

# ADOLESCENCE IN INDIA: RESERVOIR OF HIDDEN POTENTIAL

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## ABSTRACT

*Adolescence is theoretically defined as the period from end of childhood to the beginning of adulthood. It is essentially a time of transition from innocence of childhood to maturity of adulthood. In Indian context , adolescence cannot be universally defined as its meaning takes various colours across region, gender, caste and social class. Sometimes the transition from childhood to adulthood is so abrupt that adolescence appears to be more of a myth than reality. With a large pool of population below the age of 25, we can ill afford to ignore this reservoir of raw potential .What are the challenges faced by adolescence and what can be done to ensure their well being ,is the mainstay of this paper.*

**Key words:** Adolescence, mental well-being, context, rural, urban, divide.

## INTRODUCTION

According to a developmental perspective, adolescence is generally understood to be a continuity between childhood and adulthood. This generalization, however, is not accurate picture of adolescence as there is a huge geographical, class and caste based variations in this regard. A city bred child assumes maturity much faster than the one in a remote area. Similarly, cultural norms may thrust roles of adulthood on much younger children than their counterparts elsewhere. In one such ethnographical study of children and adolescence in Gujarat, the adolescent girls assumed the roles of wives, mothers and home makers in their teens.(Saraswathi & Dutta,1988).

There is no consensus on the age span that constitutes adolescence. Despite this the socio-cultural, historical and biological evidence delineates a stage marking the end of childhood and beginning of adulthood. With acceptance of adolescence as an important milestone in developmental span, it becomes imperative to address the issues related to the challenges faced by them and their empowerment.

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Indian population has crossed 1 billion mark (census, 2011). Adolescents (10-19) constitute 20 percentage of the total population. This implies that if carefully managed this huge pool of young population can be harnessed for socio-economic development of the nation. Any shortfall in this regard can have serious implication for well-being of the nation.

## CHALLENGES FACED BY ADOLESCENTS

The adolescents are not a homogeneous group. They live in different circumstances and face all sorts of challenges. Nonetheless, there are several issues

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that unite them. There are issues related to their health physical and mental well being, educational difficulties and employment prospects. More than anything else this is the period of identity acquisition or “identity crisis” (Erickson).

Interactions and experiences with family at home, with peers in school shape one's perception about self Who am I?, What are my strengths and my weaknesses (self perception). How other's perceive oneself contributes to perception about self. Self- Esteem is how favourably or unfavourably we rate ourselves .A positive Self-esteem goes a long way in shaping one's life, success and failures in various life endeavours.

## **LITERACY AND EDUCATION**

There has been steady improvement in the literacy rate of 7 + population at 74%. This figure, however, masks the regional variations in this respect with places like Mizoram and Kerala showing an impressive above 90% literacy, whereas regions like Rajasthan, Uttarpradesh and Bihar lagging with under 60% literacy rate (census, 2011). Similarly, as compared to males, female literacy rate is much poorer which is a cause for grave concern.

## **WORK AND EMPLOYMENT**

According to National sample survey of 2007-08, one in three adolescents between the age of 15-19 years worked for wages (Dev & Venkatanarayana 2011). Rural adolescents of 15-19 years age group have greater labour participation rate than that of urban adolescents. Adolescents in urban areas and from upper and middle classes utilise this time for further education and to prepare themselves for future employment. This luxury is not available to adolescents from poorer sections and specially girls whose contribution to the family income in form of house-hold chores, and work in unorganized sectors like farm labour, domestic help goes unrecognized.

## **JUVENILE CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST ADOLESCENTS**

Some of the most heinous crimes reported these days are the ones by juveniles. The national crime bureau (2010) reported that 30,303 young people below 18 years were booked. Majority of the juvenile crimes were committed by those between 16-18 years (63.3%) followed by those between 12-15 years (34%). The crimes committed range from drug abuse, alcoholism to physical and sexual assault, human trafficking etc. Similarly, adolescents, too, are victims of criminal behaviour which includes human trafficking, rape, murder and all sorts of abuse. Here, too, female from rural areas are most vulnerable.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Adolescents are the future of the nation. With an ever increasing pool of adolescent girls and boys, we need to properly utilize this potential energy with

progressive legislations, their effective implementation and investment in health and education of children and adolescents. A number of progressive legislations like right to education, child marriage restraint Act. The child labour (prohibition and regulation) Act, 1986, criminal laws to prevent child abuse are a few legislations which strengthen the rights of children and adolescents.

These legislations require support of community to be more effective. Taking cue from our surrounding it can be said that things are improving for adolescents and it is on account of joint effort by state and family.

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