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## Assessing the health challenges and behaviours of youth in India: A comprehensive review

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### Abstract

The youth demographic is a precious reservoir of human resources in every nation. Remarkably, this cohort is commonly referred to as youth, adolescents, young adults, and adults. In our investigation, we conducted a meticulous review of reputable academic journals and op-ed columns in daily newspapers, but the literature predominantly addressed public health concerns and general health issues, with a notable absence of research dedicated to the health of young individuals. Presently, adults are grappling with a wide array of both internal and external health challenges. An alarming statistic reveals that between 10% to 30% of young people are afflicted by various ailments, encompassing nutritional disorders, diabetes, hypertension, tuberculosis, road traffic accidents, tobacco and alcohol misuse, stress-related disorders, suicidal tendencies, depression, and various forms of violence, with the highest incidence occurring within the age range of 10 to 30 years. This study employed a comprehensive meta-analysis, synthesizing data from diverse studies and reports focused on youth health. However, despite this exhaustive review, it is evident that there is a conspicuous lack of concrete interventions addressing the health needs of the youth on both ends of the age spectrum. In the Indian context, numerous health initiatives, including health insurance schemes, maternal benefits programs, and child immunization initiatives, have been launched. Regrettably, these programs do not extend to the specific health requirements of the youth. This study emphatically underscores the pressing need for tailored health programs and policies designed to tackle the evident and hidden health challenges faced by the younger generation, who represent the future strength of our nation. The research findings strongly recommend the implementation of strategic health interventions to enhance the overall well-being of the youth.

**Keywords:** Health problems, health awareness, youth health policy, youth

### Introduction

Adolescence, that transitional phase bridging childhood and adulthood, is a period of immense significance in an individual's life. It is an intermediary stage, often likened to a liminal state where one stands on the threshold of maturity, no longer characterized as a child yet not fully realized as an adult. This pivotal phase is marked by a whirlwind of rapid and profound developments, occurring across physical, cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. These transformative changes signify the process of maturation and self-discovery. Within this stage, there is a staggering demographic-over 1.5 billion individuals worldwide, which represents a substantial portion of the global population totalling 6.7 billion (Khadiilkar VV *et al.*, 2014) <sup>[1]</sup>. These 10 to 24-year-olds, poised on the cusp of adulthood, play a crucial role in shaping the future of our world. It is crucial to emphasize that a substantial majority of these young people, around 70 percent, are inhabitants of developing nations. In these regions, they grapple with a unique set of challenges, encompassing social inequities, economic disparities, and health-related adversities that are distinct from the circumstances encountered in more economically advanced countries (United Nations, 2009). The current generation of youth embarks on their journey to adulthood in a world that is vastly different from that experienced by preceding generations (Jasmine S. Sundar 2013) <sup>[2]</sup>. This transformation is propelled by a multitude of external forces, including the global prevalence of AIDS, the rapid onslaught of globalization, the expansion of urban centres, the advent of electronic communication, significant patterns of migration, and a complex array of economic challenges. These interconnected dynamics collectively redefine the very essence of youth, moulding their experiences and opportunities in unprecedented ways, offering both promise and complexity in equal measure.

## Methodology

This study was conducted through a rigorous process of meta-analysis, drawing heavily on the quality of systematic reviews, findings from independent research studies, statistical data sourced from various reports, and an evaluation of the effectiveness of healthcare interventions.

## Search Strategy

Within the context of India, we undertook a comprehensive review of population-based studies. These studies were distinguished by their extensive sample sizes and multicentric scope, encompassing both urban and rural regions. To source the most reputable and reliable information, we conducted searches across established journals such as Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed, among others. Our search strategy involved the utilization of various search terms and keywords, including descriptors like 'young,' 'youth,' 'adolescent,' 'young adult.' Our particular focus was on specific outcomes of interest, which included conditions such as undernutrition, obesity, overweight, common mental health problems, stress, depression, suicide, as well as the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and other substances.

## Hypertension

Hypertension, or elevated blood pressure, is an escalating health concern among the pediatric and adolescent populations (Jasmine S. Sundar 2013) [2]. A comprehensive physical examination of adolescents should include anthropometric measurements, encompassing height and weight assessments, given the established link between increased weight and hypertension risk. Sundar *et al.* (2013) [2] conducted a study in Chennai, revealing a notable hypertension prevalence of 21.5%. Furthermore, a prospective case-control investigation involving 1,000 students aged 10 to 19 years, as reported by another study (cite), exhibited statistically significant differences in blood pressure readings between the case and control groups. These findings underscore the presence of significant hypertension risk factors among adolescents, warranting diligent attention and proactive measures in clinical and public health contexts.

## Juvenile-Onset Diabetes Mellitus

According to the International Diabetes Federation, there has been a substantial increase in the prevalence of diabetes in the adult population. In 2011, the global count of adults affected by the disease stood at 366 million, with projections estimating a surge to 552 million by the year 2030. Of particular concern is the rising occurrence of diabetes among individuals below the age of 44, indicative of a growing trend towards early-onset diabetes. For instance, in the urban setting of Chennai, a notable increase in diabetes prevalence, from 25% to 34.7%, was observed in this age group in 2006, as reported by Ambady *et al.*, 2013 [4] these statistics underscore the urgency of establishing an integrated national system aimed at the early detection and prevention of diabetes. Such a system would not only help in identifying those at risk but also in implementing preventive measures at an early stage, mitigating the burden of diabetes and its associated complications. Addressing the issue of juvenile-onset diabetes is imperative to promote public health and alleviate the potential long-term health and economic consequences associated with this chronic condition.

## Tuberculosis (TB): A Communicable and Contagious Disease

Tuberculosis, a communicable disease primarily transmitted through droplet infection, is a significant public health

concern. Dharma Rao Uppada 2014 [5] noted this communicability in 2012. Over a span of two years, a cohort of 6,643 participants underwent rigorous monitoring, during which 609 individuals sought diagnostic assessment for Tuberculosis within the diagnostic ward (DGW). Among these participants, 310 (50.9%) were male, while 299 (49.1%) were female. An interesting revelation was that 443 (72.9%) individuals were referred to the DGW based on a Tuberculin Skin Test (TST) result of greater than or equal to 10 mm. Within this group, individuals (1.15%) were definitively diagnosed with TB, and an additional 3 participants (0.50%) were categorized as probable TB cases. Importantly, approximately 19.05% of participants displayed Mycobacterium tuberculosis (MTB) positive sputum samples. Furthermore, it was observed that individuals experiencing a persistent cough lasting equal to or greater than 2 weeks were 19 times more likely to yield a positive culture for M. tuberculosis from their sputum samples, underscoring the clinical importance of this symptom in TB diagnosis. The Indian Red Cross Society Tuberculosis program has also shed light on a concerning demographic trend. It revealed that TB imposes a disproportionately high burden on young females, with more than 50% of female cases occurring in women under the age 37 (Borade P. V *et al.*, 2014) [3]. This demographic insight highlights the need for targeted interventions and awareness campaigns, recognizing the specific vulnerability of this population to TB.

## Psycho Social Problems

### Adolescent Schizophrenia

Adolescent schizophrenia is a complex mental health condition that necessitates a robust, multifaceted approach to address its challenges effectively. Notably, on a global scale, approximately 40.5% of countries currently lack established mental health policies, and a concerning 30.3% lack dedicated mental health programs entirely. Furthermore, even in countries where mental health policies have been devised and outlined, including nations such as India and Nepal, the translation of these policies into practical implementation has often fallen short of desired standards, as highlighted by Thara (2005) [11]. To adequately address the specific needs of individuals grappling with disabling conditions such as schizophrenia, a comprehensive network of services is imperative, one that collaboratively spans across government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector (Arora M *et al.*, 2014) [9]. The establishment of these services is critical for providing holistic care and support to affected adolescents. Moreover, it is crucial to develop fundamental training programs tailored for medical practitioners and nursing professionals working within Primary Healthcare Centers (PHCs). These programs should equip healthcare providers with the requisite knowledge and skills to effectively diagnose, manage, and treat adolescents afflicted by schizophrenia. Additionally, ensuring access to appropriate and evidence-based medications is of paramount importance, as medication plays a central role in symptom control and overall patient well-being. Comprehensive care, encompassing not only medical but also psycho-social support, is instrumental in improving the outcomes and quality of life for adolescents battling schizophrenia.

### Depression: A Multifaceted Psychological Disorder

Depression represents a multifaceted psychological disorder characterized by specific emotional, behavioural, and cognitive manifestations, as detailed in a study by Rani

Mohanraj and colleagues. Their study involved the examination of 964 adolescents, comprising 509 boys (constituting 39.2% of the sample). The research findings unveiled a spectrum of depressive states within this cohort. Among the examined adolescents, a notable proportion, 509 individuals (39.2%), exhibited non-depressive states, indicating the absence of clinically significant depressive symptoms. Contrastingly, 187 participants (19.4%) were identified as experiencing mild depressive symptoms, while an additional 41 individuals (4.3%) exhibited severe manifestations of depression, signifying a more profound and distressing emotional and psychological state (Khadilkar VV *et al.*, 2014) [1]. These findings underscore the diversity and severity of depressive experiences within the adolescent population. The recognition of these varying degrees of depression is of paramount importance in tailoring interventions and support strategies to address the distinct needs of affected individuals, ultimately contributing to improved mental health and well-being among adolescents.

### **Stress: A Complex Outcome of Person-Environment Interaction**

Stress is a complex response arising from the interplay between an individual and their environment, typically triggered by specific actions or situations that impose significant physical, psychological, or both types of demands on the individual. The impact of stress on human health and well-being is of paramount importance, and scientific studies have sought to investigate its prevalence and implications. In one such study, Dabur and colleagues utilized the Life Stress Scale to assess the degree of stress experienced by adolescent girls enrolled in the 12th standard in Hisar and Hyderabad. The findings revealed that a substantial portion of these young girls, specifically 47.5% and 72.5%, fell within the moderate category of family-related stress levels. This underlines the prevalence of stressors among this demographic and the potential implications for their psychological well-being. Furthermore, a cross-sectional study conducted by Samanta and associates in 2012, encompassing 199 male students from West Bengal, both urban (104) and rural (95), delved into the prevalence of mental health issues. Notably, the study identified an array of concerns, including feelings of loneliness reported by 17.3% of participants. Additionally, 19.2% of the students reported experiencing intrusive or distressing thoughts, further emphasizing the psychological impact of stressors on mental health. These findings illuminate the intricate relationship between environmental stressors and their impact on the psychological well-being of individuals, underscoring the importance of addressing stress in the context of public health and clinical practice.

### **Conclusion**

The present study review brings to light the substantial challenges faced by youth, encompassing their behaviours and conditions that exert profound influences on their growth and development. These challenges are progressively on the rise, often intertwined and coexisting, and are expected to persist in the years ahead. Key among the health-influencing behaviours and issues affecting young individuals are disparities in nutrition—both undernutrition and overnutrition, as well as the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Psychosocial challenges, notably stress, in conjunction with the consumption of substances such as tobacco and alcohol, further compound the complexities surrounding youth well-being. To effectively address these multifaceted issues, there

exists a compelling imperative for active community involvement. Communities are pivotal in the identification, planning, integration, and execution of initiatives aimed at fostering the health and well-being of young individuals. The establishment of robust mechanisms for delivering population-based interventions is equally critical, as is the rigorous assessment of their efficacy. Strategic investments in sectors encompassing health, nutrition, education, employment, and social welfare are essential for nurturing the healthy development of young people. These programs must be subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation utilizing public health methodologies to ensure their effectiveness and impact on the target population.

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