

DR. R. S. Kale

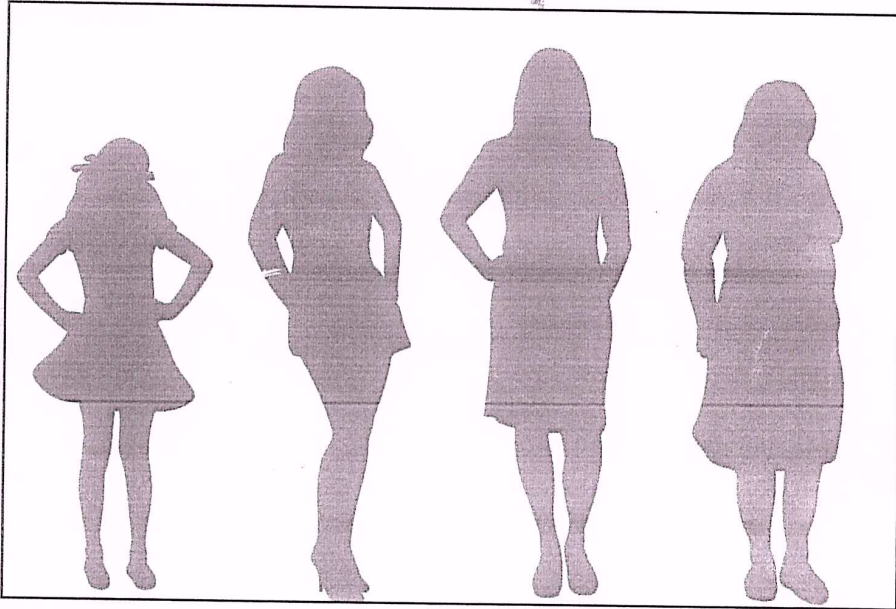


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23. Psycho-Social Aspects Concerning Mental and Physical Health of Adolescent Girls

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Abstract

Adolescent girls are the important segment of the population and they are the future of the nation, forming a major demographic and economic force. There are various challenging issues regarding physical and mental health of adolescent girls especially in Indian scenario such as need of emotional, social and economic security, need of affection or love, need of freedom and independence, need of self expression and achievement, poverty, lack of health care facilities, protection from sexual violence, mental health and menstrual cycle etc. To make the adolescence as a beautiful period of life and generally a healthy one existing adolescent health care services should be enriched.

"Adolescence" literally means "to emerge" or "to attain identity" and it is a specific developmental stage in which transitions occurs in physical and psychological development, it is period of human growth that occurs generally from puberty to legal adulthood. It is also called as crucial stage in life because it needs maximum parental care, guidance and empathy and specific health and developmental needs. Further during adolescence period there are various qualitative shifting occurs from old childhood self, and childhood memories. It is also a time to prepare for future adulthood roles in that sense it is time to develop knowledge and skills, learn to manage emotions and relationships, and acquire attributes and abilities. Adolescence can be roughly divided into three stages these are early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence and each stage has its own characteristics. Adolescents differ from adults in the way they behave, solve problems, and make decisions. Many unhealthy behaviors that start during adolescence, such as consuming a junk food, smoking, substance use, and violence, can lead to immediate health problems, long-term disorders, or poor health later in life; in that sense also it is called as crucial stage of life.



Ramprasad S. Kale

There are various challenging issues regarding mental health of adolescent girls especially in Indian scenario such as need of emotional, social and economic security, need of affection or love, need of freedom and independence, need of self expression and achievement, poverty, lack of health care facilities. Though adolescence is usually a healthy period, several risk factors of adult diseases which begin in adolescence can be prevented with proper interventions during this period. The data about important adolescent's health issues in different areas of India are limited, hence detailed study and reports on adolescent's health issues is the need of the hour.

Reproductive and Sexual Health

Early marriage and pregnancy, anemia, sexual violence, and poor educational opportunities all contribute to ill health among female adolescents. The health status of an adolescent determines the health status in her adulthood. Many serious diseases in adulthood have their roots in adolescence. It is need of the hour that to enhance the proper knowledge among adolescent girls regarding reproductive and sexual health issues, in this regard educational intervention can be useful for significant improvement in the knowledge level of the adolescent girls. In Indian context it is very essential to provide nutritional food to adolescent girls among various classes of society. The main health issues faced by the adolescents include: Mental health problems, early pregnancy and childbirth, human immunodeficiency virus/sexually transmitted infection (HIV/STI) and other infectious diseases, violence, unintentional injuries, malnutrition and substance abuse.

Gender Discrimination

Practice of dowry, the marginalisation of women in agriculture, perceived lack of economic utility of women and perception of not making a visible economic contribution make the cost of having a daughter so high, hence the families may be unwilling to invest adequate resources for the educational and social development of adolescent girls. Gender equity should be core value for programmes and policies aimed at reducing differences at the level of education and employment between men and women.



Protection from Sexual Violence

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Sexual violence has a great impact on adolescent girls physical and mental health, affecting development and causing lifelong damage. So protection from sexual violence is the fundamental right of adolescent girl. In the process of protection from sexual violence family involvement must be taken into consideration, and any kind of improper relationship should be evaluated and treated, so that it can be discouraged and eliminated.

Mental Health and Menstrual Cycle


Mental health is a positive concept related to the individual's social, emotional, and psychological well being. According to G. Stanley Hall, the first president of the American Psychological Association, period of adolescence is full with storm and stress in which teenagers are in conflict with their parents, are moody, and engage in risky behavior. Focus towards these problems in adolescent health programmes happens to be less when compared to Reproductive and Sexual Health.

Menstruation, is an inevitable part of a girl's life and more so an important indicator of normal physiological and functional wellbeing. Rising and falling down of certain hormone levels during monthly menstrual cycle, also affects on thinking and feeling. Poor mental health status also a leading cause of menstrual cycle problems. Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS), Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD), Irregular periods these are some problems which are closely related to mental health of adolescent girls. Women with depression or anxiety disorders may experience worse symptoms of PMS. PMDD is a condition similar to PMS but with more severe symptoms, including severe depression, irritability, and tension, mood swings, feeling of hopelessness, intense anger, conflict with other people, change in appetite, difficulty in concentration etc. Studies show that anxiety disorder is a leading cause of irregular menstrual cycles. Controlling stress, emotional stability, healthy sleep habits, avoiding alcohol and drugs, enough physical activity, healthy food these are the basic areas concerning to adolescent girls on which we have to concentrate for its fulfillment.

Influence of Media and Junk Food Habit

Inadequate intake of nutritional food among adolescent girls results in to underdeveloped growth and delayed sexual maturation. Nutritional requirement are higher among adolescents than any other period of life. Lot of junk food products are promoted by celebrities with catchy advertisements leading to adaptation of unhealthy food habits. Media influences the diet and lifestyle among adolescents and leads to nutritional disorders by making them sedentary and





giving false hopes. Instead of taking balanced diet they starve and end up in anorexia nervosa. These issues can be reduced by Promoting an Integrative Nutritional Education Programme.

Drug Addiction and Substance Abuse

Even though there is legal restriction, alcohol and tobacco products are available generously for under-18 age group. Generally parental substance abuse and lack of parental supervision leads to adolescent substance abuse. Parents must know their responsibility and take every effort to monitor their children activities and should set a good example to their children.

Parenting Style

Each year, about 4 million adolescents' world-wide attempt suicide, suicide is the third leading cause of death among adolescents. Parents' ignorance and negligence is a key factor of many psycho social problems occurs during adolescence. It is primary responsibility of parents to discuss and guide their children on various psycho-social aspects along with physiological changes during this age. It is observed that due to cultural barriers they neglect to talk about physical and physiological changes, in consequence of this, growing children learn about sexuality and secondary sex characteristics from their peer groups or other inappropriate sources leads to abnormal social behaviour.

Challenges in Existing Adolescent Health Care Services

In existing adolescent health services the target group is teen agers it is also equal importance that the target population should include parents and teachers also in defining, planning, implementing and evaluating specific programmes for adolescents. Due to limitations of resources like material, money and manpower, the services have not reached to target group adequately. Service providers are not properly trained. Due to no manpower allotted separately for adolescent health services, it is extra burden for existing health care providers. Adolescents have little knowledge about the need of health services. They are afraid of revealing personal issues to another person and getting examined by opposite sex health worker. So they themselves act as major obstacle for the services to reach them.

Adolescent health services for adolescent girls should make comprehensive in nature and should come under a single window. It is also essential to develop a screening tool specific for Indian adolescents. Innovating such tools based on our requirements can be very useful in diagnosing diseases and to search for and eliminate any risk factors as early as possible.



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