

RG To Campaign For Congress in J&K Agencies

Srinagar: Amid poll fervor in Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian National Congress (INC) has finalized a list of 120 star campaigners including the Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi and other top leaders, who will be visiting the Union Territory from next month.

General Secretary of All India Congress Committee (AICC) and party's candidate for Dooru assembly segment, Ghulam Ahmad Mir stated that a total of 120 star campaigners from the party are visiting Jammu and Kashmir after September 07.

He further said that at least 40 star campaigners will be visiting Jammu and Kashmir in each phase, adding that the star campaigners include the Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi and others, who will be visiting both Jammu as well as Kashmir division.

Notably, the three-phased assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir are slated to be held from September 18 and will conclude on October 01 while the counting of votes will take place on October 04.

Mir informed | [More on P6](#)

J&K ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

244 Candidates Clear Nomination Scrutiny For Phase 1

Nomination Of Jailed Sarjan Barkati, 34 Others Rejected

Observer News Service

Srinagar: In accordance with the election schedule issued by Election Commission of India (ECI) for the conduct of Jammu and Kashmir Assembly Elections 2024, the scrutiny of nomination papers for 24 Assembly Constituencies which are going to polling in phase 1st was held on Wednesday, in the office of the respective Returning Officers across seven districts.

During the scrutiny of the nomination papers filed by 279 candidates, candidature of 244 candidates was found valid as per the guidelines of the Election Commission of



India, while nomination papers of 35 candidates, which were found invalid, were rejected. The 35 candidates whose nomination was rejected

include jailed separatist worker Sarjan Ahmad Wagay alias Sarjan Barkati. His daughter Sugra had filed his nomination as an Independent candidate from

Zainapora constituency of Shopian district on Tuesday. Barkati, who shot to fame during the 2016 summer turmoil which broke out after the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani, was first arrested eight years ago and booked under the Public Safety Act. He was again arrested last year and is facing charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

According to the charge sheet filed against him in a court earlier this year, Barkati -- an active ideologue, promoter and supporter of ongoing terrorist-secessionist nexus -- hatched | [More on P6](#)

EC Transfers SSPs, SP In J&K: Sources

In an administrative tone-up ahead of assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir, the Election Commission has directed the transfer of senior superintendents of police of Baramulla and Kupwara and the SP of Handwara and has asked the administration to send a panel of IPS officers to be posted there, sources said on Wednesday.

The poll authority has also approved relieving of SSP Srinagar Ashish Mishra, an IPS officer who was transferred from Jammu and Kashmir to Delhi Police in June 2023 but could not be relieved due to administrative reasons. | [More on P6](#)

ECI Allocates Broadcast Time To Parties

Srinagar: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Wednesday allotted 'broadcast time' and 'telecast time' to political parties for campaigning on the All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan.

In an order, the poll-body today allotted time to nine national and state parties for campaigning on AIR and Doordarshan.

As per details, a base time of 45 minutes has been allotted to each national party and respective 'recognized state parties' in Jammu & Kashmir on the Doordarshan network and All India Radio network in the Union Territory.

The additional time has been decided on the basis of the poll performance of the party in the last assembly election of Jammu & Kashmir. The last election in Jammu & Kashmir was held in 2014.

As per details, Aam Admi Party has been given 45 minutes, Bahujan Samaj Party 52 minutes, Bharatiya Janta Party 162 minutes, Communist Party of India (Marxist) 48 minutes, Congress 137 | [More on P6](#)

Court Sentences Doctor To 2 Years In Jail

Says Using RTI Application On Someone Else's Name Crime Which Affects General Public

M Ahmad

Srinagar: Observing that filing RTI application under somebody else's name is a crime which affects public in general, a court here on Wednesday sentenced a medical officer from Indian Systems of Medicine (ISM) to two years in jail and imposed Rs 50000 as fine on him.

The sentence was announced by the court a day



after convicting the medical officer of offences on charges of cheating by personation by filing RTI application in the name of another person and using the same as genuine document.

"Filing RTI applications under the umbrella of somebody else's name is a crime which not only affects the officials of the ISM department or the persons so impersonated in particular | [More on P6](#)

Won't Contest Elections, Says Mehbooba

Press Trust Of India

Srinagar: PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday said she will not contest the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, pointing out that she would not be able to fulfil her party's agenda in the union territory set up even if she were to become the chief minister.

"I have been chief minister of a government with the BJP which revoked FIRs against 12,000 persons (in 2016). Can we do that now? I, as the chief minister of a government with (PM) Modi, wrote a letter

to separatists to invite them for talks. Can you do that today? I got a ceasefire (implemented) on ground. Can you do that today? If you cannot take back an FIR as chief minister, what does one do with such a post?" she said.

The PDP president was asked if she has had a change of heart on contesting the polls after vice president of arch-rival National Conference Omar Abdullah made a U-turn on his stand of not participating in the polls till Jammu and Kashmir was a union territory.

"Omar himself | [More on P6](#)

PC Releases First List Of Candidates

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Peoples Conference on Wednesday released its first list of seven candidates for the upcoming J&K assembly polls.

As per details, the party has fielded Abdul Gani Vakil from Rafiabab, Nazir Ahmed Laway from Kulgam, Abid Hussain Ansari from Zadibal, Irfan Matoo from Eidgah, Dr. Bashir Ahmed Chalkoo from Uri, Asif Lone from Baramulla, and Muhammad Hamza Lone from Gurez. Asif Lone, a young face from Baramulla town, would | [More on P6](#)

HAJJ-2025

Age Limit For Companions Extended

Observer News Service

Srinagar: In a partial modification in the Hajj Guidelines for Hajj 2025, the Hajj Committee of India (HCoI) has extended the age limit of a companion from an age bracket of 60 to 65 years.

A circular issued by the HCoI, states that in the partial modification in para 2 of the Hajj Guidelines, a person in the age bracket of 60 to 65 years, is

allowed to apply for Hajj 2025 as companion, subject to such companion being a spouse, sibling or child of the pilgrim aged 65 or above.

The circular, however, states that all other companions must be in the age group of 18 to 60 years, on the date specified by HCoI.

Notably, according to the Hajj 2025 policy before the amendment, | [More on P6](#)

Between Promises & Reality: Lessons From Gandbal Tragedy

Asma Majid

Srinagar: The old woman's frail frame trembles as she sits amidst the squalor, her worn chappals sinking into the damp earth beside the putrid mound of garbage. The fetid stench of rotting waste fills the air, but she doesn't flinch, her senses numbed by the anguish that consumes her. Tear-stained and red-rimmed, her eyes stare into the murky Jhelum waters, hoping her son will surface.

As she sits there, her wails pierce the desolate landscape, echoing off the trees and the half-completed bridge that



looms yonder, its unfinished structure a sordid reminder of the life her son will never get to build, its presence a cruel taunt

that deepens her anguish. She rocks back and forth, her grey hair disheveled, her wrinkled hands clasped together in a futile

plea. Tears stream down her weathered cheeks, mixing with the dust and grime on her face.

"Khudaya, my son! My child! Why did you leave?" she laments, her voice cracking with each sob. "What will we do without you? Who cares for us now?"

The garbage mound beside her seems to mock her grief, its discarded remnants insinuating at life's fleeting nature. A tattered shoe, a broken toy, a shattered vase -- each bear witness to a world that callously marched forward, indifferent to the woman's grief.

A grief that struck the village of Gandbal like thunder on

the fateful morning of April 16, 2024, a grief that engulfed all and sundry in and around the village, a devastating tragedy that unfolded in plain sight, left a trail of horror and gloom on all those who witnessed it and those who merely heard about it. A boat, teeming with innocent lives - including school children, their parents, and laborers - catastrophically capsized mere meters from the Batwara banks of Srinagar's Smart City. The vessel, en route from Gandbal on the opposite bank, met its doomed fate, claiming precious lives in the process.

Four months | [More on P6](#)

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Polls Apart

As the Assembly election campaign gains momentum, it is a contest between the old and the still credible regional political order and the new one created out of nowhere in the past five years. And through it all, the BJP looms large over the scene.

The old order is represented by the National Conference and the PDP as well as the Congress party, which is a national party though. The BJP's rise in the former state is a post 2015 phenomenon when for the first time it won 25 of 37 seats from Jammu division in the then Assembly elections. The BJP subsequently formed a coalition government with the PDP which secured 28 seats.

The new order is represented by the Apni Party led by the businessman-turned politician Altaf Bukhari, the DPAP headed by Ghulam Nabi Azad and the People's Conference (PC) of Sajad Lone. Although the PC is an old party, its new avatar owes itself to the political restructuring of the Valley following the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019.

The ongoing Assembly polls are the first major electoral exercise in which the old and the new political order are face to face. Though the NC looks apparently strong and Mehbooba remains politically very much relevant, the parties have a work on hand to retain their centrality. The NC has got a head start by forging an alliance with the Congress. The PDP feels left out.

The unraveling of the Peoples Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), reflects the deep-seated divisions within the ranks of the Valley parties. Originally formed with the lofty goal of advocating for the restoration of Article 370, the PAGD has devolved into little more than a memory, with its constituent parties failing to even convene, let alone pursue their shared objectives. The NC and the PDP, both integral members of the PAGD, have begun charting independent courses driven by their own political calculations - more so, the NC which was the first to go solo in the parliamentary elections in the Valley.

Going forward, the electoral scene looks fragmented, with many parties vying for Assembly seats. Engineer Rashid's Awami Ittehad Party and the surprise entry of the independent candidates affiliated to Jamaat-i-Islami into the fray has added a new dimension to the electoral contest. However, as of now, there is little evidence of any wave in favour of any party, albeit on paper the National Conference looks on a firmer wicket. Things could become clear in the days and weeks to come. Here's wishing the discourse to stay constructive and the situation peaceful.



Should Government Control School Choice of the Children of Government Employees?

Ummar Jamal

The Jammu and Kashmir government on August 18 said that it is discussing a proposal regarding the enrolment of wards of all government employees in state-run schools. This proposal, currently under review, was submitted by a local organization to the monitoring and grievance cell of the Lieutenant Governor's office. The initiative is a welcoming step towards equitable education and can catalyse systemic reforms in the public education system of Jammu and Kashmir.

Some calls in past for such initiative across India:

There have been numerous calls in past across India to make it mandatory for government employees to send their children to government schools from time to time. In 2014 verdict of the Uttar Pradesh High Court, delivered by Justice Sudhir Agarwal, the court directed that all government officials, including those in the judiciary, executive, and public representatives, must send their children to government-run primary schools. The court emphasized that if the children of government officials attended these schools, there would be a significant push to enhance infrastructure, teaching standards, and overall school management, ultimately benefiting all students. The judgment highlighted the disparity in education quality between private and public schools and sought to reduce this gap by making education a shared concern among all societal segments.

Like the judiciary there have been similar calls from legislative and executive. In 2016 Deputy Speaker of Goa Legislative Assembly Vishnu Surya Wagh said that, government should make it compulsory for all its employees and teachers to admit their children to government primary schools (GPS) and not in private primary schools in a bid to improve their standard. Similarly, in 2018, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath encouraged government teachers to enroll their children in government schools operated by the Uttar Pradesh Basic and Secondary Education Boards. Speaking on Teachers' Day, he stated, "Government teachers should send their children to government schools instead of convent or private institutions. Sending your kids to private schools while being a government school teacher casts doubt on your own capabilities."

In 2017, in response to the declining enrollment and closure of government schools, a seven-member committee led by the Karnataka Development Authority (KDA) has advised the Siddaramaiah government to mandate that all government employees and elected representatives enroll their children in government or aided schools.

There have been numerous such calls from different quarters, highlighting need of taking such crucial steps to improve the state of education in government schools in India.

Potential benefits of implementing the proposal

One of the most significant benefits of this proposal is the potential improvement in the quality of education in state-run schools. Public schools in many parts of India, including Jammu and Kashmir, have historically been perceived as under-resourced and underperforming compared to private institutions. This perception often leads to a vicious cycle where families, including those of government employees, opt for private schools, further draining resources and attention from public schools.

“

The government would need to ensure that public schools are sufficiently upgraded in terms of infrastructure, teaching quality, and extracurricular offerings before the policy is fully implemented. Moreover, the government would need to establish a monitoring mechanism to ensure that the policy, if approved, is enforced effectively and that the intended benefits are realized

By mandating that government employees enroll their children in state-run schools, the government could create a vested interest among these employees and thereby help in improving the quality of public education, as was held by Allahabad High court. Government employees, particularly those in decision-making roles, will have a direct stake in ensuring that these schools are well-resourced, adequately staffed, and provide high-quality education. This shift could lead to better infrastructure, more qualified teachers, and overall improvement in school management, as the well-being of their children will be directly impacted by the conditions of these schools.

The proposal also has the potential to introduce a new level of accountability in the public education system. With the children of government officials attending public schools, there would be increased scrutiny of the education system's functioning. Issues such as teacher absenteeism, poor infrastructure, and outdated teaching methods would likely be addressed more swiftly, as those responsible for the education system's oversight would have a personal stake in its success.

Research has consistently shown that when parents are actively involved in their children's education, school performance improves. For example, a study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the United States found that students whose parents were highly involved in their schools had higher academic achievement and better attendance records than those whose parents were less involved. Applying this to government employees, having their children in public schools would likely increase accountability and focus on school quality improvements.

This increased accountability could lead to more effective policy implementation and resource allocation. It could also foster a culture of excellence and high performance in public schools, as the involvement of government employees in the education of their children might lead to the introduction of more innovative and modern teaching practices.

According to a study published in the Journal of Public Economics, when government employees, especially those in decision-making positions, have a direct stake in public schools, there is a higher likelihood of equitable resource allocation. The study found that increased community and parental involvement led to more transparent budgeting and better utilization of resources, ultimately enhancing the quality of education.

Finland's education system is widely regarded as one of the best in the world. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Finnish students consistently rank among the top performers in reading, math, and science. One key factor contributing to this success is the universal use of public schools, which ensures that all students, including those of government officials, receive a high-quality education. This broad enrollment creates a strong incentive for maintaining high standards across the public school system.

Challenges and Considerations

While the potential benefits of this proposal are significant, it is also important to acknowledge the challenges and considerations that come with it. Implementing such a policy would require careful planning to ensure that the transition is smooth and does not disrupt the existing educational environment.

One of the primary challenges would be addressing the concerns of government employees who might be reluctant to enroll their children in public schools due to the current state of these institutions. To counter this, the government would need to ensure that public schools are sufficiently upgraded in terms of infrastructure, teaching quality, and extracurricular offerings before the policy is fully implemented. Moreover, the government would need to establish a monitoring mechanism to ensure that the policy, if approved, is enforced effectively and that the intended benefits are realized. This could involve regular assessments of public schools and the creation of platforms for feedback from government employees and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

The proposal to enrol the children of all government employees in state-run schools is a welcome step that holds the potential to transform the educational system of Jammu and Kashmir. By fostering equality, improving accountability, and enhancing the quality of public education, this initiative could lead to long-term benefits for the region. If executed well, this policy could be a significant milestone in the journey towards an equitable and high-quality education system in Jammu and Kashmir.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer

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Did you know?

The True Wealth in Investing:
Understanding CAGR, XIRR,
Absolute Return, and Annual Return

Irshad Mushtaq

When investing in equities or mutual funds, many are tempted to quickly book profits and exit. However, this mindset can undermine the potential of long-term wealth creation through compounding.

CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate)
CAGR is pivotal in understanding investment growth. It's not just about short-term gains but the US potential for your investment to compound over time. By persistently investing in quality funds and stocks like TCS, your money can grow exponentially.

For instance, consider an initial investment of 10 lakhs. Over the years, if this grows at a CAGR of 20%, it could double every 3.8 years (approximately). This means:

- After 3.8 years, 10 lakhs becomes 20 lakhs.
- After 7.6 years, 20 lakhs becomes 40 lakhs.
- After 11.4 years, 40 lakhs becomes 80 lakhs.
- After 15.2 years, 80 lakhs becomes 160 lakhs, and so forth.

This exemplifies the power of compounding: staying invested in high-quality assets allows significant wealth accumulation over time.

XIRR (Extended Internal Rate of Return)

XIRR is particularly useful when there are multiple investments over different periods. It gives a clear picture of your annualized return considering the actual dates of investments and redemptions. For example, if you invested 10 lakhs in varying tranches over several years, XIRR would account for each inflow and outflow, providing a more accurate performance indicator.

Absolute Return

Absolute Return measures the total gain or loss of an investment over a specified period. For example, if you invested 10 lakhs and after 5 years, the value is 15 lakhs, your absolute return is 50%.

Normal Annual Return

This metric shows the average yearly gain or loss of your investment without compounding effect. For example, if your 10 lakh investment grows to 15 lakhs in 5 years, the normal annual return would be 10% per annum.

Conclusion

Investing is about patience and allowing your investments to compound over time. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of early profit-taking, focus on maintaining investments in quality funds and equities. Aim for a robust CAGR (15% to 22%) for substantial long-term wealth growth.

In essence, the true wealth from investing stems from letting your assets grow uninterrupted, harnessing the power of compounding. Stay the course, and let CAGR, XIRR, absolute return, and annual return guide your investment decisions for enduring wealth creation.

Understanding CAGR, XIRR, Absolute Return, and Annual Return is crucial for successful investing. Focus on the power of compounding with CAGR, track your annualized returns with XIRR, and evaluate your total gains with Absolute Return. Stay invested for long-term wealth creation!

Learn from the insights of @IrshadMushtaq, writer, investor, entrepreneur & Founder of MI Securities! Connect for valuable financial advice at misecurities@bp.sharekhan.com

What Does It Mean to Be Truly Rich?

People See Your Income, Not Your Heart

Ikkz Ikbal

In a world where the sparkle of gold blinds the eye and the rustle of dollar bills drowns out the whispers of kindness, we find ourselves trapped in a society that values wealth over warmth. It's a tale as old as time—people see your money, not your heart. And oh, how tragic that truth is.

Walk into any room, and the first thing that catches the eye isn't the kindness in a person's smile, the sincerity in their gaze, or the warmth in their handshake. No, it's the watch on their wrist, the brand on their suit, or the price tag on their shoes. In this modern age, where we've seemingly traded compassion for currency, people are more interested in the digits in your bank account than the depth of your soul.

Imagine this: a man walks down the street, dressed in simplicity. His clothes aren't designer; his shoes aren't polished. But in his heart lies a treasure trove of love, empathy, and generosity. He's the one who feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, and offers a listening ear to anyone in need. Yet, how many eyes would actually see him for who he truly is? Not many, I'd wager.

Now, let another man stroll by—his shoes gleaming, his suit tailored to perfection, his watch ticking at a thousand dollars per second. People turn their heads, admiration glinting in their eyes. They nod approvingly, eager to align themselves with someone of such apparent success. Never mind that his heart may be as cold as the diamonds in his cufflinks. Never mind that he wouldn't spare a dime for someone in need. To the world, he's a beacon of achievement, a symbol of what everyone should aspire to be.

This obsession with wealth is nothing short of a societal sickness.



THIS OBSESSION WITH WEALTH IS NOTHING SHORT OF A SOCIETAL SICKNESS. It distorts our perceptions, making us value the outer shell more than the inner substance. We forget that money can't buy the most important things—integrity, kindness, love, and compassion

ness. It distorts our perceptions, making us value the outer shell more than the inner substance. We forget that money can't buy the most important things—integrity, kindness, love, and compassion. It's the beating heart that truly defines us, yet we continue to idolize those who flash their cash as if that's all that matters.

Consider the stories we tell our children, the heroes we celebrate. How often do we uplift those who have given their lives to help others, compared to those who have amassed fortunes? We live in a world where billionaires are revered while those who dedicate their lives to service are often overlooked, their contributions buried beneath the glitter-

ing pile of gold that we seem to worship.

And let's not forget the heartache this brings to those who aren't weighed down by wallets bursting at the seams. They walk through life, their hearts full of goodness, yet they are invisible. Their worth is questioned because they don't have the material means to flaunt. It's a cruel

reality, one that leaves so many disillusioned and hurt.

But here's the thing—money may buy you a seat at the table, but it's the goodness of your heart that will keep you there. When the lights dim and the crowds disperse, it's your character, not your cash, that will determine who stands by your side. In the end, it's not the dollars you've stacked that will be remembered, but the lives you've touched, the hearts you've healed.

Money can't buy you a satisfied heart, money can't buy you peace and happiness, and money can't buy you a reason to get up in the morning. Money isn't meant to be your source of comfort when you are hurting or of hope when you are feeling discouraged. Money can't and was

never intended to give you life. To ask money to do any of those things will always lead to money troubles.

So, let's take a moment to peel back the layers, to see beyond the surface. Let's recognize the richness in people's hearts, not just their pockets. Because at the end of the day, a heart of gold is worth more than all the money in the world. It's time to realign our values, to see people for who they truly are—not just what they have.

Real generosity is not dependent so much on income as it is on the capacity of the heart. There are many who have the means to give, but not the heart to give. And there are many, who, the more they have the less they give.

Life should not really be about how much money we accrue, but rather how many people we serve; because the greater your giving, the greater your living. Giving does not devalue your worth and the Prophet said that "charity does not decrease wealth". Remember, we are here to enrich the world, and if we ever forget that we impoverish ourselves.

At the end of the day, when the noise of the world fades and the glitter of wealth loses its shine, it's the kindness you've shown, the lives you've uplifted, and the love you've shared that will echo through time. True wealth isn't measured in dollars, but in the warmth of a grateful smile, the comfort of a helping hand, and the joy of a heart that knows it has done good. So, live richly in spirit, and let your legacy be one of compassion, not currency.

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The Danger of Unlicensed Mental Health Influencers

Kaytee Gillis

The advent of social media has revolutionized how we access and share data, including information about mental health, substance use, trauma experiences, and other issues. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health problems are increasing annually. As many of those who report increased mental health symptoms of depression and anxiety are younger people, it comes as no surprise that many are getting their mental health information on social media (World Health Organization, 2022).

However, alongside legitimate professionals, a concerning trend has emerged: the rise of unlicensed and uncredentialed mental health influencers. A quick search for terms like "anxiety," "depression," "narcissistic abuse support," and even "self-harm" yields hundreds, if not thousands, of unlicensed and uncredentialed coaches and influencers claiming to assist those looking for support. These individuals, while often well-meaning, tend to lack formal qualifications and oversight, posing significant risks by disseminating inaccurate or even harmful advice. Not ironically, research shows that there is a link between an increase in social media use and increased mental health symptoms (Beyari, 2023).

Here are some of the risks of unlicensed influencers spreading mental health information on social media:

Lack of qualifications and expertise

One of the primary concerns surrounding unlicensed mental health influencers is their lack of formal qualifications and expertise. Unlike licensed mental health professionals who undergo rigorous education, training, licensure processes, and accountability, influencers may lack the clinical knowledge and skills necessary to provide accurate and evidence-based guid-

ance. This deficit can lead to the dissemination of misinformation, outdated therapeutic techniques, or potentially harmful advice that fails to consider the complexities of mental health disorders and individualized treatment needs. Research shows that the spread of false or misinformation is a real problem on social media, and this can lead to harm if people unknowingly absorb and follow information that is false (Shearer et al., 2024).

Spread of false information and misinterpretation

The unchecked nature of social media allows misinformation to proliferate rapidly, often presented as credible advice by influential figures. Unlicensed mental health influencers may inadvertently perpetuate myths or misconceptions about mental health conditions, treatments, and recovery processes (Shearer et al., 2024). Such misinformation can undermine public trust in evidence-based practices and deter individuals from seeking appropriate professional help, potentially exacerbating their mental health challenges.

Ethical concerns and harmful advice

Ethical guidelines and standards of practice are integral to responsible mental health advocacy and support. Licensed professionals adhere to ethical codes that prioritize client welfare, confidentiality, and informed consent.

In contrast, unlicensed influencers may promote unproven treatments, advocate for risky behaviors, or exploit vulnerable individuals seeking guidance. This lack of ethical oversight

can result in unintended harm, including worsening symptoms, delaying appropriate treatment, or causing emotional distress.

out to their family but instead chooses to look for support online. In a perfect scenario, they would find

Licensed mental health professionals are held accountable to regulatory bodies and professional standards, ensuring adherence to best practices and ethical guidelines. In contrast, unlicensed influencers operate without oversight, leaving their followers vulnerable to advice lacking in scientific validity or clinical relevance. The absence of accountability mechanisms poses risks of unchecked harm, as influencers face minimal consequences for disseminating inaccurate or harmful content.

Of course, it should be noted that possessing a degree and license does not immediately absolve individuals of the potential for harm, but this form of gatekeeping is crucial for ensuring that mental health guidance adheres to established ethical standards and evidence-based practices. Licensed professionals are subject to rigorous training, supervision, and accountability measures designed to protect clients and maintain the integrity of mental health practices, which helps to mitigate the risks associated with unregulated and unqualified advice.

practices. Licensed professionals are subject to rigorous training, supervision, and accountability measures designed to protect clients and maintain the integrity of mental health practices, which helps to mitigate the risks associated with unregulated and unqualified advice.

Undermining trust in mental health professionals

The proliferation of unlicensed mental health influencers can erode public trust in qualified professionals and evidence-based practices. Misinformation propagated online may create skepticism toward established treatments, therapies, and the credibility of licensed practitioners. This skepticism can deter individuals from seeking cultur-

ally appropriate and trauma-informed mental healthcare, compromising their well-being.

Ensuring the information you find online about mental health is helpful and reliable involves several key steps:

1. Check the source.

Is this person/group qualified to make these claims? Check the credentials and qualifications of the individual or organization providing the information. Look for details such as professional affiliations, degrees, certifications, or licenses in mental health fields.

This does not mean that someone needs a degree or a specific amount of letters after their name in order to be educated in a given topic, nor does it mean that those of us with degrees and certifications are exempt from spreading false or misleading information. However, it can give you an idea of the person's background and goals for posting.

2. Check the messaging.

Be cautious of sensationalized or overly simplistic explanations of complex mental health issues, as well as claims of "miracle cures" or quick fixes without scientific backing. For example, be wary of someone who seems set on revenge and who is spreading information about narcissism or similar conditions. This does not mean that they were not victimized, but that their messaging is likely that of one who is in a specific stage of their healing that might not resonate with you.

3. Compare and cross-check.

Cross-check information across multiple reputable sources to ensure consistency and reliability. Look for consensus among experts in the field regarding treatment approaches, symptoms, and outcomes. Do not take only one person's words at face value—if there is validity in their claims, others will be saying similar things.

The article was originally published by Psychology Today



Impact on vulnerable populations

Social media platforms provide a global platform where vulnerable populations, including adolescents, individuals in crisis, and those with limited access to mental health resources, seek information and support. An example of this is the Queer teenager who is unable to come

validation and support for their identity. However, there is a risk that the opposite can happen. Without proper qualifications, influencers may lack the cultural competence or sensitivity needed to address diverse experiences and identities.

Lack of accountability and liability

