

## States

Posted at: Oct 9 2018 6:13PM

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### Mental health problems on the rise among Indian adolescents : Study

Kochi, Oct 9 (UNI) One out of every five students in Kerala in the age group of 12-19 suffers from psychological distress, with its severity ranging from mild in 10.5 per cent of students to moderate (5.4 per cent ) and severe (5 per cent ), a study revealed.

Studies across the state have also revealed the prevalence of physical abuse (75%), emotional abuse (85%) and sexual abuse (21%) among school-going adolescents, which are prime factors in triggering mental illnesses, informed Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences Head of Department Dr Dinesan N here on Tuesday.

Disclosing this at a workshop on mental health problems among young people here, organized by the AIMS here, he said according to WHO, 10-20 per cent of all adolescents worldwide (youngsters between 10 to 19 years) experience mental disorders. Half of all these mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 years, and three-quarters by the age of 20 years. Suicide is the leading cause of death among 15-20 year-old youth.

The burden of depression has increased by 67 per cent between 1990 – 2013; by 2025, it is projected to rise by another 22.5%, he said.

“Most of the time, youngsters are not able to cope with stress and use a variety of coping mechanisms like substance abuse. In Kerala, the prevalence of alcohol among adolescents is found to be 15% (23% in boys and 6.5% in girls), with prevalence increasing with age. The prevalence of tobacco use is 6.9%, and the mean age of onset of use is 14 years. Bullying, depression, substance abuse, and suicide are major challenges facing today’s youth,” Dr Dinesen said.

“Adolescent depression is on the rise, but most of the time, it goes undetected with symptoms like irritability, anxiety and poor performance in studies. Traumatic events in early childhood, frequent migration, negative life events, educational setbacks, early relationship problems and stress at school and family are all linked to depression among children and adolescents. Early identification and treatment are the key to improving the mental health and quality of life of such patients,” he added.

Regarding suicides among youth, he said that “suicide is the second leading cause of death among youngsters in the age group of 15-29 years. About 78 per cent of global suicides occur in low and middle income countries. Ingestion of pesticides and hanging are the most common methods to commit suicide among young people. The link between suicide and mental disorders is well established, but in adolescents, suicide mostly occurs on an impulse.”

Highlighting the menace of substance abuse among today’s youth, which is on the rise, with 40-70 per cent of adolescents in India exposed to some form of substance abuse before the age of 18 years, he said “addiction to drugs at an early age leads to many high-risk behaviors like gambling, stealing, fighting and other antisocial activities. Parents, teachers and friends of children facing substance abuse need to help enhance positive self-esteem among them and be supportive. It has also been found that the increased need for gadgets and technology in adolescents has given rise to impulsivity and reduced ability to concentrate. Children unable to delay gratification is predictive of low performance in later life.”

Stressing the need for inculcating a spirit of resilience in today’s adolescents to overcome mental illnesses, Dr Dinesen said: “resilience is the ability to successfully cope with the various challenges and opportunities in life. It does not mean that individuals do not suffer emotionally when faced with a life circumstance; it means they are able to apply competencies which they have learned to deal with challenging circumstances. By doing that, they are developing new skills which they will be able to apply in future situations. Having supportive relationships and an ability to manage emotions and ask for help contribute to resilience,” he added.