

Dealing with Teens and Twenties

Family Welfare Concern

Ms. PREM MEHRA

THE population which is productive between 15 years and 25 years of age comprises 135 million out of total population of 700 millions of India. This age group is of great concern to the population experts for various reasons.

During puberty and adolescence the child is being transformed into an adult, when he/she starts searching for his/her identity, individuality and independence into the wide world.

The adolescent has low disease rate but might feel hypochondriacal as his/her concern about body functions and personal appearance are at its maximum. An adolescent is mostly neglected, misunderstood and not tolerated by parents, teachers and paediatricians. Such attitude of adults and his own forceful impulses frighten him/her. In the West a specialist called 'Ephebiatrist' looks after problems of the adolescent. The attitude of this expert is friendly, understanding, accepting and non-judgemental.

Importance of Initiation Ceremonies

In traditional societies certain Initiation Ceremonies help the child to know the rules of conduct during adolescence. But in modern society with democratic rights of each growing in his/her own way is frightening to an adolescent especially when his/her biological and psychological forces are playing havoc and he/she is unable to channelise them properly. Hence the accidents are at its height at this age.

The incidences of pregnancy are on the increase among adolescents in almost all countries. Unfortunately, biologically, pregnancy is possible but it is socially unacceptable. Pregnancy at this age is known to be a symptom of maladjustment and social problem.

The possible reasons for increase in pregnancy during this age group is said to be as follows:

1. Puberty has dropped in years because of improved nutrition and health facilities.
2. Modernisation is fast changing the family social norms.
3. An adolescent seeks for a quick pleasure but rarely gets fulfilled in his/her desire for relationship.
4. Relaxed law in regard to rape, incest and prostitution. Rape and incest are quite common in rural India and lower income group class but a hidden fact.

The author is Nursing Superintendent, Nehru Hospital, PGI, Chandigarh.

5. Lack of supervision of a mentally deficient girl.

A pregnant adolescent is a medical and social problem. Adolescent girl is of tender age, her development in a transition period, her studies or even life education is incomplete. Mostly she is still unmarried.

At adolescent period the child birth has high risks of the following nature:

1. Still born and prematurity is prevalent at 20-35% rate.
2. Mother suffers from anaemia and other deficiency-diseases and toxæmia of pregnancy, etc.
3. Incidence of malformation in the neonate increases three fold in adolescents due to nutritional deficiency or incest.
4. Future prospects for both child and mother are not happy due to social stigma.

The mortality rate is low at this age. Childbirth depends on quality of antenatal care given. Due to social stigma the pregnancy is mostly hidden and does not get the care it deserves. Use of forceps and episiotomy operation are common during child birth.

Infancy is a vulnerable period. Prematurity enhances the chances of motor and sensory damage leading to mental deficiency. Majority of children land up in orphanage where they are deprived of essentials for growth and development.

Some mothers may give the child for adoption and others may like to keep the child and look after it themselves. Marriage prospects of such mothers and their integration into the society are not favourable.

In the normal process as the adolescent achieves the task of identity successfully he/she comes into the stage of young adulthood which urges him/her for intimacy with opposite sex to start his/her own family life.

Primary Health Care

Now let us look at primary health care applied to adolescents which concerns with promotion of their health and prevention of accidents (pregnancy is known to be an accident in this age group) and rehabilitation of mother and child is an important concern.

1. Sex education to the kids in the schools and family environment should be with a very matter-of-fact attitude without attaching any feeling of shame

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