The International Journal of
INDIAN PSYCHOLOGY

Research Paper

Psychosocial Approach Towards Issues, Challenges and Solutions Concerning Adolescent Girls in India

Nikhil Yadav[1]*

ABSTRACT

Girls below 19 years of age comprises one-quarter of India's rapidly growing population. Life of many young girls is a painful tug of war filled with mixed messages and conflicting demands from parents, teachers, coaches, employers, friends and oneself. It creates stress and it can create serious depression for young people ill-equipped to cope, communicate and solve problems. Several policy documents in India have also recognized adolescents as an underserved vulnerable group which needs reproductive health information and services. Majority of girl dropouts at school level have limited choices available for the future. They are caught in the cycle of early marriage, repeated pregnancy, and poverty. Still those girls somehow managed going to college faces a number of challenges. This paper examines the significance of various psychological constructs and psychosocial issues that are important in the life of a "girl" of our country. What issues either educational, psychological, health, social and family bother to college going girls? What areas of adjustment should be taken care off? Either educational, emotional, health or social adjustment areas need to be taken care, so as to make a girl fully adjusted towards overcoming the challenges. Suicide, substance use, technology addiction, academic pressure, bullying, career planning and the problem of plenty are some of the challenges faced by adolescent girls today. These challenges are described in detail in relation to girls. And how these issues and challenges can be overcome? How educational and health institutions can help in overcoming these challenges?

Keywords: *Psychosocial Approach, Issues, Challenges and Solutions, Adolescent Girls*

Adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood and also changes at biological, psychological and social level. India has one of the fastest growing youth populations in the world. Girls below 19 years of age comprise one-quarter of India's rapidly growing population (Rao, G.P. et al, 2015). Nearly all cultures recognize a phase in life when society acknowledges these emerging capacities of young people. What varies considerably by culture and context is whether the passage from childhood to adulthood is a direct and short passage, or whether there is a prolonged adolescence marked by a choice of identities and roles (WHO Publication, 2007). Life of many young girls is a painful tug of war filled with mixed messages and conflicting demands from parents, teachers, coaches, employers, friends and oneself. It creates stress

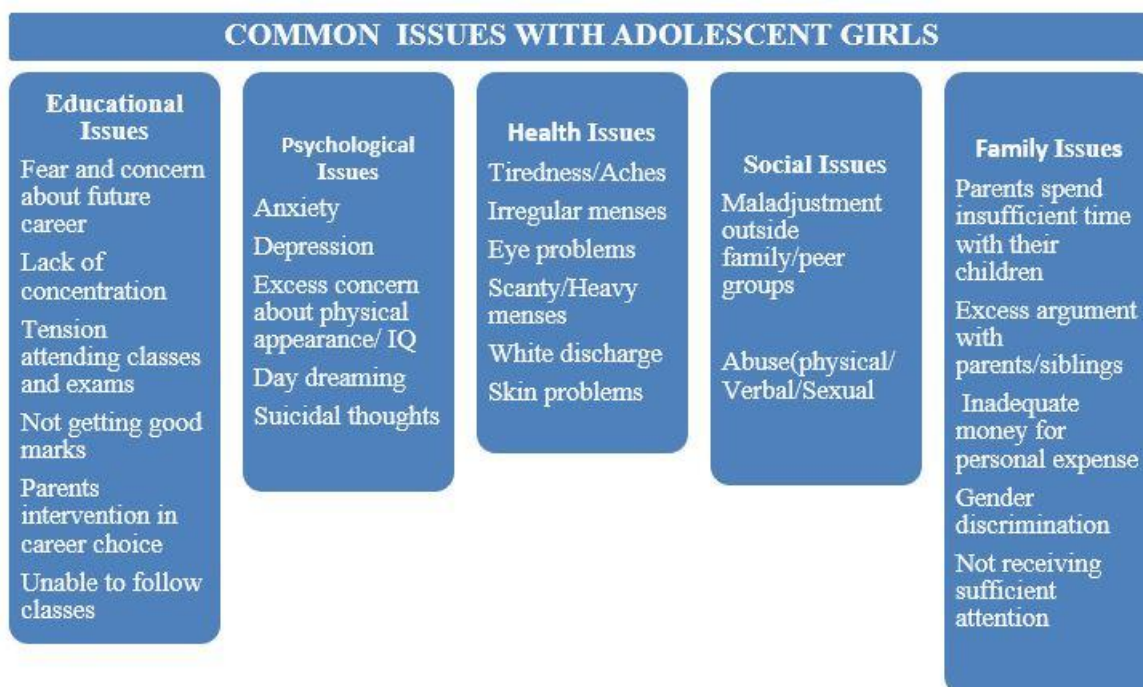[1]Student researcher, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India
*Corresponding Author

and it can create serious depression for young people ill-equipped to cope, communicate and solve problems. Several policy documents in India have also recognized adolescents as an underserved vulnerable group which needs reproductive health information and services (Kumar, R. et al, 2008). Unfortunately, the majority of girl dropouts at school level have limited choices available for the future. They are caught in the cycle of early marriage, repeated pregnancy, and poverty. Still those girls somehow managed going to college faces a number of challenges. This paper examines the significance of various psychological constructs and psychosocial issues that are important in the life of a "girl" of our country.

Common issues with adolescent girls are as follows (B, G. K. et al, 2013):

COMMON ISSUES WITH ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Educational Issues
Fear and concern about future career

Lack of concentration

Tension attending classes and exams

Not getting good marks

Parents intervention in career choice

Unable to follow classes

Psychological Issues
Anxiety

Depression

Excess concern about physical appearance/ IQ

Day dreaming

Suicidal thoughts

Health Issues
Tiredness/Aches

Irregular menses

Eye problems

Scanty/Heavy menses

White discharge

Skin problems

Social Issues
Maladjustment outside family/peer groups

Abuse(physical/ Verbal/Sexual)

Family Issues
Parents spend insufficient time with their children

Excess argument with parents/siblings

Inadequate money for personal expense

Gender discrimination

Not receiving sufficient attention

Challenges in the Areas of Adjustment
Emotional Adjustment: Frequent, intense and apparently unjustified emotional outbursts lead others to judge the individual as "Immature". Suppression of emotional expression results in moodiness which tends to make the individual rude, uncooperative and pre-occupied with self. A satisfactory state of personal and emotional adjustment may be said to exist when an individual's physical and psychological needs can be satisfied by socially acceptable patterns of behavior. Emotional reactions may therefore, interfere seriously with young person power to use the freedom of decision making and behavior. Those students whose pattern satisfied with their life styles, whose urges and desires are met with satisfactions tends to enjoy life to the fullest and become emotionally adjusted. Some students adjust well to the college environment whereas others struggle with the transition some leaving school entirely (Ezezek, 1994; Holembek & Wandrei, 1993).

Health Adjustment: Heightened emotionality even when the expressions are controlled tends to make one nervous or ill. It is often accompanied by specific mannerism such as nail biting or giggling, creates the impression that the person is silly or immature. Heightened emotionality is especially common among pre puberscent girls at the time of menstrual period of other girls. Baker and Siryk (1984) assessed the psychological adjustment of

students in college. They recognized the importance of psychological adjustment, as well as the importance of academic and social integration into college systems.

Social Adjustment: Social adjustment is the most difficult developmental task of student life. This adjustment has to be done with members of the opposite sex in a relationship that never existed before and to adults outside the family and school environments. Early adults are a period of social expansion and development. Guo (1998) found that females scored higher than males on reading recognition and comprehension tests after controlling family background factors.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Roy, Ekka and Ara (2011) observed that Girl students were better adjusted in all areas of adjustment than Boy students. Lama (2010) reported that there is a great tendency for female students to experience adjustment problems more than males, implied that male students are better adjusted in overall adjustment on the campus as compared to female students. Mc Whitner (1997) found that female students had a more difficult time fitting into the college environment and were less likely to be involved in college activities and less likely to have leadership positions in campus organizations. Cook (1995) calculated that female students are found to demonstrate more adjustment problems such as establishing social relationship in college compared to the male students. Singh (1995) observed that adolescent girls are better adjusted in the areas of emotional whereas adolescent boys were better adjusted in the area of health and social adjustment. Anita (1994) revealed that girls are better adjusted in emotional, social, educational and total areas of adjustment areas of adjustment compared to boys. Sujatha et.al (1993) studied social adjustment problems among urban & rural college students and reported a significant difference in the social adjustment of urban and rural college students. Dhoudiyal (1984) revealed that rural college students were more emotionally disturbed than the urban college students.

Sulthana et.al (1981) conducted a comparative study on personality adjustment among rural and urban students and revealed that students of urban area were more adjusted as compared to rural college students. Palsane (1970) explored the role of health adjustment and parental education on personal adjustment and revealed that students with good health were high in overall adjustment. He also reported that students with good parental education were better adjusted. Langner (1962) conducted a study on health adjustment among rural and urban college students and conclude that rural students face more problems than urban students, especially girls.

CHALLENGES IN FRONT OF ADOLESCENT COLLEGE GIRLS

Adolescence is a phase of struggle in preparing oneself for the adult world. It revolves around school or college and work is on the horizon. For many, it's managing the confusion, questions and challenges of social relations. For almost all, it's working in the direction of achieving independence from parents while still needing their direction and support. Suicide, substance use, technology addiction, academic pressure, bullying, career planning and the problem of plenty are some of the challenges faced by adolescent girls today.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the 15 29 year age group in both sexes in our country. It is 13% in males while 15% in females in 15-29 years of all the death by suicide. These figures do not include suicide attempts which may be up to 20 times more frequent than completed suicide. The most common method of suicide employed by adolescents is

poisoning, followed by hanging. According to the data, causes of suicide include family problems, illness, marriage-related issues, love affairs, drug abuse/addiction, bankruptcy or indebtedness, failure in examination, unemployment, poverty and mental illness.

Substance abuse in adolescence is becoming a global health concern and is fast assuming alarming proportions in both developed and developing nations. In 2002, the use of Alcohol and Illicit drugs was estimated to contribute 4% of the disease burden in the 15-29 years age group in low and middle income countries by the WHO. In an Indian study on substance use (tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, areca nut/oral tobacco, opium, sedatives and hard drugs) among inter college students, a total of 58.7% students were found to be ever users while 31.3% were regular user of any substance. The prevalence of regular use of substances was significantly higher among urban students (37.9%), as compared to rural students (24.4%) (Juyal, R. et al, 2006). Substances which are easily available include – tobacco and alcohol, glues and other inhalants and cannabis. A number of prescription drugs (codeine and dextro propoxyphene containing cough syrups) are commonly being abused. In the crucial developmental period of adolescence, this could lead to progressive neglect of studies, extracurricular activities and interpersonal relationships placing these youth many paces behind their contemporaries (Agarwal, M. et al, 2013).

Technology addiction, which is defined as a habitual and compulsive way of indulgence with technology deviating from meeting the life's different issues. The use of technology is essential to make the tasks of life easier, however it's abnormal, excessive, unnecessary use leads to addiction and makes life more difficult. Adolescents today, use different types of gadgets like cell phone, tablets, laptops, I-pads etc. for various purposes like communication, entertainment (watching movies, listening music, playing online games), shopping, browsing educational materials etc. The incidence of problematic internet use has been reported to be 2-11% (Agarwal, V. et al, 2015). The rising trend of technology addiction is giving rise to problems like decrease in social skills, decrease in physical activity, rejection sensitivity, psychological problems and academic problems.

Academic Pressure is one of the leading causes of stress among adolescent school goers. Majority of schools often apply old ways of teaching. All children are taught and treated in the same manner and education is not based on individual's needs. There is emphasis on rote learning, marks or grades rather than personality development. Every year a number of school and college kids commit suicide, either because they fail or fear they will fail in their examinations. Also, the number of children who dropped out of school is increasing. More and more youngsters are visiting psychiatrists and counselors every year with high levels of stress and anxiety just a few months before examinations (Roy, R. et al, 2014).

Bullying: One of the less apparent causes of stress among adolescents is bullying. A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over a period of time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending him or herself (Olweus, D., 1993). Bullying is a serious issue that may result in severe consequences for the victim such as dropping out of school, suicide, depression and fear (Geoffroy, M. C. et al, 2016). However, there is also research evidence which suggests that bullying among females is also on rise (Zou, M. et al, 2014) Adolescents usually hide these issues under peer pressure and patient and empathetic listening may be required to expose the situation.

Career planning is another troublesome issue for the adolescent of today which has given rise to an industry of its own. Parents want to decide career for the child and go after then known career choices in order to ensure a safe and secure future in respect of job and location. Little do they realize how the competition has grown over the years and end up spending large sums of money without the child's interest or aptitude for it.

Domestic Violence: In India, violence within the home is universal across culture, religion, class, and ethnicity. Girls face violence at the hands of their husbands, fathers, brothers, and uncles in their homes (Rafferty, Y., 2013). The abuse is generally overlooked by social custom and considered a part and parcel of marital life. It may also include rape and sexual abuse. Psychological violence includes verbal abuse, harassment, confinement, and deprivation of physical, financial, and personal resources. They are often caught in a vicious circle of economic dependence, fear for their children's lives as well as their own, ignorance of their legal rights, lack of confidence in themselves, and social pressures. These factors effectively force women to a life of recurrent mistreatment from which they often do not have the means to escape. The sanctity of privacy within the family also makes authorities reluctant to intervene, often leading women to deny that they are being abused. This is equally common in the higher as well as in the lower segments of the society. Domestic violence has devastating repercussions on the family. Mothers are unable to care for their children properly. Often they transmit to them their own feelings of low self-esteem, helplessness, and inadequacy.

Immoral trafficking and sexually transmitted diseases: Trafficking in its broad sense includes the exploitation of girls by pushing them into prostitution, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, and trade in human organs. This is further compounded by the apathetic attitude of society, fuelled by a mindset which views women as mere assets with no freedom of choices and options to lead a life with dignity. Women and children are trafficked and exploited, and forced to lead a life of indignity, social stigma, debt, bondage, and a host of ailments including HIV/AIDS (Vlachovd, M. et al, 2005). These developments have made parents extra cautious. They are taking greater care in bringing up daughters.

Gender bias and impact on young girls: Abuse and violence against girls in the society may contribute to the development of dysfunctional behavior, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, somatization disorders, etc. Discrimination and neglect can result in lowered self-expectations, negative attitude toward self, lack of initiatives, and so on. (Rao, G. P. et al 2013).

Drug addiction: The cultural and social transitions in India have caused an increase in drug abuse in women. The major causes for drug addiction among girls are peer pressure, stress, family disputes, failure in life, examination stress, unhealthy novelty seeking, love affairs, and psychiatric disorders. This is especially because youth is a time for experimentation and identity formation (Vlachovd, M. et al, 2005). Positive parenting would go a long way in protecting girls from falling prey to drug use and its related problems.

Recommendations
Various studies show that girls are found average and unsatisfied in health, social and emotional dimension of adjustment. Adjustment is very important as it is a process by which an individual learns certain ways of behavior to cope with situation. Only an adjustable

person can make his life successful. As it is observed from the result that urban college students are better adjusted than the rural college students in health, emotional dimensions of adjustment. It may be due to poor financial conditions and unavailability of proper facilities in rural areas. There should be an adolescent health education cell for a group of college students to address the issues of adolescent problem. Regular meetings of parents with college authorities should be held to identify the problem among adolescents early. Regular health check-ups of adolescents conducted to identify the health problem for early treatment including follow up.

- College authorities and parents should pay attention to minimize the adjustment problems of college going students.
- Appropriate interventions programs can be planned to assist college students who have problems in coping with the demands and challenges which can create stress and tension to their life in campus.
- General information on perceived academic, social and cultural issues in campus environment should be provided in order to make students transition smooth.
- College authorities should give specific attention towards student financial needs as serious financial problems could leave a negative impact towards their adjustment in college.
- College administration should organize health awareness programs. They should be made to aware about the available resources and services so that the students can easily take benefit from them.

CONCLUSION

Adolescent girls are facing many challenges and parents, professors and clinicians need to be aware of these issues. There is need of research in to the factors leading to these problems as well as development of strategies applicable to our country to address these problems in the community. Family and society together can lead girls toward the positive psychology of increasing optimism, strong social connections, and healthy self-confidence.

REFERENCES

Adolescents, social support and help seeking behaviour [cited 2012 Nov27]; Available from URL: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2007/9789241595711_eng.pdf.

Agarwal, M. V., Kar, S.K. (2015). Technology addiction in adolescents. *J Indian Assoc Child Adolesc Ment Health*; 11(3):170-4.

Agarwal, M., Nischal, A.M., et al. (2013); Substance Abuse in Children and Adolescents in India. *J Indian Assoc Child Adolesc Ment Health.* 9(3):62-79.

Anita, K.M, (1994), Sex difference in adolescent‟s self-concept and adjustment. Res highlights, 4:79

Baker, R.W and Siryk, B (1984), Measuring adjustment to college; *journal of counselling Psychology*, 31, 179-189.

Cook S.L (1995), Acceptance and expectations of sexual aggression in college students (Versiel E K Trunik) *Psychology of women quarterly*.

Dhoundiyal, (1984), Home environment and emotional disturbance among adolescents *Ind. J Psych.*, 59(2):17-22.

Dr. Agarwal, V., Sinha, S. (2016). Issues and challenges with adolescents, *J. Indian Assoc. Child Adolesc. Ment. Health; 12(3):204-210.*

Geoffroy, M.C., Boivin, M., Arseneault, L., Turecki, G., et al. (2016). Associations between Peer Victimization and Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempt During Adolescence:

Results from a Prospective Population-Based Birth Cohort. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*; 55(2):99-105.

GopiKrishna, B. et al., (2013). Help seeking behavior of adolescent girls: *International Journal of Research & Development of Health*; Vol 1(1): 16-20.

Guo, R. (1998), Social adjustment of male and female, Psychological review, 82, 72-76.

Holembek, G.N. and Wanderi, M.L. (1993), Individual and relational predictors of adjustment in first year college students. *Journal of counselling psychology*, 40, 73-78.

Juyal R, Bansal R, Kishore S, Negi K, Chandra R, Semwal J (2006). Substance use among intercollege students in district Dehradun. *Indian J Community Med.*; 31(4):252.

Lagner, V.K. (1962), Local and sex difference in health adjustment of students; *J. Comm. Guid.res* 16(2): 200-235.

Lama, M. (2010), Adjustment of college Freshman: The importance of Gender and Place of Residence. *International Journal of Psychological Studies* 2(1) 142-150.

Mcwhitner, B.T. (1997), Loneliness, learned resourcefulness, and self-esteem in college students (Electronic version). *Journal of counselling and development*, 75(6), 460-469.

MerajSulthana,G., Siddique, A. (1981), Personality adjustment among rural & Urban students. *IJ clinical Psychology* vol. (8).51-88.

Olweus D. Bullying at school: What we know and what can we do. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, England; 1993.

Palsane, M.N. (1970), Health and parental education as factors in personal adjustment; *Psych. Stu.*, 15: 55-58.

Radhakrishnan, R, Andrade, C. (2012). Suicide: an Indian perspective. *Indian journal of psychiatry.*; 54(4):304.

Rafferty Y. (2013). International dimensions of discrimination and violence against girls: A human rights perspective. *J Int Women's Stud.*;14:1–23.

Kumar, R.; et al. (2008). Health Care Seeking Behavior of Adolescents: Comparative Study of Two Service Delivery Models. *Indian J Pediatr*; 75: 895-9.

Rao, G. P; Vidya, K. L.V. Sriramya (2015), The Indian "girl" psychology: A perspective, *Indian J Psychiatry;* 57(Suppl 2): S212–S215.

Rao, G.P, Rao, T.S.S (2013). Women's mental health. *Indian J Priv Psychiatry*, Special Supplement on Women and mental health, 7–8.

Roy, R., Mukherjee, S., Chaturvedi, M., Agarwal, K., Kannan, A. (2014). Prevalence and predictors of psychological distress among school students in Delhi. *J Indian Assoc Child Adolesc Ment Health*; 10(3):150-66.

Roy, B., Ekka, A., Ara, A. (2010), Adjustment among university students. *Journal for social Development.* Vol.2. (2), ISDR. Ranchi.

Singh, A.k. (1995). A study of parent-child relationship and adjustment problem among preadolescent. An unpublished Ph.D. thesis, L.N.M.U. Darbhanga.

Sujatha, S., Goankar,V., Khadi, P.B and Katarki, P.A.,(1993); Factors influencing adjustment   among adolescents. *Ind. Psy. Rev*. 40(1-2): 35-40.

Vlachovd, M., Biason, L.(2005);Women in an Insecure World;1–33 Geneva: *DCAF Pub.*

Zou, M., Ganguli, N. (2014). Personality and Connectedness as predictors of school bullying among adolescent boys. *J Indian Assoc Child Adolesc Ment Health*; 10(4):249