

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND APPLIED EXERCISE SCIENCE**Promoting Physical Activity among Adolescents: A Solution for Common Adolescent****Prof. (Dr.) Augustine George* & Smt Eeva Sara Jacob****

*Professor, Department of Physical Education, Government College, Kottayam, Kerala

**Physical Education Teacher, St Therasas Bethany Convent Higher Secondary School, Chengaroor, Pathanamthitta Kerala

Abstract:

India has a significant adolescent population whose health and well-being critically shape the nation's development. This study examines common adolescent issues such as poor mental health, academic procrastination, inadequate sleep, and excessive screen time, and the role of physical activity in mitigating them. Despite initiatives like the Adolescence Education Programme (AEP), physical activity remains inadequately integrated into adolescent education and health promotion frameworks. Evidence highlights that regular participation in physical education, sports, and yoga enhances academic performance, cognitive functions, emotional stability, and overall mental health. However, data reveal that nearly 74 per cent of Indian adolescents are insufficiently active, largely due to academic pressure, weak infrastructure, and a lack of physical education teachers. Findings emphasise that structured, compulsory school-based physical activity programs can significantly improve adolescent health and productivity. The paper advocates for integrating daily physical activity by parents and schools as a sustainable and holistic approach to adolescent development in India.

Keywords:

Adolescents, Physical activity, Mental health, Physical education, School programs, India, Adolescent Education Programme

INTRODUCTION

There are 253 million adolescents in the age group 10-19 years in India. This age group comprises individuals in a transient phase of life. The remarkable physical, emotional and social changes make adolescents vulnerable to certain common problems. The health of this age group is a key determinant of India's progress ¹.

Various government programs and educational policies aim to support adolescent development comprehensively, focusing on health, education, mental well-being, child marriage prevention, and life skills education. The Adolescence Education Programme (AEP) is specifically designed to address sexual and reproductive health, life skills, and risk behaviours among adolescents. Evidence indicates AEP has potential positive impacts but requires sustainability and expansion ². Physical activity plays a vital role in adolescent development. But it is not seen to be significantly placed in AEP.

Adolescence is a problematic age with common problems such as excessive screen time, mental health issues, academic procrastination and unhealthy sleeping patterns on a higher side. Studies indicate that physical activity has positive influences on academic performance, cognitive function, and mental health among school-aged children and adolescents in India. Students participating more regularly in physical education (PE) tend to show better academic results, attendance, and cognitive benefits ³.

As per the India report card, 2022, Physical education is present in most Indian schools, with about 80% of primary and 90% of secondary private schools and a high percentage of government schools having PE in their curriculum. This often includes two PE periods per week, totalling 40-50 minutes. However, there is generally no evidence of daily physical activity or daily access for students to playgrounds and facilities, limiting opportunities for physical activity ³

Another matter of concern is the absence of PE teachers to provide quality physical education in schools throughout India. In Kerala, though physical education is part of the curriculum from class V to class XII, with well-prepared activity books and a teacher's handbook for every class, there is a massive dearth of PE teachers. As a result, the knowledge is not transmitted to the students. PE periods are indeed available to students. But these periods are not used in the true sense for which it is provided by the school authorities or students.

Barriers to sufficient physical activity in Indian schools include academic pressure, lack of infrastructure and playground access, cultural norms, gender biases, and inconsistent implementation of policies like those in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 that advocate for integrating physical activity into the curriculum³.

This paper looks into the intricacies of adolescent problems concerning mental health, academic procrastination, screen time, sleep issues and their interplay. This paper also explores the possibility and practicality of regular physical activity as a remedy to these problems.

Adolescents' problems

Adolescents' being an age of transition is a troubling age. This is the time period when a lot of challenges and issues pop up in an individual's life. Some frequently observed problems are mental health issues, academic procrastination, increased screen time and insufficient and low-quality sleep. These problems are cyclic and often become the root cause of other problems.

Mental health

Depression is the most prevalent mental health issue among Indian adolescents, with studies reporting that over half of school-going adolescents experience mild to severe depression⁴.

Anxiety, psychological distress, social and behavioural problems, social phobia, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are also common.⁵ Covid-19 has intensified these problems with isolation, fear of uncertainty, and heightened anxiety. Now, Artificial Intelligence is posing another challenge, and the fear of losing job opportunities is adding fire to already burdened adolescents.

Mental health issues arise and are intensified by academic pressure, societal expectations, and stigma surrounding mental illness in India.⁶ Even after identifying that the child requires counselling or professional help, parents and the child themselves are reluctant to do so, fearing negative social comments.

Screen time

Post-COVID-19 screen time use has increased significantly among adolescents. Even though offline classes have replaced online classes, the children have become addicted to mobile phones and other screen gadgets.

Regional studies, such as those from Maharashtra, show that 22% of children aged 9–17 years spend more than six hours daily on screens, while over 60% nationally in this age group log at least three hours daily on mobile games or social media. Urban adolescents are particularly at risk due to greater digital access, while parental engagement often remains limited⁷.

Internet and technology addiction are recognised as significant contributors to mental health problems among Indian adolescents. Excessive screen time is linked to anxiety, depression, and poor emotional regulation⁷

Academic procrastination

One study in Assam found that over 61% of undergraduates exhibited an average level of procrastination, with nearly half expressing a desire to reduce these tendencies. Procrastination, although common across genders and regions, is tied to lower performance, increased stress, and negative emotions such as guilt and self-doubt⁸.

Academic procrastination is often a result of maladaptive behaviour. Opening books gives anxiety, and to prevent anxiety, close the book. Many times, the overconfidence in covering the syllabus later, impulsive tendencies, lack of attention and interest also lead to academic procrastination.

Procrastination can lead to lower grades, heightened stress, absenteeism, and a lot of mental health issues.

Sleep quality

A Kerala urban study with 657 adolescent students showed a mean sleep duration of 7.2 hours, with 60% having inadequate sleep duration. Private school students showed poorer sleep patterns with late bedtimes and early wake-ups. Factors influencing poor sleep included age, gender, type of school, family income, and distance travelled to school.⁸

Poor sleep can lead to poor attention in school, tiredness, bad body posture, lower academic performance, low immunity and cognitive errors.

Mental health issues, excessive screen time, academic procrastination and poor sleep are interrelated problems and one worsens the other. It is also noted that if one aspect is corrected or improved, it shows improvement in other aspects too. If a teenager gets good sleep, mental health improves, which can lower academic procrastination, too.

Impact of physical activity in managing adolescents' problems

A study done on adolescents by Pandey M et al shows that yoga and physical exercise interventions can improve emotional, behavioural problems and academic performance, reinforcing the holistic benefits physical activity has on adolescent wellbeing.⁹

A broader review of physical activity's effect on mental health in children and adolescents found that aerobic exercise significantly benefits psychological well-being, cognitive function, and reduces internalising (e.g., anxiety, depression) and externalising problems across populations, including those with neurodevelopmental disorders. These benefits are linked to neurochemical changes and improved executive function¹⁰.

One study conducted among school-going adolescents aged 14-16 in Kerala found that the majority had moderate physical activity levels and good mental health, though no strong direct correlation between mental health and physical activity was found. However, moderate to high physical activity was associated with better psychological outcomes, and socio-personal factors such as type of school and gender influenced physical activity levels. The study recommended school-based initiatives to promote physical activity for mental and physical health benefits, highlighting the role of health education and counselling to motivate adolescents to participate in physical activities¹¹

Prevalence of physical activity among adolescents in India

According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) study analysing data across 146 countries, including India, approximately 74% of Indian adolescents aged 11-17 years were insufficiently physically active in 2016. Insufficient activity was reported in 72% of boys and 76% of girls, slightly below the global average of inactivity. Walking and active chores contributed to some of the activity, especially among girls¹².

The 2022 India Report Card on physical activity assessed data from 27 states with a sample of 3,808 children and adolescents. It found 25.2% of youth aged 15-17 years did not meet the moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) guidelines of at least 60 minutes daily. Urban adolescents (38%) and girls (29.3%)

were more likely to be insufficiently active. About 64.3% participated in physical activities at school, but averaged only 16.1 minutes of activity daily. Objective accelerometer data in Chennai revealed only 25.8 minutes of MVPA per day among adolescents³.

Another study in Chennai found 63% of adolescents were insufficiently active, particularly females and older adolescents (16-17 years) versus younger (13-15 years). Academic stress and lack of play spaces were cited as causes for reduced physical activity¹³.

Discussion

The above studies show that mental health issues, academic procrastination, sleep quality and screen time are challenges of adolescence. If these problems are not addressed and managed, they can lead to loss of productivity and can adversely affect the progress of the nation. Physical activity could be a possible one-stop solution for all these problems. The challenge lies in developing adherence towards physical activity by adolescents. Making them aware and motivating them works for some but not all. A compulsory physical activity and sports session every day for the students might be a doable act.

Conclusion

It is beyond doubt that mental health issues, academic procrastination, excessive screen time, and poor sleep are lowering the performance of adolescents in India. The impact of physical activity in mitigating these issues is encouraging. However physical activity intervention study is recommended to study the effect of physical activity on these four variables. The type of physical activity and the duration of physical activity that can improve adherence among adolescents to physical activity also need to be studied. Nevertheless, physical activity must be encouraged to keep our youth healthy and productive. Sincere efforts must be made by the parents and schools to ensure that adolescents are getting sufficient physical activity.

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