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Research Paper

Emotional And Behavioural Problems among School Going

Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Background: Emotional and behavioural functioning during adolescence is an important developmental outcome which acts as a strong predictor of future adjustment of the individual. It is important to identify emotional and behavioural problem at an early stage for treatment and promotion of mental health services. Objectives are 1. To describe the emotional and behavioural problems of school going adolescents 2. To determine the association between emotional and behavioural problems with selected socio-demographic variables. 3. To establish the extent to which selected socio-demographic variables predict the variability in the emotional and behavioral problems of school-going adolescents. *Methods*: The present study was a descriptive and cross-sectional study. Eighty adolescents studying in government schools in the age group 13-16 years were selected purposively for the study. Written informed consent was taken from parents and teachers and assents from the participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. The study was undertaken with the permission of the Research Advisory and Institute Ethics committees (IEC). Strength & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was administered to assess the emotional and behavioural problems. Collected data were analyzed using the software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences SPSS, 25.0 versions). *Results*: The prevalence rate of emotional and behavioural problems on the basis of the Total Difficulties Score (TDS) which was found to be 3.8%. The prevalence rate of emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity problems, peer problems and pro-social behaviour was found to be 1.3%, 18.8%, 5.0%, 6.3% and 12.5%, respectively. Socio-demographic variables [Gender, home environment, types of family, Socio Economic Status (SES)] significantly predicts the emotional and behavioral problems [(TDS) (f (5, 79) = 7.976, p=.000]. *Conclusion:* Knowledge of the prevalence of emotional and behavioural problems can be used to design effective intervention strategies in the school setting.

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Keywords: Adolescents, Emotional and behavioural problems, Strength and difficulties questionnaire

dolescence represents one of the critical transitions in the life span of a human being and is marked by a tremendous pace of physical and psychological human development. As per 2011 census, in India, 362.0 million (28%) of the 1.2 billion population are adolescents and youth between the ages of 10-24 years. This period is critical for the introduction and sustenance of critical health-related knowledge and skills, and is thus vital for mental health (Pandey et al. 2018). The emotional and behavioural problems most commonly observed in adolescents are conduct disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and depressive or anxiety disorder (WHO, 2020). In a recent study conducted by Harikrishnan & Sailo (2021) found that a little more than a tenth of school going adolescents had emotional and behavioral problems and multiple regression analysis revealed a significant association in TDS with type of schools, school settings and SES. Masare et al. (2019) found that out of 304 participants on teachers reported TDS of SDQ, 7.2% were having borderline total difficulties and 3.6% were reported to be abnormal. Further, parent reported SDQ showed that 7.9% of the participants were having borderline total difficulties, while 10.9% were found to be abnormal on SDQ scale. Barman & Khanikor et al. (2018) found that mean score of externalizing problem is more than that of internalizing problem and there was significant association between emotional problem and age, conduct problem and gender, conduct problem and number of siblings, hyperactivity and religion, pro-social problem and age. Research has shown that socio-demographic factors or variables can be the predictors of emotional and behavioral problem in adolescents. The parent-child relationship, gender of the child, low parental educational level, low income and family structure seemed to be more powerful predictors (Roy et al. 2010; Meer et al. 2008; Hay et al. 1999; Kolko & Kazdin, 1993).

Emotional and behavioural issues have increased in the recent decades, especially among the children and adolescents in low-income and middle-income countries. The patterns of behavior developed by an individual during adolescence lasts a lifetime. These mental problems often become more evident in the school setting and may impair the functional and cognitive performance of school children. WHO has pointed out that it is important to identify the vulnerable groups early so as to prevent developmental impairment and worsening of the clinical condition. There are certain risk factors that contribute to the emergence and aggravation of mental health problems at this development stage. It is also associated with various social and economic factors that are complex, and interrelated to each other. Poverty unemployment, severe marital discord, parents with mental health and economically disadvantaged families increases the risk of exposure to adversity and are strongly associated with mental health problems in children and adolescents. WHO (2016) tries to strengthen the provision of mental health services to adolescents through the department of Adolescent Health by implementing the mental health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP). To improve the overall development of children and adolescents, Government of Assam in the year 2016 has published the document "Assam 2030- Our dream, Our Commitment" as a roadmap to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with child development as one of the major aspects of this vision. Screening of emotional and behavioral problems among children is the first step in determining their magnitude. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the prevalence of emotional and behavioural problems among the adolescents which will help to design effective intervention strategies. This study is aimed to assess the emotional and behavioural problems of school going adolescents and its association with selected socio- demographic variables.

Objectives

- To describe the emotional and behavioural problems of school going adolescents
- To determine the association between emotional and behavioural problems with selected socio- demographic variables
- To establish the extent to which selected socio-demographic variables predict the variability in the emotional and behavioral problems of school-going adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for the present study was descriptive and cross sectional in nature. The adolescents were recruited from government school for the present study. Eighty adolescents belonging to the age group 13-16 years were selected purposively from government schools. Data was collected with the voluntary assents of the participants as well as consent from the teachers and parents. A consent form and information sheet were prepared by the researcher. Participants were evaluated on the basis of the following tools:

- Socio –demographic data Sheet: The researcher developed a self-structured sociodemographic data sheet for the purpose of assessing the socio-demographic characteristics.
- Strength & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ): To assess the emotional and behavioural problems of the school going adolescents, SDQ (Self report) developed by Goodman, (1995) was used. It consists of 25 items and assesses emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, conduct problems, peer problems and pro-social behaviour of the adolescents. Sum of the first four subscales (emotional symptom, hyperactivity, conduct problem, peer problem) consist of the TDS. High scores indicate there are substantial risks in the problem areas.

Ethical issues

Written informed consent was taken from the participants who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. Before administrations of the tools, basic purpose of the study was explained. Confidentiality was maintained and the present study was undertaken with the permission of the ethics committees of the Institute.

Statistical analysis

After the data collection, analysis was done using the licensed software in the Institute [Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS, 25.0] according to the objectives of the study. Fisher's exact test was used to find out the association between TDS and socio-demographic variables. Regression analysis was used to find the predictors of emotional and behavioural problems among the school going adolescents.

RESULTS

A total of eighty school going adolescents were recruited for the present study. The mean age of the adolescents was 14.5 (standard deviation [SD] = 1.00). The adolescents were in the age group of 13-16 years, majority of them were male (57.5%), belongs to Hindu religion (87.5%) and 81.3% were from rural area. Results also suggest that 63.8% the adolescents belongs to nuclear family and 75% of their home environment was found to be congenial. The study shows that majority 81.3% of the adolescents belongs to the upper lower socio- economic status.

Variable		Frequency	Percentage (%)
TDS	Normal	60	75.0
	Borderline	17	21.3
	Abnormal	3	3.8
Emotional Symptoms	Normal	72	90.0
	Borderline	7	8.8
	Abnormal	1	1.3
Conduct problem	Normal	42	52.5
-	Borderline	23	28.8
	Clinically significant	15	18.8
Hyperactivity	Normal	69	86.3
	Borderline	7	8.8
	Abnormal	4	5.0
Peer problem	Normal	49	61.3
	Borderline	26	32.5
	Abnormal	5	6.3
Pro-social behaviour	Normal	24	30.0
	Borderline	46	57.5
	Abnormal	10	12.5

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of emotional and behavioural problems among school going adolescents (N=80)

*TDS- Total Difficulties Score

Table 1 shows data on emotional and behavioural problems among school going adolescents. In TDS, 3.8% of the adolescents were found to be in the abnormal level while 21.3% falls in the borderline category. Findings of the study suggests that 1.3% of the adolescents have emotional symptoms, 18.8% of them have conduct problems, 5.0% of them have hyperactivity, 6.3% of them have peer problems and 12.5% have pro-social behaviour at an abnormal level.

Variables		TDS			
		Normal	Borderline	Abnormal	p
Gender	Male	31 (67.4%)	13 (28.3%)	2 (4.3%)	.061
	Female	30 (88.2%)	3 (8.8%)	1 (2.9%)	
Religion	Hindu	54 (77.1)	13 (18.6%)	3 (4.3%)	.617
	Islam	7 (70.0%)	3 (30.0%)	0 (0%)	
Family type	Nuclear	43(84.3%)	7(13.7%)	1 (2.0%)	.071
	Joint	18(62.1%)	9(31.0%)	2(6.9%)	
Residence	Rural	47 (72.3%)	15(23.1%)	3(4.6%)	.286
	Urban	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.7%)	0(0.0%)	
Home	Congenial	47(78.3%)	13(21.7%)	0(0%)	.023*
environment	Disturbed	14(70.0%)	3(15.0%)	3(15.0%)	
SES	Upper lower	48(73.8%)	14(13.0%)	3(2.4%)	.853
	Lower middle	13(86.7%)	2(13.3%)	0(0.0%)	

Table 2: Association between emotional and behavioural problems (TDS) and sociodemographic variable

*p<0.05, TDS- Total Difficulties Score, SES- Socio-economic status

Table 2, Fisher's exact test data represents that there was a significant association between TDS and home environment of the adolescents (p=.023*). There was no significant association found between gender, religion, types of family, area of residence, SES with emotional and behavioural problems (TDS).

Table 3: Gender, religion, home environment, types of family and SES as predictors of emotional and behavioural problems (TDS)

Predictors: Gender, religion, home environment, types of family, Socio Economic Status

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R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate		
.350	.306			2.76707	
Sum of Squares		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
305.358		5	61072	7.976	.000
566.592		74	7.657		
871.950		79			
able					
Un-standardiz	zed		Standardized	t	Sig.
Coefficients			Coefficients	_	
В	Std erro	or	Beta		
14.961	1.930			7.751	.000
-2.490	.637		373	-3.909	.000
.194	.972		.019	.200	.842
1.775	.802		.233	2.212	.030
1.498	.724		.218	2.069	.042
293	.136		209	-2.162	.034
	R Square .350 Sum of Squares 305.358 566.592 871.950 able Un-standardiz Coefficients B 14.961 -2.490 .194 1.775 7 1.498	R Square Adjus .350 .306 Sum of Squares 305.358 305.358 566.592 871.950 871.950 able Un-standardized Coefficients 8 B Std error 14.961 1.930 -2.490 .637 .194 .972 1.775 .802 V 1.498 .724	R Square Adjusted R .350 .306 Sum of Squares df 305.358 5 566.592 74 871.950 79 able Un-standardized Coefficients B Std error 14.961 14.961 1.930 -2.490 .637 .194 .972 1.775 .802 V 1.498	R Square Adjusted R Square .350 .306 Sum of Squares df Mean Square 305.358 5 61072 566.592 74 7.657 871.950 79 able Un-standardized Standardized Coefficients Coefficients B Std error B Std error 14.961 1.930 -2.490 .637 .194 .972 .194 .972 .1498 .724	R Square Adjusted R Square Std. Err .350 .306 2.76707 Sum of Squares df Mean Square F 305.358 5 61072 7.976 566.592 74 7.657 7.976 871.950 79 79 7.976 ble Un-standardized Standardized t Coefficients Coefficients 7.751 -2.490 .637 373 -3.909 .194 .972 .019 .200 1.775 .802 .233 2.212 γ 1.498 .724 .218 2.069

(SES)

Dependent variables: Total Difficulties Score, **p<0.01; *p<0.05

Table 4, Linear Regression analysis shows the predictor of TDS in SDQ on the basis of selected socio-demographic variables. Socio-demographic variables (Gender, home environment, types of family, SES) significantly predicts the emotional and behavioral problems [TDS) (f (5,79) = 7.976, p=.000]. TDS contributes 5.92% variance, Gender (Beta=-.373, t=-3.909, p=.000), home environment (Beta=.233, t=2.212, p=.030), types of family (Beta=.218, t=2.069, p=.042) and SES (Beta=-.209, t=-2.162, p=.034), act as strong contributor to the variance of mental health status (emotional and behavioral problems on SDQ total difficulties score).

DISCUSSIONS

Emotional and behavioural problems can lead to poor academic performance, low attendance, relationships problems, risk taking behaviour, drug use and even it can leads to suicide. NMHS (2017) suggests that 7.3% of adolescents have some kind of mental health problems. Pathak et al. (2011) found that 30.4% of the school going adolescents among 12-18 years had emotional and behavioural problems. Studies conducted among adolescents in different parts of the globe suggests that prevalence rate of emotional and behavioural problems ranges from 16.5% to 40.8% and in India it is in the range of 13.7% to 50% (Mishra & Sharma, 2001). If children or adolescents have emotional and behavioural issues it has a negative impact on their interpersonal relationships, academic performance etc (Fatori et al. 2013).

Findings of the present study suggest that prevalence of emotional and behavioural problems among the adolescents based on the TDS was 3.8% which is low as compared to the findings of Nair et al. (2017) where 15% of the adolescents on the TDS was at abnormal level. Higher the scores in TDS indicate higher the emotional and behavioural problems. Conduct problem is one of the leading causes of disability (Whiteford et al. 2010). In this study it was found that 18.8% of adolescents were found to have conduct problem which is similar to the findings of Barman & Khanikar (2018). In the domains of hyperactivity and peer problem, comparable findings were reported by Ali & Eqbal (2016); Faizi et al. (2016). Emotional symptom among the adolescents is found to be low as compared to the findings of Keyho et al. (2019). Whereas 12.5% of the adolescents were found to have scored in the pro-social behavior unlike the findings of Kerketta et al. (2020).

Adolescents were in the state of confusion as they were in the crucial phase of development. Socio-demographic variable (gender, religion, types of family, family environment, SES) plays a significant role in the overall development. In this study a significant association was found between home environment with emotional and behavioural problems (p=.029) similar to the findings of Aboobaker et al. (2019). Congenial home environment plays a crucial role in the development of interpersonal, personality, outlook and career choices for adolescents (Deb et al. 2015). There is a reported rise in stress among teenagers which may be due to disturbed family dynamics leading to maladaptive behavior (Singh & Kaur, 2015). Earlier studies have reported that there is significant association with socio-demographic variables (gender, religion, types of family, area of residence) with emotional and behavioural problems in adolescents (Patil et al. 2013; Nair et al., 2017

Linear regression analysis suggests that Gender (Beta=-.373, t=-3.909, p=.000), SES (Beta=-.209, t=-2.162, p=.034), home environment (Beta=.233, t=2.212, p=.030) and types of family (Beta=.218, t=2.069, p=.042) act as strong contributor to the variance of TDS. The findings of the study can be supported by the findings of Harikrishnan & Sailo (2021) where multiple regression analysis revealed a significant association in SDQ total score with the type of schools, settings, and socioeconomic status. Roy et al. (2010) found that parent-child relationship, family gender of the child and socio-demographic variables (low income and male gender) reported most symptoms and acts as a powerful predictor of emotional and behavioural problems.

Limitation of the study

The present study has some limitations as sample size is less and only government schools adolescents were included. Moreover, SDQ (self-report) assessment was only done while teachers and parents versions were not used.

CONCLUSION

Identifying emotional and behavioural problems at an early stage will help to plan for intervention. There is urgent need to carry out sensitization programs at schools, community to make the adolescents, parents, teachers, and community people aware about the mental health issues of the adolescents. Collaboration between schools, community, family, mental health institution will not only help in improving the mental health of the adolescents but it will also help them in seeking mental health services. The findings of the study will be helpful for understanding the emotional and behavioural problems among the school gong adolescents which will help for planning proper intervention.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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