

Prevalence of Behavioral and Emotional Problems in School Going Adolescents in India

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Abstract : Background: Adolescence is the transitional period between puberty and adulthood. It is marked by immense turmoil in emotional and behavioral spheres. Adolescents are at risk of an array of behavioral and emotional problems, resulting in social, academic and vocational function impairments. Conflicts in the family and inability of the parents to cope with the changing demands of an adolescent have a negative impact on the overall development of the child. This augers ill for the individual's future, resulting in depression, delinquency and suicides among other problems. Aim: The aim of the study was to compare the prevalence of behavioral and emotional problems in school going adolescents aged 13 to 15 years residing in Ludhiana city. Method: A total of 1380 school children in the age group of 13 to 15 years were assessed by the adolescent health screening questionnaire (FAPS) and Youth Self-Report (2001) questionnaire. Statistical significance was ascertained by t-test, chi-square test (χ^2) and ANOVA, as appropriate. Results: A considerably high prevalence of behavioral and emotional problems was found in school going adolescents (26.5%), more in girls (31.7%) than in boys (24.4%). In case of boys, the maximum problem was in the 13 year age group, i.e., 28.2%, followed by a significant decline by the age of 14 years, i.e., 24.2% and 15 years, i.e., 19.6%. In case of girls also, the maximum problem was in the 13 year age group, i.e., 32.4% followed by a marginal decline in the 14 years i.e., 31.8% and 15 year age group, i.e., 30.2%. Demographic factors were non contributory. Internalizing syndrome (22.4%) was the most common problem followed by the neither internalizing nor externalizing (17.6%) group. In internalizing group, most (26.5%) of the students were observed to be anxious/ depressed. Social problem was observed to be the most frequent (10.6%) among neither internalizing nor externalizing group. Aggressive behavior was the commonest (8.4%) among externalizing group. Internalizing problems, mainly anxiety and depression, were commoner in females (30.6%) than males (24.6%). More boys (16%) than girls (13.4%) were reported to suffer from externalizing disorders. A critical review of the data showed that most of the adolescents had poor knowledge about reproductive health. Almost 36% reported that the source of their information on sexual and reproductive health being friends and the electronic media. There was a high percentage of adolescents who reported being worried about sexual abuse (20.2%) with majority of them being girls (93.6%) reflecting poorly on the social setup in the country. About 41% of adolescents reported being concerned about body weight and most of them being girls (92.4%). Up to 14.5% reported having thoughts of using alcohol or drugs perhaps due to the easy availability of substances of abuse in this part of the country. 12.8% (mostly girls) reported suicidal thoughts. Summary/conclusion: There is a high prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems among school-going adolescents. Resolution of these problems during adolescence is essential for attaining a healthy adulthood. The need of the hour is to spread awareness among caregivers and formulation of effective management strategies including school mental health programme.

Keywords : adolescence, behavioral, emotional, internalizing problem

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