

## Individualization and Mental Well-Being among Youth: The Mediating Role of Social Disembedding

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### Abstract

This paper examines the connection between individualization and mental wellbeing, evaluate the impact of individualization on social disembedding and determine the mediating role of social disembedding in the connection. These processes are particularly relevant to the case of young adults in the fast-urbanizing Pakistan, which experiences heightened self-responsibility in the context of diminished institutional support. The quantitative, cross-sectional design was adopted to gather survey data on 385 urban adults (18-35 years old) in Sargodha, Pakistan. Measurement of individualization, social disembedding and mental well-being was done using standardized scales. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test direct and indirect effects. Individualization was positively associated with mental well-being but also significantly increased social disembedding, which negatively affected mental well-being. Social disembedding partially mediated the relationship between individualization and mental well-being. Policies and interventions should strengthen community, family, and institutional support systems to mitigate the mental health costs of individualization in urban Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Individualization, Social Disembedding, Mental Well-Being, Mediation, Urban Pakistan, Late Modernity

### Introduction

Late modern societies are characterized by profound structural transformations that have reconfigured the relationship between individuals and social institutions. Processes such as globalization, neoliberal governance, urbanization, cultural pluralization have weakened the traditional framework of class, family, religious community softened, source of secular identity for people has to break with old ways and it's, as a result, not as stable now as it once was (Purcell, M. 2007). Sociological theorists describe this shift as individualization; under such circumstances, the pathway of one's life is not collectively determined (as was formerly the case) but must be consciously constructed by oneself (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). Although this change can be easily linked to a higher degree of freedom and autonomy, in fact, it creates new sources of uncertainty, risk, responsibility, which are distributed unevenly among the values of various social groups. Consequently, contemporary individuals are becoming more and more compelled to go it alone in making their fateful decisions -about occupations, relationships, lifestyle devoid of the protective influences of the

robust social institutions (Sheldon, G. W. 2012). The loss of a traditional norm and the disintegration of the collective, according to the classical social thinkers, casts doubt upon the social solidarity, psychological well-being. Durkheim through his anomie identifies that the lack of moral control and disembeddedness in society will cause confusion, or even disintegration, instead of the enhanced benefit of all the involved or even individualism (Durkheim, 1897/1951). The condition in the present-day late-modern environment is not so much the product of none whatsoever of social transformation as much as the discharged waves due to high-paced communication, exchange and consumption. In more recent years, the argument that sociological theorists have put forward is that individualization increases the sense of self-responsibility to succeed and fail and that structural hazards have been turned into personal hassles (Beck, 1992; Bauman, 2000). This change makes mental health not only medical or a psychological issue which can best be ascribed to the individuality, but rather a sociological result of structural withdrawal, social bondages which are only precarious and coping mechanisms which prove to be strictly personal (Sheldon, G. W. 2012). Consequently, mental distress is demoralized as a personal failure rather than indicative of other people having the same dislocation. Although the contemporary societies have largely awakened to the mounting mental health issues, sociological solutions are still limited to the insulated regions, where individuals are prescribed wellbeing and social integration as two rather disconnected domains (Parr, H. 2011). It is high time that theoretically informed studies that re-link mental well-being to the structural processes of late modernity, especially, the conflict of autonomy of the individual and social embeddedness, should be developed (Sheldon, G. W. 2012). The paper is an effort to enhance sociological knowledge on how our stress, anxiety, and doubt experiences are conditioned by the current modern social circumstances by situating mental well-being in the broader context: individualization and social disembedding. By doing that, we have found mental well-being as an important indicator of social integration in late modern states. This also adds to the existing discussions of modern societies, theoretical study in sociology and sociology of mental health (Branaman, A. 2007). With the fast growing and changing Pakistan, all spheres of social life are influenced by the technological development; unemployment is the usual condition and families are divided into individuals or smaller groups, which are blocked by other issues (Binns, D., & Mars, G. 1984). These emerging individualism tendencies have been notable especially among the youth and the urban middle classes. With the traditional social integration places such as extended families, religious communities and neighborhoods all straining to adapt, in the same breath there is practically no support of the established institutions in the delivery of mental health care. Thus, it is upon themselves to shoulder the weight of educational tension and insecurity, unequal sex moral imperative, and to rise above their own contradictions, which is the necessity of the individuals in this society (Branaman, A. 2007). They are converted into transformational operations of personality structuration driven to the ground in each individual (Baumert, A., et al. 2017). It is then essential when one contemplates tendencies toward mental well-being within the context of individualization and social disembedding namely why people experience more pressure than ever before but at the same time they are given less and less opportunities to act or speak out-in Pakistan. In placing psychological suffering in the context of more general processes of late modern social change, as opposed to conceiving it as an individually-centered pathology, this research can offer sociologically informed policy advice and empirically-informed and culturally-sensitive mental health paradigms to communities, as well (McDonald, C. E., Granger, C. L., & Remedios, L. J. 2025).

### **Significance of Study**

The research has a considerable theoretical, empirical and practical implication to sociology. In principle, it expands the thoughts in classical sociology to re-define the concepts of social

integration and cultural disorientation in modern times as suggested by Durkheim. It is by incorporating the classical theories with the modern conception regarding the nature of individualism and the liquid society that it contributes significantly to the sociological theory of how structural changes influence the subjective well-being of the people. Specifically, it transforms the condition of the mental wellbeing not as a psychological result but rather as a problem built in. An importance of highlighting the connections between the social theory and sociology of mental health due to the following reasons. The empirical analysis of the study seals a gaping void in the sociological research in the Pakistani context, in which mental well-being must be framed in a clinical or individual-level framework, rather than be given due attention by societal constructs. Through consideration of events such as social disembedding, deterioration of institutional support system and the rise in self-responsibility, the study provides location-specific data on the impact of late modern living conditions on the daily experience of stress, anxiety and social alienation of people. It is especially useful in Global South studies which remains under-represented in globalization arguments on modernity and individualization. Reporting this study can thus contribute to changing the discussion about the trends in globalization so far which has centered on the negative aspects of globalization to a subtler viewpoint of what non-Western societies can teach us, both beneficial and detrimental, about the aspects of this contemporary existence. In practice, the results are significant implications on social policy, mental health intervention and community support system in Pakistan. Disclosing the structural causes of mental distress, the research may make policymakers and social welfare professionals and mental health workers realize the necessity of integrated approaches. Reliable systems of social support, trusted institutions, and development of collective forms of resilience could enhance mental well-being, e.g., people can literally survive and then recover later after eventualities like earthquakes that wipe the entire landscape with entombs. In this manner, the research expands culturally based and socially sensitive reactions to mental health issues within late modern Pakistani society.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To investigate the correlation between individualization and mental health among people in late modern societies.
2. In order to measure the impact of individualization on social disembedding, it is necessary to pay attention to the failure of social bonds and the deinstitutionalization of social relationships.
3. To explore the mediating effect of social disembedding on the association between individualization and mental well-being.

### **Literature Review**

Although it is theoretically based on this more refined reading of modernity, individualization has also been studied empirically based on its implications of life trajectories, social responsibility, and stress. Numerous researches have demonstrated that as the responsibility of people in their own lives is increasing, this final choice causes an increasing psychological load burden. Furlong & Cartmel (2007) point out that youth in late modern Western societies suffer from "choice overload," meaning that they must make major decisions about education, work and relationships for themselves – with all the resulting anxiety and doom. Similarly, Molcho et al. (2018) found that among youth in their first years of prefer adult life, those who take an individual perspective on responsibility levels for the future have higher degrees of stress and depression. Global South studies are already yielding some results and this field is underdeveloped at the moment. Riaz and Rehman (2019) suggest that such decisions are forced upon young career-people in urban Pakistan, and who have to develop their own educational career trajectories and make them without the guidance of the

experience part of their traditional family, which creates conflicts and leaves them with no sense of identity: a kind of localised variant of individualism. In addition, gender assumptions only heighten this load because they have to strike a balance between being self-reliant and the social standards of family responsibilities. Such results show that individualization is not exclusive to the West, but rather has its own variant throughout the world in which rapid social change is being played upon the existing traditions. This is because economic uncertainty to many is equivalent to insecurity of income, social status and future prospects. Asia-based research (Lim & Putnam, 2018) suggests that when individuals assume a total trading responsibility for their careers, economic instability only magnifies stress levels and lowers overall happiness. In Pakistan, where the labor market is unstable and tertiary education very competitive, the mix of individual responsibility and limited structural support is likely to make mental health problems even worse. This reinforces the relevance of investigation in this area. Social disembedding refers to the weakening of personal networks and social support structures in modern societies and consistently finds that this is associated with decreased mental well-being in empirical research. Helliwell & Putnam (2004) report that within urban areas, lower levels of social trust actually predict more worry about life, dissatisfaction with life and higher rates of anxiety, depression on Index Oryx. Likewise, Kawachi & Berkman (2001) show that social isolation and a diminished relational network predict significantly worse medical states including psychological distress (Branaman, A. 2007). Similar patterns have been found in Pakistan. Urbanization and migration have broken down traditional community structures, so that many individuals now have fewer than previously members of their extended family or neighbor nearby to provide mutual aid network support (Soomro et al., 2020). In online social interactions where there is no physical person to share words with face-to-face, the emotional support received may be correspondingly weaker (Ahmad et al., 2021). Empirical work in South Asia (Sharma & Subramanian, 2020) finds that young people experiencing low social embeddedness report higher role ambiguity and greater moral ambivalence, which directly injures their psychological resilience (Sheldon, G. W. 2012). In Pakistan, where traditional kinship and social networks historically alleviated life burdens and disputes, disembedding brings with it practical as well as emotional challenges--hence the need for such equivalences to be explored empirically within a specific culture setting.

Mental well-being has been increasingly studied by sociologists, who emphasize its links with social structures rather than individual pathology alone. Keyes (2002) defines mental well-being as consisting of emotional health, psychological health and social health, where the three are related: if one is well then so will be another two. Empirical evidence suggests that structural factors, including social isolation, rapid modernization and institutional mistrust, affect mental well-being (Umberson and Montez, 2010). Among urban Pakistanis, polls taken recently reveal rising levels of stress, anxiety and depression, the youth and professionals in particular (Soomro et al., 2020). Some of the causes of this phenomenon are a stressful educational and work competition; the absence of traditional family and neighborhood support systems; utter exposure to rapidly shifting social norms. These complications demonstrate the sociological mechanism of mental well-being, not only by the psychology of the individual, but also by numerous more influences (Sheldon, G. W. 2012). It is consistent with the theme of this monographic work. In addition, in which other places can one ask other than in sociological analyses? Empirical studies indicate that there is an interaction between individualization and social disintegration in influencing mental well-being. Articles published in Europe and Asia (Molchoet al., 2018, Lim & Putnam, 2018) help with making the point that individuals with a high level of autonomy and few social interactions feel more anxious, depressed, and subjectively stressed than other individuals. This is according to assertions of sociologists that mental well-being is not an individual

quality; it is both entrenched in social combination, and in the social standard, supportive groups but not an individual attribute (Branaman, A. 2007). There have been numerous studies concerning relations between individualization, social disembedding and mental well which form the foundations of this research model. Indeed, Furlong & Cartmel (2007) find that in a post-industrial society the more people must independently construct their own paths of life, more likely it will also be that they experience disembedding from transitional structures. Such disembedding in turn leads to a loss of both society support and sense of control for individuals as well as increased uncertainty in their lives in hot weather trend which cannot be counted on for two years running snows North or South So while social disembedding remains less directly linked to individualization than mere initial independence statements, the negative impact of living in an independent life are worsened by it nonetheless. Again, Molcho, et al. (2018) and Lim & Putnam (2018) empirically show social disembedding to be a mediator between life autonomy and psychological stress. Although direct empirical evidence is rare, there are some indications in the Pakistani context. Urban youths, responsible for finding their own way through education; employment in whatever they wish; and personal relationships alone already have much greater stress and lower levels of social integration (Riaz & Rehman, 2019; Soomro et al.2020). These studies suggest that individualization itself is not enough to guarantee mental health, thus the issue then becomes how one should look at social disembedding as a mediation role. Researching these mechanisms in Pakistan will not only test the cross-cultural applications of extant theories but also those which are specific to this country those insights essential for social policy and mental health intervention (Sheldon, G. W. 2012). Little research in Global South contexts, particularly Pakistan, examining how these variables relate to one another societal point of view the sociological mechanisms which connect them. There is no study that looked carefully at how disembedding ultimately results in mental illness from individualization. No attempt whatever to integrate culturally contextual issues such as urbanization, family expectations, or the role of religious frames (Sheldon, G. W. 2012). This study aims to fill these gaps by conducting a theory driven empirical investigation of the connections among individualization, social disembedding and mental health focused on urban city in Pakistan.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Attempting to address the issue of individualization versus meditation in the present day, this study attempts to make the contact with the classical / modern sociologies. The conceptual vegetating method amalgamates the relativity in law and social integration theory by Durkheim, The Individualization of War by Beck, (1992) and the liquid modernity theory by Bauman, (2000). It therefore offers a complete closed system to comprehending the structural and personal state of the modern life.

### **Anomie and Social Integration**

Durkheim (1897/1951) theorized that anomie was a state of normlessness that occurs when social regulation is weak and individuals are not aware of what they can do and what their goals in life are acceptable. When the individualization is high, social norms and communal moral direction is less firm, which create disembedding to the traditional social institutions like family, community, and religious institutions. The theory by Durkheim gives a classical framework on the structural origins of psychological tension and lower mental health with a focus that human flourishing does not only rely on individual autonomy but also inclusion into a steady social system.

### **Individualization Thesis**

The classical sociological approach is elaborated by Beck, (1992) and Beck and Beck (2002), who point out that contemporary societies require people to design their own ways of life

with no set norms and roles. Individualization converts structural risks, including economic unpredictability, professional pressures, and societal demands, into personal liabilities, which increases cognitive and emotional load of people. The sense of autonomy in making decisions, which is obligatory in late modernity, plays a role in causing stress, anxiety, and social disconnection, this is the thesis of Beck, (1992), especially when the support is lacking or weakened by the social networks.

### **Liquid modernity**

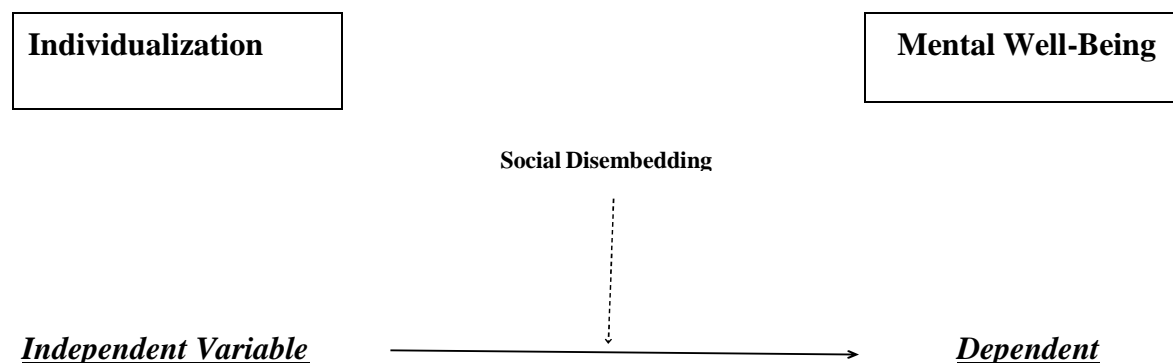
Bauman, (2000) theorizes about modern societies as being liquid modern where social relationships, institutions and normative order are becoming more fluid and temporary. In this regard, social relations are temporal and institutional support is weak, and this plays a role in social disembedding. The ambiguity and instability of liquid modernity add to the problem of individualization, which makes the socio-cultural context of liquid modernity very dependent on individual ability to withstand risk, instability, and social loosening.

### **Integration of Theories**

These three theoretical perspectives together constitute a powerful framework of this study: Durkheim reveals the effects of the lack of social regulation (anomie) on the psychological health. Beck, (1992) expounds on how contemporary people are becoming more and more responsible of their life decisions and how structural change is attributed to individual stress. Bauman, (2000) puts these processes in a broader social context of impermanence, fluidity and detached social networks. This kind of combination assists the research in investigating the role of individualization in the disembedding of social factors, and, as a result, mediate mental well-being, both classical and the contemporary sociological accounts of the specified phenomenon.

### **Conceptual framework:**

#### **Mediating Variable**



### **Methodology**

The research design used in this study was a quantitative, cross-sectional research design that was used to analyze the direct and mediating effects between individualization, social disembedding, and mental wellbeing in the late modern society. The survey-based method of data gathering was used among the urban adults between 18-35 years' old who lived in Sargodha, Pakistan, as a group that was chosen based on the increased exposure to urbanization, individualization, and the modern social forces. Out of educational, occupational, or profession life-oriented people having active present life was purposive sampling to recruit a final sample of 385 respondents (54% men and 46% women) who had various educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, which proved sufficient to provide

mediation analyses. A structured questionnaire of standardized and adapted items was used to collect the data: individualization was assessed through a 12-item scale by Beck and Beck, (2000) estimating individualization using autonomy, self-responsibility, and reflexive life planning, social disembedding was assessed by a 10-item scale modified by Giddens, (1991) which reflected the perceptions of weakening social ties, decreased community involvement, and reliance on abstract systems and mental well-being was assessed using the 14-item Mental To ascertain that the instrument was clear, culturally relevant, and reliable, it was pretested with 30 participants and Cronbachs alpha coefficients revealed high internal consistency values of all scales (individualization  $\alpha = 0.87$ ; social disembedding  $\alpha = 0.85$ ; mental well-being  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). The data were gathered in a period of four weeks in face to face and web based mode in the work places, universities and professional networks under the procedures of informed consent and with the guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality. The partial least squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS was utilized because it was appropriate when dealing with multifaceted models with mediating variables and non-normal data. The analysis proceeded in two stages: assessment of the measurement model using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and discriminant validity (HTMT ratio), followed by evaluation of the structural model through estimation of path coefficients and mediation effects using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences.

## Results

**Table 1: Measurement Assessment Model**

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite reliability(rho-a)</b>
<b>Individualization</b>	0.816	0.805
<b>Social Disembedding</b>	0.870	0.851
<b>Mental Well-being</b>	0.748	0.767

All the constructs exhibit good internal consistency reliability in the measurement model. The alpha values are 0.748 (Mental Well -Being) to 0.870 (Social Disembedding), which is higher than the acceptable alpha of 0.70 which gives a positive indication that the items have a valid measure of their respective constructs. On the same note, the Composite Reliability (rho-A): The values of 0.767 to 0.851 indicate high construct reliability. In general, these findings show that the measurement scales are reliable and can be further analyzed in a structural model.

**Table 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>HTMT Ratio</b>
<b>Individualization → Social disembed</b>	0.47
<b>Individualization → Mental well-being</b>	0.37
<b>Social disembed → Mental well-being</b>	0.42

HTMT ratios of the construct pairs take a value of 0.37 to 0.47, which are far less than the conservative level (0.90) showing a high degree of discriminating validity. The latter validates the fact that every construct Individualization, Social Disembedding, and Mental Well-Being, is conceptually different and has distinct areas of measurement of the model. As a result, the constructs can be used to study structural relationships without any fears of multicollinearity or duplication of concepts.

**Table 3: Structural Model Assessment**

	<b>B</b>	<b>t - value</b>	<b>p - value</b>
<b>Individualization → Mental well-being</b>	0.29	5.12	<.021
<b>Individualization → Social disembed</b>	0.52	10.57	<.001
<b>Social disembed → Mental well-being</b>	-0.41	7.24	<.001
<b>Individualization → Social disembed → Mental wellbeing ( Indirect)</b>	-0.21	6.33	<.002

As the outcomes of the structural model suggest, Social Disembedding is positively dependent on Individualization ( $b = 0.52$ ,  $t = 10.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) where the higher the level of individualization, the weaker the social ties and social integration. Social Disembedding, on the other hand, has a detrimental impact on Mental Well-Being ( $b = -0.41$ ,  $t = 7.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which means that social detachment leads to the decrease in psychological and emotional health. Mental Well-Being is also directly positively influenced by individualization ( $b = 0.29$ ,  $t = 5.12$ ,  $p < 0.021$ ), and the existence of the mediating pathway indicates that the Social Disembedding mediates this effect (indirect effect  $b = -0.21$ ,  $t = 6.33$ ,  $p < 0.002$ ). Altogether, these findings validate the hypothesis that the effect of individualization on mental well-being takes place directly and indirectly via social disembedding.

## Discussion

The results of the current study are empirical to support the complex connection between individualization, social disembedding, and mental well-being based on late modern Pakistani society. In line with individualization thesis posited by Beck, (1992), the findings suggest that the high levels of individualization are the most important predictors of high levels of social disembedding. This is to imply that, as urban grown-ups in Sargodha contend with independent life decisions, in areas of education, work and self-identification the traditional social bonds, such as family, community, and institutional back up, are undermined (McDonald, C. E., Granger, C. L., & Remedios, L. J. 2025). These results are consistent with both the research on western (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Molcho et al., 2018) and South Asian backgrounds (Riaz & Rehman, 2019) indicating that psychosocial impacts of individualism are not exclusive to the West but are also represented by the people of the Global South (Branaman, A. 2007). In addition, the findings verify that social disembedding is detrimental to the mental well-being as Durkheim (1897/1951) stated that this constitutes anomie. People who cannot be connected to sound social networks are more vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and lower levels of life satisfaction, and it is important to emphasize that social integration is indispensable to the psychological and emotional well-being of people (Baumert, A., et al. 2017). The fact that the mediation of social disembedding in the association between individualization and mental well-being is partial suggests that autonomy in itself does not negatively affect mental well-being, but the disruption of social support systems increases the increased psychological load of contemporary life. This is in line with liquid modernity presented by Bauman, (2000) that focuses on the instability and temporary nature of social relationships in modern societies, making them more uncertain and vulnerable (Sheldon, G. W. 2012). The paper also highlights the contextual specificity of such processes in Pakistan. The individualizing aspects of urbanization and economic forces and the lack of community and family institutions in urban cities such as Sargodha intensify the impact of individualization on social disembedding. The mental health of young people is



undermined as they grow more dependent on a set of abstract institutional structures instead of existent social networks (McDonald, C. E., Granger, C. L., & Remedios, L. J. 2025). These results offer empirical evidence to the application of classical sociological theory to the current viewpoints showing that structural changes in late modernity have empirical psychosocial consequences in non-Western societies (Baumert, A., et al. 2017).

## Conclusion

This study proves that individualization affects the mental well-being directly and indirectly due to the social disembedding. The research shows that in the late urban Pakistan, where there is greater autonomy and the self-responsibility, the social bonds are weakened, hence adversely affecting the psychological and social well-being. The partial mediation effect of social disembedding emphasizes the fact that individual choices and the intensity and stability of social networks contribute to the mental well-being. The results are theoretically significant because they help to fill the gaps between the classical perspectives of Durkheim on social integration, the individualization thesis by Beck, (1992), and the liquid modernity by Bauman, (2000) and provide a general framework of the psychosocial impacts of the modern social changes. In practice, the study focuses on the significance of enhancing supporting the community, family unity, and institutional trust to mitigate the adverse mental health consequences of individualization in urban Pakistani settings. To sum up, the study proves that the requirement of modernity to independent management of life is accompanied by both opportunities as well as psychological threats, and that the social embeddedness is essential in ensuring mental health. The insights can be applicable to policy makers, social workers and mental health practitioners who need to formulate the interventions based on individual and social levels of autonomy and social support respectively in the modern Pakistani society.

## Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that future studies must seek to understand the relationship between individualization and social disembedding and the mental wellbeing in various cultural and regional settings in Pakistan including rural areas so that differences in social integration levels and psychological consequences could be evaluated. It is suggested to conduct longitudinal studies that would determine the dynamics of individualization and the process of social disembedding that develops with time and has a compound effect on mental health. Also, the possible moderating variables, including gender, socioeconomic status, and the digital social networks, can be examined in future studies to determine the groups of people who would be most susceptible to the adverse outcomes of social disembedding. Designing interventions which reinforced the family, community, and institutional support mechanisms and creating interventions which bolstered coping and resilience of urban youth under the burden of autonomy and new social demands should also be considered by policy makers and mental health practitioners.

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