

Health concern and utilization of health services among adolescents

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Abstract

Health is considered to be an integral part of social development (WHO). It is also an essential component of development, imperative to a nation's economic growth and internal stability. Improving Adolescent Health is an emerging area. There is a need for developing platforms for adolescent-friendly health services.

Adolescence is said to be a period of heightened "storm and stress" G. S. Hall's (1904). The problems of adolescents are multi- dimensional in nature and require holistic approach. Therefore it is necessary that every young person is required to acquire knowledge, positive attitude and utilization of services in an effective way.

Self structured questionnaire was used to assess health concern and utilization services among adolescents. Stratified Random Sampling with Proportional respondents randomly selected for the sample size of 60 adolescents' boys and girls between the age of 14 -19 years from PU colleges of Mangalore city.

The present study shows that there is an ignorance of knowledge and attitude related to reproductive and sexual health, other related issues and utilization of health services among adolescents. Education and counseling can be effective measures to promote Adolescent health.

Key Words: *Adolescents, Health Concern and Utilization of Health Services*

Introduction

Adolescence is characterized by the conjunction of a wide range of opportunities in all domains of life. They are an epitome of change, hope and progress. The lives of adolescents are subject to global challenges faced by information and technological

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revolution, changing markets and globalization, and specific changes taking place in family, dynamic, cultural traditions, religious beliefs and other socialization practices. Adolescence is described as the period between 10 and 19 years of age (WHO). They form 20 percent of the world's population, of whom 85 percent live in developing countries. It is a sole period, characterized by momentous physical, cognitive and psycho-social development that brings special challenges and opportunities. Adolescence is called to be a period of heightened "storm and stress" G. S. Hall's (1904). During adolescence lack of knowledge, attitude towards health related issues and risk factors are more prone to be affective, enormous psychological and emotional problems as well as immediate consequences of risk behaviors. Illnesses can hinder abilities to grow and develop to full potential that could have serious adverse effects on health in the future.

Health is considered to be an integral part of social development (WHO). It is also an essential component of development, imperative to a nation's economic growth and internal stability. Acquiring knowledge, positive attitude towards health, early intervention for health related issues and utilization of health services may be helpful for young people to acquire better healthy adult life. It presents a window of opportunity to set the stage for healthy and productive adulthood and to reduce the likelihood of problems in the years that lie ahead. Improving Adolescent Health is an emerging area. There is a need for developing platforms for adolescent-friendly health services. To solve the problems of youth, establishing youth friendly services is the major one in addressing the reproductive and sexual health need of youth UNFPA (1998). In this regard the present study aimed to assess health concern and utilization of health services among adolescents.

Health Concern

Adolescence is a phase of vulnerability often influenced by several intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect their health and safety. Two third of the premature deaths and one third of disease burden among adults are associated with conditions and behaviors initiated during adolescence. Most young people are presumed to be healthy but as per WHO, an estimated 2.6 million young people age 10 to 24 years die each year and much greater number of young people suffer from illness behaviors which hinder their ability to grow and develop to their potential. Two-third of the disease burden among adults are associated with conditions and behaviors initiated during adolescence G.B.Choudhary (2014). In India, the Adolescent mortality rates are reported as 2.1 and 1.7 among the age group of adolescents aged 15-19 years old females and males (India Facts sheet, n.d) Different literature has confirmed that many health problems and much of the risky behavior that underlies later health problems begin during adolescence. Studies show that assessment of health

of adolescents prevents the estimated 1.4 million deaths that occur globally every year. Adolescents are not fully capable of understanding complex concepts, or the relationship between behavior and consequences, or the degree of control they have or can have over health decision making including that related to sexual behavior (WHO). This inability may make them particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and high-risk behaviors. However, adolescents showed poorer health care- seeking behavior. Therefore during adolescence health impacting behaviors and conditions need urgent attention of policy makers and public health professionals.

Reproductive and Sexual Health

Adolescence is the period when young ones get initiated into sex and start exploring their sexuality. Adolescents-specific problems and emerging adult disorders can include sexual problems, menstrual problems, and mental and behavioral health problems. Coming to terms with their bodies and adopting healthy attitudes and behavior patterns are crucial not only for the well being of an adolescent, but important for the development of a healthy and prosperous humanity. It is a period when a person is most vulnerable; the overall growth and development and also the physical, reproductive and psychological changes expose the adolescents to many health risks. Careful and unobtrusive attention to each aspect of health at this stage will help adolescents grow into healthy and responsible adults. Adolescence is characterized by significant physiological, psychological and social changes that put adolescents to high risk sexual and reproductive health (SRH) problems Amanuel. Et.al., (2014). The increasing incidence of pre-marital sex, teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse are issues that demand serious attention. Promoting sexual and reproductive health education is cost effective reaping personal, social and economic development. It would provide choice to adolescent boys and girls to make informed decision and have control over their lives. Investing in the health of adolescents helps prevent the estimated 1.4 million deaths that occur globally every year due to road traffic injuries, violence, suicide, HIV and pregnancy related causes. It can also improve the health and well-being of many millions of adolescents who experience health problems such as depression, anemia or HIV infection; and promote the adoption of healthy behaviors that help prevent health problems that occur later in life, such as cardiovascular diseases and lung cancer resulting from physical inactivity and tobacco use initiated during adolescence.

As studies show sexual activity, early pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including human immune deficiency virus (HIV) infection rates are increasing at unprecedented rates among adolescents, adolescent and youth reproductive health becomes a concern. Adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) is also

one vital component of adolescent health. ASRH needs involves providing age-appropriate services including counseling, family planning, voluntary counseling and testing, and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. Optimally, these services must safeguard adolescents' rights to privacy, respect, and informed consent, while respecting cultural and religious values and the rights and responsibilities of parents.

Psychological and Emotional Problems

Adolescence is a period of tremendous growth and development, and navigating the social, behavioral, cognitive and physical changes is extremely challenging. Adolescents are at increased risk of experiencing social and/ or psychological problems. Data from the 2004 NHIS found that over 1 in 10 (11.6%) adolescents ages 12-17 had serious behavioral or mental health difficulties. Addressing mental health and psychosocial issues can help adolescents to develop resilience, enabling better decision-making capacity and healthier risk-taking behavior. In a given year, about 20 percent of adolescents experience mental health problems, most commonly depression and anxiety M Mukherjee (2016). It is therefore important to integrate mental health and psychosocial support for adolescents.

Utilization of Health Services

Adolescents have significant needs for health services. They pose different challenges for the health-care system than children and adults, due to their rapidly evolving physical, intellectual and emotional development. Adolescence is a critical juncture in the adaptation of behaviors that are relevant to health (Shiribman, 2007). Adolescents suffer from a greater number of acute health conditions than adults, they see private physicians less than any other group (Edelman, 1996). Adolescents also underutilize other health care systems (Marcell & Halpern, 2005). Addressing adolescents' preferences to the different attributes of health services and ensuring supportive environment from parents and relevant others would maximize the service utilization rate and satisfaction of adolescents. To increase the provision of quality health care and to help providers become skillful in addressing the socio-cultural and other factors that might be important with regard to health services delivery to adolescents, we must understand adolescents' health service utilization patterns and their satisfaction on the service they receive. Measuring adolescents' health service utilization and satisfaction plays an important role in the growing push towards accountability among health care providers and also can be used as an established indicator of quality of care.

Knowledge on health service utilization and their health concern will enable health care administrators and providers to work on program improvements and contribute

to design appropriate programs for adolescents. Many adolescents who suffer from mental health disorders, Reproductive health issues, substance use, poor nutrition, intentional injuries and chronic illness do not have access to critical prevention and care services (WHO). Promoting healthy practices during adolescence, and taking steps to better protect young people from health risks are critical for the prevention of health problems in adulthood, and for countries' future health and social infrastructure.

Methods and Tools

A study was conducted in Mangalore city of Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka State, India. The participants of this study were adolescents 14–19 years old who are going to PU colleges in Mangalore city. Making the final sample size of 60 (30 boys and 30 Girls) from the 6 Pre-University Colleges, 10 each (5 males and 5 girls) were randomly selected. The sample allocated was proportional. The systematic random sampling technique was applied to identify the respondents to be included. A structured questionnaire was developed and administered to the participants. The questionnaire and consent documents were developed in English and THE local language. Data were checked for completeness and entered into SPSS version 16.0 for further analysis. The criterion for statistical significance was set at a p value of 0.05. Ethical clearance and permission was obtained from the Pre University Board Education, Dakshina Kannada. Oral consent was obtained from the adolescents and they were assured confidentiality by using anonymous questions and by conducting the interviews.

Results

Table 1 Health concern among adolescents

Health Concern	Boys	Girls	Total	P Value
Reproductive Health and Knowledge	10(33.33)	9(30)	19(31.66)	0.391
Reproductive Health Attitude (Positive)	19(63.33)	21(70)	40(66.66)	0.290
Awareness on HIV/AIDS diseases	18(60)	6(20)	24(40)	0.001**
Psychological and emotional Issues	19(63.33)	26(86.66)	56(93.33)	0.018*

Health concern is a very crucial issue among adolescents. Young people often failed to acquire good health because of lack of knowledge about their growth and

significant changes that take place during adolescence. Data portrayed in above table on Adolescents' overall knowledge was evaluated by summarizing all reproductive health-related responses (pubertal changes, family planning and marriage contraception, abortion and reproductive tract infections). Accordingly, the adolescent health concerns are related to reproductive health knowledge 19(31.66%) and positive attitude 40(66.66%). Another major health concern among adolescents is the knowledge and attitude on HIV/AIDS (transmission, condoms, methods for prevention, STI's, STD's) which is highly significant ($p < 0.001^{**}$) among boys 18 (60%) and girls 6(20%). During adolescence most of young people prone to have psychological and emotional issues which may bring greater impact on their development as well as there will be possibilities to have serious adverse effects on health in the future. The study predicts that there is a significant differences ($p < 0.018^*$) among boys 19(63.33%) and girls 26(86.66%) regarding psychological and emotional issues faced by adolescents.

The present study finds that most of the adolescents interviewed were not aware of health related issues and concerns. It is clear that adolescent require intervention programmes to enhance their knowledge on Reproductive and sexual health, HIV/AIDS and effective psychological and emotional health care and support. Therefore enhancing their attitude and skills to gain knowledge and effective care for their health is necessary.

Table 2 Utilization of Health services

Health Services	Utilization			P Value
	Boys (n=30)	Girls (n=30)	Total (n=60)	
Treatment of reproductive and Sexual and related Issues	7(23.66)	27(90)	34(56.66)	0.001**
Education and counseling regarding Reproductive and Sexual Health	1(3.33)	14(46.66)	15(25)	0.001**
To get mental health and psychosocial support (Counselling)	18(60)	13(43.33)	31(51.16)	0.098
General Medical Checkups and treatment of health problems	26(86.66)	24(86.66)	50(83.33)	0.244

Effective health care helps to determine the problems and tackle health issues. Adolescents face numerous health problems due to lack of access to health. Health systems are characterized by high out-of-pocket payments and a wide range of public and private health care providers, adequate utilization of health services can be effective to have healthy and amendable life.

Table 1.2., shows the utilization of common health services among adolescents. These were general health 26 (86.66%) among boys and 24 (86.66%) among girls), mental health and psychosocial support 18 (60%) among boys and 13 (43.33%) among girls), reproductive and sexual health related issues 7 (23.66%) boys and 27 (90%) girls), and reproductive health, sex education and Counseling 1 (1.33%) among boys and 14 (43.66%) among girls). The present study portrays that there is a highly significant difference ($p < 0.001^{**}$) among boys and girls in utilization of services in terms of Treatment of reproductive and Sexual and related Issues as well as Education and counseling.

Discussion

Advocating and increasing awareness about health issues is also crucial to the success of any adolescent health effort. Hence, this study represented an initial effort to assess the health concern and services utilization among adolescents. There is remarkable differences among boys and girls with relation to knowledge and attitude of participants about puberty, menstrual cycle, pregnancy, contraception, condom and also transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS, STD's. Various studies have shown that there is a requirement for enhancing knowledge and attitude related reproductive, sexual health HIV/AIDS etc. Study by K. Malleshappa et.al., (2011), shows the lack of right kind of information regarding their own physical and or sexual developments among young people. The need to address this problem through health education by health professionals needs to be ascertained. Young people tend to be at higher risk of contracting STDs, including HIV/AIDS, for several reasons. According to the WHO report n sub-Saharan Africa only 10 percent of young men and 15 percent of young women aged 15 to 24 are aware of their HIV status. In this study also find that most of the young people ignorant of many aspects of reproductive health and other related issues especially about knowledge on HIV/AIDS. Approximately 5 to 7 percent of adolescents in the general population experience depression, while 10 to 40 percent of adolescents report experiencing depressed or unhappy moods (Rice & Leffert, 1997). The present study also shows that a little more than half of the adolescents have psychological and emotional problems. Depression is the top cause of illness and disability among adolescents and suicide is the third cause of death. Violence, poverty, humiliation and feeling devalued can increase the risk of developing mental health problems.

Utilization of health services among adolescents is slightly lesser than the general population. This can be due to the ignorance of health services available; it could be uncomfortable feelings about sharing their problems related to sexual health and issues. Usually comparing among boys and girls the majority seeking health care is female, particularly in adolescent health clinics. A study predicted that 85 percent to 90 percent of the teenage girls visit to health clinics for seeking health care where as most of the boys reluctant to visit these clinics Michael Weswood (2008). Similar type of opinion was expressed in this study that girls are ahead of boys to seek health care. Adolescent health education should be built into the adolescent health program as well as the basic education curriculum. Adolescents are in need of “information” or “counseling”. Therefore, “counseling” must be recognized as a major component of the health service for the adolescents (Gopi Krishna B. et. al.,2013) As per the present study most of the adolescents have not received or attended education and counseling related to reproductive and sexual health as well as for their psychological problems.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The prevalence of ignorance on reproductive and sexual health issues among young people is not only high but varies widely across studies and needs immediate attention to reduce the occurrence of HIV and related diseases. As per the present study adolescents require greater help to enhance their knowledge as well as inform them about the need of utilizing the health services for effective healthy life and have better future adult life. There is a need for increasing the number and strengthening youth friendly health service facilities, delivering the services in acceptable manner and enhance the capacity of health providers on how to approach adolescents. Today’s youth is exposed to many pressures; although they have access to lot of information; misconceptions still prevail. Health issues need to be discussed and their concerns addressed in nonjudgmental manner. Good relationship with parents, other family members, teachers and easy access to adolescent friendly health facilities will help them enjoy positive health leading to healthy adulthood. Adolescents have their own developmental needs. Adolescence is the most important stage of the life cycle for health interventions. Health care providers in adolescent medicine assist adolescents and their families in developing strategies to deal with developmental issues and the complications and conflicts that may erupt between illness, treatment, and developmental needs.

It is evident that improvements in Adolescent Education require interdisciplinary, collaborative, and comprehensive efforts. The involvement of social scientists and other health care providers with expertise and broad scope of involvement with youths and families, schools, and health service institutions, is vital to the achievement

of positive outcomes for our youths. There is greater scope for social sciences to promote youth development as an effective approach in improving Adolescent Education. The role in advocating for programs, policies, and practices that promote Adolescent Education is important.

Promoting healthy practices during adolescence and taking steps to better protect young people from health risks are necessary for the prevention of health problems in adulthood. Adolescent friendly health services are required for monitoring the growth and development and for management of behavioral problems of adolescents. Information and counseling on developmental changes, personal care and ways of seeking help reproductive health care and other related issues and problems is necessary. Adolescent health programme should focus on reproductive and sexual health, mental health concerns and attitudes. There is a strong need for public health to identify, prepare, integrate and implement activities that help to promote health and healthy lifestyles among young people and establish mechanisms for delivery of population-based interventions along with measuring its impact. There is a need to generate good quality and robust population data that can drive policies and programmes. Strategic investments in health, nutrition, education, employment and welfare are critical for healthy growth of young people and these programmes need to be monitored and evaluated for their efficacy and effectiveness using public health approaches.

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