

WHITE PAPER

MAJOR HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES FACED BY ADOLESCENTS IN KERALA

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Abstract:

This White Paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the major health and psychological issues faced by adolescents in Kerala, India. The paper investigates the key factors contributing to these issues and presents relevant data, research, and expert opinions to better understand the complexity of these challenges. The paper also discusses possible interventions and policy recommendations to address these issues and improve the overall health and well-being of adolescents in Kerala.

Introduction

Background

Adolescence is a critical stage in human development, characterized by significant biological, psychological, and social changes (Sawyer et al., 2018). However, during this transitional period, adolescents often face various health and psychological issues that may have long-lasting consequences on their overall well-being (Patton et al., 2016). In Kerala, a state in southwestern India, adolescents experience several unique health and psychological challenges, which warrant a comprehensive analysis and exploration.

Objectives

This White Paper aims to:

- a) Identify and discuss the major health and psychological issues faced by adolescents in Kerala.
- b) Explore the factors contributing to these issues, including socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors.
- c) Present relevant data, research, and expert opinions to better understand the complexity of these issues.
- d) Discuss possible interventions and policy recommendations to address these issues.

Literature Review

Mental Health Issues

Kerala has reported high rates of mental health issues among adolescents, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Nair et al., 2013). The prevalence of depression among adolescents in Kerala is higher than the national average (Math et al., 2015). A study by Anoop et al. (2021) found that 23.5% of adolescents in Kerala experienced depressive symptoms, while 12.2% reported suicidal ideation.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is another significant concern among adolescents in Kerala. Research has shown an increasing trend of alcohol and tobacco use among adolescents (Kuriakose et al., 2018). The prevalence of alcohol use among adolescents in Kerala is estimated to be 10.3%, while tobacco use prevalence stands at 7.1% (Nair et al., 2018).

Nutritional Issues

Malnutrition, obesity, and eating disorders are some of the nutritional issues faced by adolescents in Kerala. Despite significant progress in addressing malnutrition in recent years, 19.5% of adolescents in Kerala are still underweight, while 12.3% are overweight or obese (Menon et al., 2020). Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, are also emerging as significant concerns (Rajendran et al., 2017).

Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health

Adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues, such as early pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and lack of awareness about reproductive health, are critical concerns in Kerala (George et al., 2018). A study by Thomas et al. (2017) reported that 8.2% of female adolescents in Kerala became pregnant before the age of 19, while the prevalence of STIs among adolescents was found to be 3.5%.

Factors Contributing to Health and Psychological Issues

Socioeconomic Factors

Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, low educational attainment, and limited access to healthcare services, contribute to the health and psychological issues faced by adolescents in Kerala (Pillai et al., 2020). Additionally, the high unemployment rate among the youth in Kerala exacerbates mental health problems (George et al., 2020).

Cultural Factors

Cultural factors, such as social stigma, gender norms, and traditional beliefs, play a significant role in influencing the health and psychological well-being of adolescents in Kerala (Joseph et al., 2018). For instance, the stigma associated with mental health issues prevents many adolescents from seeking timely and appropriate care (Krishnakumar et al., 2016). Furthermore, conservative attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health hinder open discussions and education on these topics (Sebastian et al., 2019).

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors, such as urbanization, pollution, and climate change, have been linked to various health issues among adolescents in Kerala (Soman et al., 2018). For example, increased air pollution has been associated with respiratory problems, while extreme weather events due to climate change can exacerbate existing health conditions (Anand et al., 2020).

Possible Interventions and Policy Recommendations

Mental Health Promotion and Awareness

Increasing mental health awareness and reducing stigma are critical to addressing the mental health issues faced by adolescents in Kerala. Schools, colleges, and communities should implement mental health promotion programs, such as workshops, seminars, and counseling services, to educate adolescents and their families about mental health (Philip et al., 2021).

Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment

Substance abuse prevention programs should target adolescents in Kerala to address the growing issue of alcohol and tobacco use. These programs should focus on education, skill-building, and community engagement to discourage substance use among adolescents (Thomas et al., 2020). Furthermore, accessible and affordable treatment options should be made available for adolescents with substance abuse problems.

Nutrition and Health Education

Nutrition and health education programs should be implemented in schools and communities to address malnutrition, obesity, and eating disorders among adolescents in Kerala (Menon et al., 2020). These programs should aim to promote healthy eating habits, physical activity, and body image awareness.

Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Education

Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education should be integrated into the school curriculum in Kerala to address adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues (George et al., 2018). This education should be age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and gender-responsive, covering topics such as contraception, STIs, and healthy relationships.

Conclusion

Adolescents in Kerala face various health and psychological issues that require a comprehensive and integrated approach to address. By identifying the key contributing factors and implementing evidence-based interventions and policy recommendations, it is possible to improve the overall health and well-being of adolescents in Kerala.

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LIFE Foundation, New Delhi
Email: research@lifefoundation.ngo
Website: lifefoundation.ngo

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