



Review Article

The prolonged passage to adulthood: A contemporary reflection

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Abstract

Background: The transition from adolescence to adulthood has increasingly become a prolonged and complex process, shaped by an intricate web of economic, cultural, psychological, and technological factors in the modern contemporary context.

Aim: This endeavour seeks to illuminate the intricate interplay of multifarious factors that contribute to the enduring postponement of adulthood responsibilities among the adolescents of the present generation.

Materials and Methods: A literature search using keywords like 'Prolonged Adolescence' and 'Delayed Adulthood' was conducted in March 2025 through reputable academic platforms such as PubMed, Medline, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate. Relevant studies were carefully selected, organized, scrutinised and assimilated. As no primary data were involved, ethical clearance was not contemplated. Key findings of the work have been presented graphically in the results section.

Results: This research unveils the complex factors contributing to prolonged transition to adulthood, extending beyond economic explanations including shifting societal norms, evolving family structures, and redefining measures of success. It highlights influences such as educational inflation, globalization, parental involvement, and advances in health and life expectancy. Emphasizing the concept of 'Waithood and Risk', Aversion, the study calls for flexible support systems and policies that accommodate diverse life paths, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of modern adulthood and a more supportive environment for emerging adults.

Conclusion: Institutions and societies must embrace diverse, non-linear pathways to adulthood by promoting inclusive education, supportive policies, and empathetic narratives that empower young adults to navigate their journeys with resilience, robustness and autonomy.

Keywords: Protracted adolescence, Adrift adulthood, Waithood, Risk aversion, Credential inflation

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1. Introduction

In the modern era, many in their twenties seem to drift in the twilight between adolescence and adulthood, lingering at the threshold where youth fades but full maturity has yet to firmly take root. This phenomenon transcends familial and socioeconomic boundaries, manifesting not merely as a return to the parental abode but as a broader deferment of traditional adult milestones. Notably, this shift predates economic downturns in the recent past, suggesting deeper undercurrents at play. The ramifications remain uncertain—affecting the trajectories of these young men and women, the parents who continue to support them and a society structured around a linear progression of education, economic independence, career establishment, family formation, and eventual retirement, sustained by succeeding generations following the same path. This conventional cycle now seems

disrupted among the elites, high-end society and the middle class aspirants, with many young adults trying to disengage from long-term relationships or permanent residences, opting for further education in the absence of preferable alternatives, engaging in travel, eschewing commitments, and vying intensely for unpaid internships or temporary employment—thus postponing the commencement of full-fledged adult life.

The third decade of life, often termed the twenties, has evolved into a complex and transformative period, characterized by significant transitions and explorations. This phase, appropriately identified by psychologist Jeffrey Arnett as "emerging adulthood," is marked by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, a feeling of being in-between with a sense of possibilities and expectation of manifold opportunities.¹ Experiential data highlights the fluidity and variability of this stage in the canvas of life. Approximately

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one-third of individuals in their early twenties relocate every year, showcasing a pursuit of new prospects, chances and environments. A significant proportion return to their parental homes undoubtedly - a phenomenon often attributed to economic factors and termed the 'Boomerang Generation'. Career trajectories during this period are equally dynamic, with young adults averaging seven job changes, indicative of a quest for vocational alignment and stability.³

The institution of marriage has also manifested a temporal shift in the contemporary context of modern compeers. In the early 1970s, the median age at first marital bond was 21 for women and 23 for men in the US. By 2009, these ages had risen to 26 and 28, respectively, reflecting broader societal changes in attitudes toward marriage, individual readiness and economic ability for family formation and responding to the social responsibility of the year old marital institution.¹ Sociological framework traditionally delineate the transition to adulthood through five milestones: completing education, entering the workforce, achieving financial independence, tying the marital knot, and becoming a parent. In 1960, a majority of young adults used to attain these benchmarks by age 30. However, by 2000, fewer than half of women and one-third of men had done so, signalling a deceleration in the conventional progression to adulthood and the social obligations of life.³ This reconfiguration of adulthood's timeline invites a re-evaluation of societal expectations and support structures, acknowledging the diverse pathways individuals now navigate in their journey towards a mature independence.

Studies in India documented that each chapter of adult life unfolds a tapestry of profound choices and options, inviting thoughtful negotiations and navigations.⁴ The art of decision-making in these moments, weaves together an intuitive and holistic discernment of possibilities, delicately influenced by the intricate threads of education, family bonding, social capital, class distinctions, and the vast cultural landscape in which one is embedded. Thus, achievement of important progressive goals across the life-frame involves evaluation of resources, limitations and constraints. During early adulthood, individuals traverse a whirlwind of evolving roles, responsibilities, and shifting environments. Choices arise not only within the familiar realms of education and relationships but also in the tender passage of stepping away from the embrace of parents and extended family, seeking financial independence, securing a sense of stability, and answering the call of social obligation.⁵ The choices embraced during emerging adulthood, — embodied in personal goals, both emanate from and actively shape one's evolving identity, laying the vital foundation for the journey into adult life.⁶⁻⁷ Furthermore, individuals continuously adapt their life choices and goal-setting to align with their personal development, age-related expectations, and the broader contextual consideration. Although emerging adulthood is frequently conceptualized as a period of self-exploration and autonomy in individualistic cultures, this

developmental stage may take on a markedly different character in collectivist contexts such as India, where community obligations, prioritization of family and societal interests often supersede personal pursuits.^{5,8} The underlying processes of these life choices therefore, need to be examined at both the societal and individual levels.

Exploratory research and incisive probe examining the consequences of the diverse life choices made by emerging adults during the developmental period remains limited. Life-choice is understood not as a straightforward cognitive process involving selection of binary or closed-ended options, but as a complex negotiation among alternatives shaped by constraints, structural limitations, and available forms of capital. The establishment of culturally normative goals plays a crucial role in defining which behaviors are considered adaptive or maladaptive within a given societal context. An individual's navigation through developmental tasks during the transition to adulthood carries significant implications for both their immediate well-being and their long-term psychosocial adjustment.⁷

2. Aim

This endeavour intends to study the current literature on the contemporary reasons of winding pave way from the late teens through the twenties and project a logical interpretation with genuine recommendations.

2.1. Novelty

The protracted prolongation of transit to adulthood is especially relevant in contemporary India, where rapid socio-economic transformation intersects with deep rooted cultural and familial expectations. As the nation witnesses unprecedented growth in education, urbanization, industrialization, and globalization, young Indians are increasingly delaying to reach traditional check-posts of adulthood such as financial independence, marriage, parenthood, and family formation. Factors like surging academic competition, restricted job prospects despite higher credentials, and the growing importance of individual aspirations contribute to this delay. Additionally, the clash between the modern values of autonomy and traditional familial structures often complicates the transition. Understanding this shift is the decisive key not only for framing youth-centric policies but also for redefining what it means to grow up in a modern India.

While the notion of emerging adulthood has garnered considerable scholarly attention in developed nations, its presence in research in contemporary India remains markedly limited, where a pronounced youth bulge has resulted in a notable rise in the 18–29 year age group.⁹ Amidst this demographic shift, the experiential possibilities of scholarly observations merit attention, as they represent dynamic and influential issues navigating the intersection of tradition and modernity. By focusing on these counts, the present review

seeks to illuminate the nuanced trajectories of adulthood in contemporary India — the flight that increasingly resonate beyond national borders and contribute meaningfully to global discourse.

3. Materials and Methods

The groundwork for this scholarly endeavour was thoughtfully initiated in March 2025, with a comprehensive literature search embarked upon using meticulously chosen keywords such as ‘Prolonged Adolescence’ and ‘Delayed Adulthood’. This intellectual pursuit was conducted through esteemed, credible, and academically authoritative platforms, including PubMed, Medline, Google Scholar, and Research-Gate—each recognized for their intellectual standards and scholarly integrity. The gathered literature was subjected to a meticulous process of scrutiny, with each piece of data carefully appraised for its relevance, accuracy, and authenticity. Any content found to be imprecise, ambiguous, or lacking in scholarly rigour was systematically excluded to preserve the academic purity of the discourse. The resultant corpus of foundational literature was then thoughtfully curated, assimilated, and sequenced to form the backbone of the preliminary draft. The study selection algorithm is depicted in **Figure 1**.

In determining the eligibility for inclusion in this study, specific criteria were established to ensure methodological relevance. Only studies published from the year 2000 onwards were considered, in order to capture contemporary perspectives on the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The scope of the review was global, encompassing research from both Western and Oriental societies to reflect diverse cultural contexts and influences. Emphasis was placed on descriptive studies employing qualitative and quantitative approaches that directly investigated the socio-economic, cultural, technological, and psychological factors contributing to delayed adulthood. Furthermore, only articles published in the English and available in full text were included to maintain consistency and accessibility of data sources. Exclusion criteria incorporated studies published prior to 2000, works that included opinion pieces or editorials, and research focused solely on bio-medical determinants without sufficient socio-cultural analysis.

In recognition of the sources that have significantly enriched this study, all consulted websites and publications have been duly acknowledged and cited within the reference section. Furthermore, to visually encapsulate, energize, and communicate the distilled findings, a well-crafted chart has been included in the results section. Considering the research predominantly relied upon already published qualitative literature and involved no primary data collection from human participants, formal institutional ethical clearance was deemed unnecessary for the scope of this article.

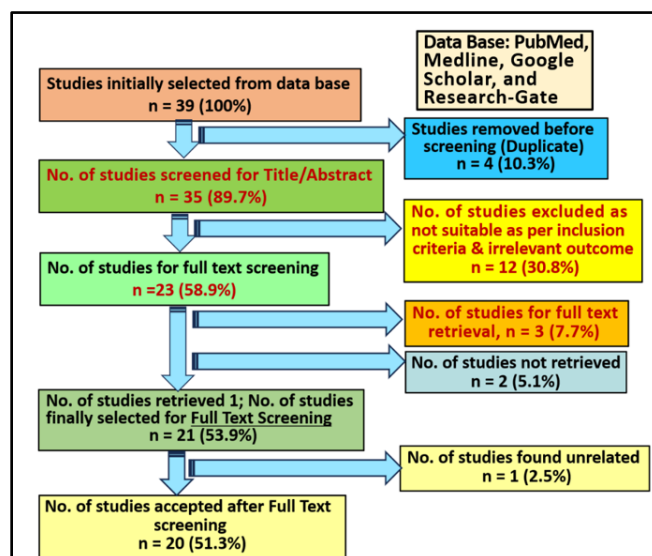


Figure 1: Study selection algorithm

4. Results

4.1. Reasons and realities

Traditional sociological frameworks conceptualized the transition to adulthood through the attainment of five cardinal milestones - the completion of formal education, entry into gainful employment, the securing of financial autonomy, the solemnization of marriage, and the assumption of parental responsibilities. However, these are often influenced by the ‘Prime Tetrads’ like - Economic and structural realities, Cultural and societal influences, Psychological development - Identity formation, and Technological advancements and Social connectivity in the modern world (**Figure 2**). Few interlinked ‘Allied Heptads’ that offer an in-depth analytical view on protracted adolescence are - Societal Expectations and the Notion of ‘Waithood’, Educational inflation and credentials, Globalization and mobility aspirations, Parental influence and prolonged support, Fear of commitment and risk aversion, Changing philosophies of success and fulfilment, and Health & reproductive trends (**Figure 2**).

5. The Prime Tetrads

5.1. Economic and structural realities

The contemporary economic and structural landscape has undergone a seismic shift, redefining the traditional markers of success and stability. In an era characterized by rapid technological advancement, globalization, and shifting labor dynamics, young adults today are propelled by soaring aspirations and an intense desire to achieve excellence swiftly. However, the dismantling of well-defined career pathways — once established in stability and linear advancement — has led to the proliferation of precarious, short-term, and perilous employment.⁹ This evolution has not only disrupted conventional professional pathways to accomplishment but has also engendered a pervasive sense of

ambiguity and restlessness among the youths, who find the path to personal and financial settlement increasingly elusive.

Moreover, conventional educational frameworks and orthodox institutional training programs, previously regarded as reliable springboards into prosperous careers, are now often perceived as inadequate or outdated. These conventional routes are no longer aligned with the dynamic and competitive demands of the modern workforce. As such, fewer individuals embrace them wholeheartedly, preferring instead to explore unconventional avenues—such as entrepreneurship, freelance work, e-commerce, or digital content creation—that promise quicker recognition, flexibility, and creative freedom.¹¹ This paradigm shift underscores a broader reconfiguration of values, where innovation and adaptability have supplanted stability and predictability as the cornerstones of professional success leading to dwindling progress to adulthood.

5.2. Cultural and societal influences

Cultural and societal transformations have profoundly reshaped the contemporary understanding of adulthood and individual identity. The growing acceptance of diverse lifestyles, coupled with a heightened emphasis on personal achievement, self-expression, and economic independence, has gradually supplanted the once-dominant ideals of conventional adulthood—centred on marriage, home-ownership, parental care and familial responsibilities. In today's globalized world, success is increasingly defined not by adherence to tradition, but by the pursuit of purpose, autonomy, and fulfilment on one's own terms.

This redefinition is particularly complex in collectivist cultures, such as those prevalent across many Asian societies, where familial expectations remain deeply rooted often estranging with high-end individual aspirations. Emerging adults often find themselves navigating a delicate balance between honouring traditional obligations and asserting their own individual paths to attain high-end life style. Decisions surrounding career, relationships, and lifestyle may not be frequently made within the shadow of parental expectations, intergenerational duties, and community values. As a result, personal exploration—while increasingly valued—can be constrained by the enduring weight of cultural continuity and respect for elders. Nonetheless, this conflict has ushered to a nuanced evolution: a generation that seeks to harmonize modern ideals of self-actualization with longstanding cultural heritage. The interplay between tradition and transformation continues to shape the aspirations, choices, and identities of young adults in profound and multifaceted ways.¹²

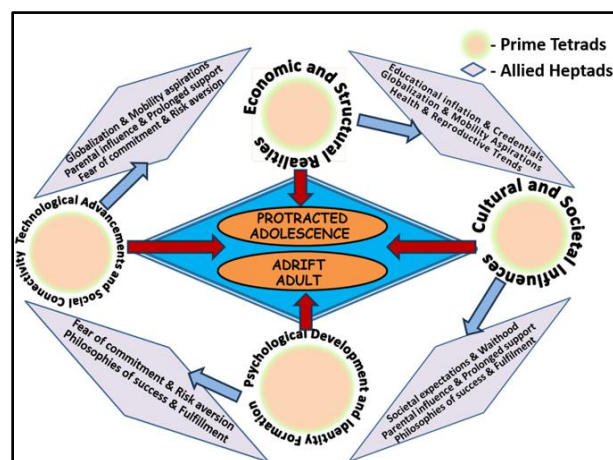


Figure 2: Factors related to protracted adolescence and adult drift

5.3. Psychological development and identity formation

From a psychological standpoint, the concept of *emerging adulthood*, as proposed by Jeffrey Arnett, eloquently captures the complexity and fluidity of the transitional phase between adolescence and full-grown adulthood.¹ This developmental stage—typically spanning the late teens through the twenties—is marked by a heightened emphasis on exploration, self-discovery, and the gradual cultivation of independence. During this period, individuals are afforded the psychological space to navigate various roles, experiment with diverse belief systems, and evaluate potential life paths before committing to enduring decisions related to career, relationships, and identity.

While this prolonged phase of exploration offers fertile ground for personal growth and individuation, it is not without its psychological burdens. The absence of clear societal expectations and the deferral of traditional adult milestones can give rise to a sense of instability, ambiguity, and existential uncertainty. For many, the freedom to choose among multiple life directions is both liberating and exciting, often leading to periods of self-doubt and emotional turbulence considering the risks impending in future.¹³ Nevertheless, it is within this very space of uncertainty that identity is actively shaped, allowing emerging adults to forge a more authentic and intentional sense of self. This stage thus represents both a challenge and an opportunity—a crucial crucible in the development of adult identity and psychological resilience; could be ancillary in delay to share the traditional and familial responsibilities ultimately lingering in teens instead being stridden with maturity and adulthood.

5.4. Technological advancements and social connectivity

The digital age has introduced new layers of complexity to the transition from adolescence to adulthood. With smartphones, social media platforms, and instant text message becoming integral parts of daily life, young people are constantly connected to a virtual world – a world away

from ground reality. This constant connectivity has transformed the way individuals build and maintain relationships, often prioritizing digital interaction over face-to-face communication. As a result, traditional social skills such as empathy, active listening, meaningful conversation, and verbal expression may not be as well developed.¹⁴

Moreover, social media platforms frequently present idealized versions of reality, leading many young people to compare themselves unfavorably to elites including celebs. This weird comparison can significantly impact self-esteem and contribute to feelings of inadequacy and insufficiency precipitating anxiety and disquiet. While technology has undeniably improved access to information, education, and global communications, it has also created new challenges in developing a stable sense of self, identity supported by valued esteem and forming authentic, in-person relationships. Navigating these challenges requires a thoughtful balance between embracing technological benefits and cultivating real-world social connections.¹⁵

6. The Allied Heptads

6.1. Societal expectations and the notion of 'waithood'

The evocative term *waithood* captures the prolonged and often frustrating liminal phase that countless young adults experience—a suspended state between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood. In this precarious period, assuming conventional adult responsibilities such as stable employment, homeownership, and family formation is frequently delayed. This postponement is largely driven by crippling economic inequality, soaring housing costs, and overwhelming student loan debt.¹⁶ As societal expectations for timely transitions clash with harsh economic realities, young people navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain world, caught in a prolonged adolescence that undermines their autonomy, aspirations, and sense of identity.

This deeply unsettling phase is not merely a delay but a structurally induced stagnation marked by mounting anxiety, psychological strain, and diminished opportunities. Young adults often find trapped in a paradox—overqualified yet underemployed, socially mature yet economically dependent. In many societies, the glorified milestones of adulthood remain distressingly out of reach, leaving individuals disillusioned and marginalized. Cultural narratives that once promised linear progression now feel outdated in the face of volatile labor markets and unaffordable living standards. The phenomenon of *waithood* highlights a profound disjuncture between institutional expectations and the lived realities of youth, revealing urgent social and policy-level inadequacies that must be addressed to restore hope and agency to the emerging generation.

6.2. Educational inflation and credentialism

The transformation of the educational landscape has ushered in a period where higher academic qualifications are no longer a guarantee of gainful employment. The phenomenon of credential inflation denigrates, where increasing levels of education are required for jobs that previously demanded less, has become pronounced.¹⁷ Today, a bachelor's degree is often viewed as a baseline, not a distinction, compelling young adults to pursue postgraduate studies or additional certifications. This extended educational overshoot delays labor market entry and, by extension, financial independence and vied entry to adulthood. Compounded by unpaid internships and the rising cost of education, this structural evolution significantly postpones adult milestones.¹⁸

6.3. Globalization and mobility aspirations

In an era defined by unparalleled global interconnectivity, the dreams and ambitions of young adults are no longer tethered to their immediate environs. The allure of international exploration—whether for education, employment, or self-discovery—has become a potent force that reshapes the architecture of adulthood. Aspirations to study in prestigious foreign universities, to traverse continents in search of meaningful vocations, or to immerse oneself in culturally enriching experiences have become emblematic of a cosmopolitan identity.¹⁹ This fervent desire for global mobility, though ennobling, often demands extensive preparation, linguistic proficiency, financial investment, and bureaucratic navigation, all of which contribute to the postponement of life's more traditional milestones.²⁰

Furthermore, the psychological and logistical demands of such ventures can lead to a deliberate deferment of marriage, parenthood, or long-term career commitments. Young individuals often prioritize flexibility over permanence, and exploration over settlement, as they seek to position themselves advantageously in an increasingly borderless world. Thus, globalization does not merely open doors—it also reconfigures timelines, compelling the youth to stretch the formative years in pursuit of a richer, more expansive life narrative. In this light, the passage to adulthood becomes not a straight path, but a winding journey through the global mosaic of opportunities.

6.4. Parental influence and prolonged support

The evolving dynamics of the modern family have given rise to an increasingly pervasive phenomenon: the prolonged interdependence between parents and their adult children. In contrast to previous generations that valorized swift autonomy and early household formation, contemporary parents—often more affluent, emotionally engaged, and culturally involved—extend both financial support and emotional scaffolding well into their offspring's twenties and even thirties.²⁰ This extended patronage, while nurturing and benevolent in intent, can inadvertently delay the onset of full-

fledged adulthood by buffering young adults from the exigencies of independent living.

The phenomenon, frequently termed Emerging Adulthood, is underpinned by a parental ethos that prizes security, comfort, and guided success over risk and self-reliance. Adult children residing within the familial home, benefitting from parental subsidies, and receiving counsel on life decisions are less compelled to shoulder responsibilities traditionally associated with adulthood. Consequently, the parental household becomes both a sanctuary and a soft cocoon, enabling prolonged adolescence while impeding the cultivation of resilience and self-governance. While such support may be well-meaning, it contributes to a social environment wherein maturity is no longer a rite achieved through adversity, but a state deferred until the conditions are optimal—often late into what was once considered adulthood.⁵

6.5. *Fear of commitment and risk aversion*

In an age rife with uncertainty—economic volatility, shifting societal norms, and the relentless digitization of human interactions—many young adults exhibit a pronounced aversion to permanence. Marriage, mortgage, and career tenure—once heralded as noble hallmarks of adulthood—are now often approached with caution, scepticism, and even reluctance.²² This prevailing fear of commitment is not merely rooted in apprehension, but in a rational response to a world that no longer guarantees stability in return for loyalty. Young individuals, schooled in the fragility of institutions and the capriciousness of markets, are loath to entangle themselves in obligations that may constrain their personal growth or compromise future choices.

Risk aversion, particularly among the educated middle classes, manifests as a cautious deferral of life's traditional commitments. Many prefer to invest time in self-exploration, casual relationships, or flexible/remote working rather than in long-term engagements. This ethos, shaped by both caution and choice, transforms adulthood from a predetermined script into an open-ended improvisation. In this landscape, the reluctance to settle down is not mere indulgence, but a reflection of deep-seated anxieties and an acute awareness of life's fragility. Thus, the modern youth, ever contemplative and self-aware, treads slowly and deliberately toward the commitments that once defined adulthood.

6.6. *Changing philosophies of success and fulfilment*

Contemporary young adults are increasingly guided by reimagined conception of success—the ones' that prioritize personal fulfilment, experiential richness, and authenticity over material acquisition and social conformity. The traditional metrics of achievement—a stable job, a suburban home, and a nuclear family—are no longer seen as universally desirable or even attainable. In their place, we witness the rise of alternative life scripts centered on travel,

artistic creation, spiritual exploration, activism, and entrepreneurial experimentation.²³

This philosophical shift reflects a deeper generational yearning to live meaningfully rather than merely efficiently. Many now seek careers that align with their values, prefer experiences over possessions, and are more willing to embrace uncertainty in pursuit of passion. Consequently, they may delay the outward signs of adulthood not out of aimlessness, but from a desire to live with intention and depth. Such aspirations, while admirable, often entail periods of financial instability and extended dependence on flexible living arrangements.

Adulthood, in this context, is no longer a fixed destination but a fluid state, shaped by inner alignment rather than societal approval. In the quest to harmonize the soul's calling with worldly realities, young adults carve paths that are longer, more winding, and richly adorned with moments of introspection and growth.

6.7. *Health and reproductive trends*

The profound advances in health care, nutrition, and reproductive science have extended not only life expectancy but also the socially and biologically viable window for marriage and parenthood at a later stage.²³ Where once there was a tacit urgency to marry young and begin a family by one's mid-twenties, modern medicine now affords both men and women the luxury of time. Women, in particular, benefit from reproductive technologies that allow for later conception, thereby dismantling the traditional biological imperatives that once structured the life course.

Moreover, the emphasis on physical well-being, mental health, and aesthetic vitality has redefined what it means to be 'young,' making age itself a more fluid and subjective concept. Individuals in their thirties often possess the energy, appearance, and outlook that previous generations associated with much younger adults. As a result, the temporal boundaries of adulthood have shifted forward, allowing space for prolonged self-discovery and delayed familial commitments.

These trends engender a lifestyle in which individuals feel less pressurized to 'settle down' early, choosing instead to focus on personal aspirations, career ambitions, and intellectual pursuits. Thus, the modern concept of adulthood, no longer bound by biological or chronological limits, unfolds in tandem with the rhythms of individual readiness and societal evolution.

7. **Conclusion**

The study highlights that the transition to adulthood has become a diverse and multifaceted journey in the contemporary world, shaped by an intricate blend of cultural, psychological, economic, and technological influences. Moving beyond conventional economic explanations, it

underscores the role of shifting societal norms, evolving family structures, and changing definitions of success. Key factors such as educational inflation, globalization, parental involvement, and risk aversion are compounded by advances in modern medicine and increased life expectancy, which collectively extend the perceived timeline for achieving adult milestones. The concept of *waithood* offers a valuable lens for understanding the prolonged and often uncertain nature of this phase. As young adults navigate through winding and non-linear paths, there is a pressing need for flexible support systems and policies that honor individual trajectories while promoting autonomy and resilience. Recognition of the complexity of modern adulthood is essential for building inclusive frameworks that empower emerging robust and resilient adults in an ever-changing world.

8. Limitations

While this research provides a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted factors contributing to the prolonged passage to adulthood in the modern society; however, it is not without limitations. The scope of the study predominantly centres on trends observed in urban, industrialized, contemporary societies, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to rural Indian context where cultural norms and economic structures differ significantly. Additionally, the complexity of adulthood's evolving definition renders it challenging to capture the nuanced experiences of indigent sub-populations, including severely marginalized groups whose pathways may diverge markedly from mainstream narratives.

Moreover, the rapidly shifting socio-economic and technological landscape means that conclusions drawn today may require continual re-evaluation as new variables emerge. The reliance on secondary data and existing literature also constrains the depth of insight into individual psychological and emotional dimensions, which could benefit from more extensive qualitative or longitudinal approaches. Future research integrating assorted methodologies and broader geographical representations would enrich understanding and provide more robust frameworks for supporting young adults globally.

9. Recommendations

Given the intricate interplay of structural, cultural, psychological, and technological forces that have redefined the twirling trajectory into adulthood, it is imperative that institutions, policymakers, educators, and families recalibrate their approaches in supporting young adults. First, governments and educational bodies must address the burden of credential inflation by promoting diverse pathways to success—such as vocational training, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurial support—that honor competence over formal credentials. Secondly, housing and employment policies should be reimaged to create affordable, accessible

opportunities for independent living and sustainable careers, thereby empowering young adults to exercise autonomy.

Families, too, must strike a delicate balance between support and independence, nurturing resilience and decision-making without fostering prolonged dependency. Educational curricula should incorporate life skills, financial literacy, and emotional intelligence to better prepare students for the multidimensional challenges of adulthood.

Furthermore, social narratives must evolve to embrace alternative timelines and non-linear life scripts, recognizing that the journey to adulthood is no longer monolithic but multifaceted and deeply personal. Societies that honor this diversity with empathy, flexibility, and innovation will be better equipped to cultivate thriving, fulfilled citizens. By acknowledging the legitimacy of delayed adulthood and investing in its support, we can forge a future where young adults are not merely waiting—but wisely preparing—for lives of purpose and dignity.

9.1. Strength of the Study

Most notable strength of this study lies in its holistic and interdisciplinary approach in understanding the prolonged transition to adulthood in modern high-end societies also being imitated by the middle class. Rather than limiting its scope to traditional economic determinants, the research integrates cultural, psychological, sociological, and technological dimensions, thereby offering a richly textured perspective on a deep-down complex phenomenon. The study draws upon diverse and credible sources, employing a discerning lens to synthesize qualitative literature and construct a cohesive narrative around the multifactorial nature of delayed adulthood.

Furthermore, the inclusion of contemporary constructs such as *Waithood* and *Risk Aversion* add conceptual depth, enriching the discourse with frameworks that are both relevant and resonant in today's sociocultural context. By illuminating – how evolving norms, extended life expectancy, and global shifts influence the timelines and definitions of adulthood, the study underscores the importance of adaptable support mechanisms and policy innovation. Its emphasis on individual trajectories, autonomy, and resilience contributes meaningfully to a more inclusive and empathetic understanding of emerging adulthood in a rapidly changing world.

10. Source of Funding

None.

11. Conflict of Interest

None.

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