276	.198
MH	247	3.3957	.74032	-.168	.297
HFC	247	3.9740	.66863	.493	-.657

Note: WB= Well-Being of Gen Z, HA= Health Awareness, HLB= Healthy Living Behavior, PA= Physical Activities, HP= Haze Pollution, MH= Mental Health, and HFC= Healthy Food Choice.

The results reveal that the Well-being of Generation Z recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.1586), suggesting that, on average, the respondents reported a relatively high level of subjective well-being. The mean values of the constructs HA, HLB, PA, HP, HFC, and WB all have mean score above 3.3 which indicates that the majority of the respondents tend towards fair and agree options of the Likert scale measurement. The values of standard deviation of the constructs all fall in the range from 0 to 1. This may reflect a positive outlook and life satisfaction among the sample group, despite varying exposures to environmental and lifestyle challenges. The skewness values for all variables ranged from (- 0.919 to 0.493), indicating that the data distributions are generally symmetrical, with only minor deviations from normality. The kurtosis values for the study variables ranged from (- 0.657 to 0.540), indicating that all variables fall within the acceptable threshold of ±1 (George & Mallery, 2010), thus supporting the assumption of normality required for parametric testing.

Correlation Matrix

Table 4

Correlation Analysis

Variable	WB	HA	HLB	PA	HP	MH	HFC
WB	1	.745**	.696**	.424**	.210**	.513**	.733**
HA		1	.707**	.409**	.062**	.149**	.614**
HLB			1	.545**	.118**	.289**	.702**
PA				1	.188**	.205**	.386**
HP					1	.461**	.196**
MH						1	.328**
HFC							1

N=247

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows the correlation matrix of the independent variables HA, HLB, PA, HP, MH, and HF with consideration of the dependent variable WB. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships between Well-being and its potential predictors. A very strong positive correlation was found between Health Awareness (HA) and Well-being (WB) ($r = .745$, $p < .01$). This suggests that individuals who possess greater knowledge and consciousness about health-related issues tend to report higher levels of well-being. This aligns with prior research highlighting the role of health literacy in empowering individuals to make informed lifestyle choices that enhance psychological and physical health (Sørensen et al., 2012).

Regression Analysis

Table 5

Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
	B Error	Std.				Tolerance VIF
(Constant)	.889	.135		6.594	.000	.463
HA	.345	.032	.471	10.612	.000	2.159
HLB	.032	.041	.041	.774	.439	.329 3.036
PA	.022	.025	.032	.871	.384	.685 1.459
HP	-.040 .028		-.050	-1.443	.150	.766 1.306
MH	.254	.028	.350	9.765	.000	.711 1.406
HFC	.234 .035		.298	6.638	.000	.455 2.199
Adjusted R-squared		.775				
F		142.364	Sig (F) .000			

Table 5 provide the summary of regression analysis along with the values of VIF and tolerance. The regression model yielded an adjusted R^2 of 0.775, indicating that approximately 77.5% of the variance in well-being can be explained by the combined effect of the six predictors. The model was statistically significant overall, as evidenced by the F-statistic of 142.364 ($p < .001$), confirming the joint predictive power of the variables included in the analysis (Hair et al., 2010).

Mediation Analysis

Table 6

Regression Coefficients for Mediation Analysis

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	0.72	0.16	4.55	< .001	[0.41, 1.03]
HLF	0.72	0.04	16.98	< .001	[0.64, 0.81]
MH	0.18	0.03	6.05	< .001	[0.12, 0.24]

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval;
HLF = Healthy Living Factors (independent variables); MH = mental health (mediator).

In the Table 6, the regression analysis indicates that the healthy living factors (HLF) significantly predicts the MH ($B = 0.72$, $p < .001$), suggesting a strong direct effect. Additionally, the mediator (MH) also significantly predicts the outcome variable WB ($B = 0.18$, $p < .001$), supporting the presence of a mediation effect. The confidence intervals for all predictors do not include zero, reinforcing that the effects are statistically significant. These results suggest that MH (Mental Health) partially mediates the relationship between HLF and the outcome variable WB.

Hypothesis Confirmation Table

Table 7

Hypothesis Testing

S.N.	Hypothesis	Correlation	Regression	Result
H1	There is a significant positive relationship between health awareness and the well-being of Generation Z.	Significant	Significant	Accepted
H2	There is a significant positive relationship between healthy living behaviors and the well-being of Generation Z.	Significant	Not Significant	Rejected
H3	There is a significant positive relationship between healthy food choices and the well-being of Generation Z.	Weak Significant	Not Significant	Accepted
H4	There is a significant negative relationship between haze pollution exposure and the well-being of Generation Z.	Significant		Rejected

H5	There is a significant positive relationship between mental health status and the well-being of Generation Z.	Significant	Not Significant	Accepted
H6	There is a significant positive relationship between physical activity and the well-being of Generation Z.	Significant		Rejected

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the influence of health awareness, lifestyle behaviors, environmental factors, and mental health on the overall well-being of Generation Z in the urban context of Nepal. The results reinforce several theoretical assumptions while offering points of divergence from previous empirical studies conducted in other Asian countries. Health awareness is the most significant predictor of well-being ($\beta = 0.471$, $p < .001$) which is consistent with the conclusions drawn by Agustina et al. (2024) in the Indonesian context. Their study found that Gen Z individuals with higher health consciousness were more inclined to engage in preventive health behaviors and sustainable consumption practices, ultimately improving life satisfaction. Similarly, Sorensen et al. (2012) emphasized the foundational role of health literacy in empowering individuals to make healthier lifestyle decisions, an idea substantiated by the strong association found in this study.

Healthy Food Choices also demonstrated a statistically significant positive effect on well-being ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < .001$), reinforcing findings by Agustina et al. (2024), who noted that Gen Z's trust in health information and food quality labels shaped their consumption behaviors and health outcomes. In contrast to Agustina et al. (2024); however, Healthy Living Behaviors and Physical Activity although correlated with well-being did not show significant effects in the regression model. This inconsistency could be context-specific. In Indonesia, institutional support for healthy living (e.g., urban wellness initiatives, gym culture, and healthy food campaigns) is more prevalent. In Nepal, young individuals might lack access or motivation to regularly engage in these behaviors despite their awareness.

The influence of mental health on well-being ($\beta = 0.350$, $p < .001$) aligns closely with findings by Zhou et al. (2019) and Akbar et al. (2024). Zhou et al. (2019), in their study on haze pollution tolerance among Chinese youth, emphasized psychological resilience as a key buffer against environmental stress. In this study as well, Gen Z respondents with better mental health reported significantly higher levels of well-being underscoring mental health as not just a mediator but also a primary driver of quality of life. Interestingly, Haze Pollution ($\beta = - 0.050$, $p = .150$) was not a significant predictor of well-being in this study. This diverges from Zhou et al. (2019), who found that awareness of and exposure to haze pollution had a substantial psychological and behavioral impact. The weaker effect in the current study may reflect lower public discourse and perceived urgency around air pollution in Nepal compared to China. Without strong environmental literacy or institutional communication, the public may not fully grasp or react to such long-term environmental risks. Thus, this study largely supports existing literature on the positive role of health awareness, food choices, and mental well-being in shaping youth wellness, while also pointing to regional differences in lifestyle behaviors and environmental perceptions that merit closer exploration.

6. Conclusions

This study offers valuable insights for researchers and managers regarding the moderating role of mental health in wellbeing of generation Z. The findings of this study hold important implications for understanding the evolving well-being landscape of Generation Z in Nepal. As a generation shaped by digital interconnectedness, information access, and environmental uncertainty, their well-being appears to be significantly anchored in mental health, health literacy, and dietary behavior. The strong and statistically significant relationship between health awareness and well-being supports the assumptions that awareness and understanding of health risks or benefits motivate individuals to adopt healthier behaviors. Healthy personal habits such as regular sleep, exercise, and stress management emerged as significant predictors. This finding suggests that while Generation Z may be aware of healthy lifestyles, only certain consistent behaviors translate into measurable well-being improvements. This aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, where physiological and safety needs (like health) must be met before individuals can experience psychological well-being. Urban Generation Z populations are frequently exposed to air pollution, noise, overcrowding, limited access to green spaces, and environmental degradation, all of which have been linked to chronic stress, reduced cognitive functioning, and lower life satisfaction (World Health Organization, 2018).

Generation Z is not passive, but selective; they are not just doers but thinkers. Overall, the results highlight the central role of health education and personal habit formation in enhancing the well-being of Gen-Z youth. These findings provide valuable insights for health educators, youth counsellors, and policymakers aiming to support the holistic development of this generation. They prioritize meaningful knowledge, psychological security, and purposeful choices a trend that future research and interventions must not overlook.

7. Implication

Theoretical Implications

This study makes a meaningful contribution to the theoretical discourse on youth well-being in several dimensions. First, it expands the health behavior model by underscoring the significance of health awareness and mental health, thereby lending empirical support to the Health Belief Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior, and highlighting the central role of cognitive and emotional factors in shaping behavioral outcomes and overall life satisfaction. Second, by situating the findings within a regional context and comparing them with studies from countries such as Indonesia and China, the research emphasizes that while sustainable and healthy behaviors are universal ideals, their influence on well-being is shaped by local socio-cultural factors, including health infrastructure, education systems, and environmental challenges. Finally, the study integrates insights from environmental psychology, as evidenced by the limited predictive power of haze awareness, which reveals a research gap in environmental health psychology in Nepal. This finding paves the way for future investigations into how risk perception, media framing, and institutional trust interact to shape ecological health behaviors and mental well-being.

Managerial Implications

From a managerial and policy perspective, the findings provide several actionable insights. Educational institutions and public health agencies could prioritize targeted health literacy campaigns that focus on practical knowledge, mental health care, and nutritional awareness, leveraging digital platforms such as social media to effectively engage Gen Z. Universities

and youth organizations are encouraged to incorporate mental health services and stress management workshops into their wellness initiatives, as early intervention and stigma reduction can significantly enhance long-term well-being. For businesses, particularly those in the food and wellness sectors, the results highlight a growing demand for health-conscious and informed choices among youth, creating opportunities for brands to strengthen their connection with this generation by emphasizing transparency, environmental responsibility, and nutritional integrity. Finally, the relatively weak influence of environmental factors such as haze pollution points to gaps in public engagement and awareness, underscoring the need for stronger governmental action in environmental education, accessible pollution monitoring, and community-level health interventions.

8. Limitations and Direction for the Future Research

This study focuses on urban area i.e. Kathmandu Valley in Nepal, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of Generation Z across nation. Since the study has used Likert scale, all items, regardless of intensity are given the same weight. Most data collected through surveys on participants' self-reporting, which may be affected by recall bias, or inaccurate self-assessment of health behaviors and awareness. A small or non-random sample size may affect the generalizability of the results to the broader Gen Z population. Regardless of its contribution, this study has several gaps that should be acknowledged. The study doesn't consider other factors like digital media influence, socio-economic background, peer influence on Gen Z awareness and behavior. Incorporating these variables presents an important area for future research. The Likert scale (agree–disagree) gives equal weight to all responses, which may miss the depth and detail of participants' true feelings or opinions. Future research could benefit from incorporating more sophisticated measurement techniques, such as mixed-method approaches or open-ended questions, to capture richer insights. This study does not include a comparative analysis between Gen Z and other age groups, which could be a valuable direction for future research. These gaps highlight opportunities for more comprehensive research in future. Given that mediation in this study was examined using a composite variable, it is recommended that future investigations assess the mediating effects of each individual variable separately. Such an approach would allow researchers to identify specific pathways and provide a more specific insights understanding of the relationships among the constructs.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest while preparing this article.

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