

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Adolescents Aspiration and Their Parental Relations: A Study among Rural School Going Adolescents in a Block of Darjeeling District

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Abstract: *Background:* Adolescents' future aspirations and expectations are important precursor of adult attainment. *Objectives:* To document rural adolescents' understanding of their aspirations and the problems they face for achieving them. The relationship of adolescents with their family and how they feel about themselves have also been determined. *Methods:* This was a cross-sectional study conducted among school-going adolescents of Fashidewa block of Darjeeling district from July to October, 2007. A total of 420 students comprised the study population. *Results* - Among them, 41.4%, responded that they want to pursue a professional career in future. Poverty was found to be the commonest obstacle. The commonest problem-solving method was having discussions with friends. The study revealed that 56.4% of the adolescents communicated their problem and about 27.6% of them had conflict with their parents in last one year. *Conclusion:* Interventions at the community level like youth clubs for safe social interaction and literacy classes, training of peer educators to teach life-skills, forums for parents and teachers to discuss their own concerns and those of the adolescents may help to design programmes that will contribute to greater financial independence and employment opportunities for adolescents.

Key words: adolescent aspirations, parental relations

Introduction

The adolescent years are pivotal to adult life success. During these years the adolescents assume increased responsibility for self direction in areas like socialization, independent living, education, employment, mental and physical health. From initial experiences the young adult lays foundation for how his or her life will progress in various domains. Adolescents' future aspirations and expectations are important precursor of adult attainment. Expectations result from perception of opportunity that exists within the family and in the society. Many important decisions of life such as to pursue higher education or to enter the job force directly after high school are made during adolescence. These early decisions affect the rest of a person's life. Therefore, it is important to understand the individual and social factors that play into the process of adolescent career development [1].

In many parts of India, a large number of young girls are married off in their early adolescence and lack the independent authority for the control of their future aspirations [2]. Even adolescent boys may have to join the work force to earn a living

for the family. Relationship of the adolescents with their family members as well as the teachers play an important role in shaping their future. Support from parents and teachers help them to move forward [3-4]. Various studies have highlighted the importance of nutrition, psychological support and sexual issues during the adolescent years, however, evidence for better understanding of adolescents aspirations and perceptions is scant particularly in the north-eastern part of the country. So this study had been carried out to document rural adolescents' understanding of their aspirations and the problems they face for achieving them. The relationship of adolescents with their family and how they feel about themselves have also been determined.

Material and Methods

This was a cross-sectional study conducted from July to October, 2007, among school-going adolescents studying in various schools of Fashidewa block of Darjeeling district. The study was approved by the ethical committee of North Bengal Medical College. Among the 4 high schools of the block, one co-education school was selected for the study. All the students of class VI to IX were eligible to participate in the study. These classes were selected as they correspond to the desired age group of the adolescents. The head of the selected school was contacted and the purpose of the study was explained, followed by obtaining of permission. The research project was described to each class of students involved and were told about confidentiality. Parental consents were taken. All the students present on the day of visit with the signed consent form were considered for the study. A total of 420 students comprised the study population.

A self-administered anonymous questionnaire in vernacular language was developed for the study. Data was collected regarding their family background, future aspirations, problems in attaining them, relation with the family etc. A set of questions were asked to determine how they perceive their self image in terms of achievements or failures. Data analysis was done using EPI info version 3.3.2. Proportions and chi-square tests were used for data analysis.

Results

Aspirations	Male	Female	Total
Professional course	127(49.2)	47(29)	174(41.4)
Army & Police	79(30.6)	4(2.6)	83(19.8)
Work hard & good jobs	27(10.5)	56(34.5)	83(19.8)
Excel in sports	11(4.2)	3(1.8)	14(3.3)
Don't know	14(5.5)	52(32.1)	66(15.7)
Total	258(100)	162(100)	420(100)

Figures in parentheses are percentages

A total of 420 students were interviewed. Of these 258 (61.4%) were males and 162 (38.6%) were females. Majority of the study population were in their early adolescent age (60.2%). Most of them were Hindus (90.5%) and

belonged to nuclear families (72.4%). Majority of them (88.8%) lived with both parents, 9.3% had single parent and 1.9% lived with their grandparents and/or stepmothers. When the adolescents were enquired about their aspiration in next ten years, most of them, 41.4%, responded that they want to pursue a professional career

in future (doctor, teacher or engineer). Approximately half of male students (49.2%) aspired for a professional career as compared to 29% of female students. Among the males 30.6% would prefer to join the army and police and 4.2% wanted to excel in sports. Of the females 34.5% wanted to work hard and join the workforce but another one-third of them (32.1%) were not very sure about their future aspiration (Table-1).

	Male (n= 258)	Female (n=162)	Total (n=420)
General health problems	123(47.6)	93(57.4)	216(51.4)
Food and nutrition	100(38.7)	68(41.9)	168(40.0)
Lagging behind in studies	49(19)	54(33.3)	103(24.5)
Use of tobacco/addictions	141(54.6)	45(27.8)	186(44.3)
Sex-related problems	96(37.2)	49(30.2)	145(34.5)
*Multiple responses does not add to 100 percent Figures in parentheses are percentages			

On questioning about the obstacles and shortcomings to achieve these goals, 47.4% mentioned that they have no such barriers while the rest reported of some difficulties. Poverty was found to be the commonest obstacle

followed by other family problems, poor health, poor school performance etc. Poor health and poor school performance were more common among females. Regarding the place of values in life, most (60.4%) of the adolescents ranked bravery at the top, followed by responsibility, respectfulness and patience. The study population were asked to reveal their views about the problems of adolescents. It was found that half of them (51.4%) perceived general health problems to be important followed by the problem of addiction (44.3%). While the girls mostly mentioned about the general health and nutritional problems, the boys mentioned mostly about addiction and sex related issues. (Table-2)

	Male (n=258)	Female (n=162)	Total (n=420)	P-value
Discussion with friends	196(75.9)	99(61.1)	295(70.2)	<.005
Discussion with parents	121(46.8)	105(64.8)	226(53.8)	<.001
Help from teachers	16(6.2)	13(8)	29(6.9)	>.05
*Multiple responses Figures in parentheses are percentages				

The commonest problem-solving method among the adolescents was found to be discussion with the friends (70.2%) followed by discussion with parents. Compared to females (61.1%), a significantly higher proportion of males (75.9%) discussed their problems with their peers,

whereas with regards to discussion with parents, it was significantly higher among females (64.8%) compared to males (46.8%). Seeking help from the teachers was found to be very low among both the genders (Table-3).

To determine the relationship with the family members, the adolescents were asked a set of questions. The present study revealed that 56.4% of the adolescents communicated their problem to their parents in last one year, the females (65.4%)

having communicated significantly more than the males (50.7). However, 42.6% of males and 54.9% of females think that their parents listen to them and take their feelings seriously. The difference between the males and females was found to be significant.

	Male (n=258)	Female (n=162)	Total (n=420)	p- value
Communicate freely with parents	131(50.7)	106(65.4)	237(56.4)	<0.05
Parents listen to you and take your feelings seriously	110(42.6)	89 (54.9)	199(47.4)	<0.05
Had conflict with parents	79(30.6)	37(22.8)	116(27.6)	>0.05
Ever thought of running away from home	8(3.2)	3(1.8)	11(2.6)	>0.05

Figures in parentheses are percentages

Among the study population, 27.6% of the adolescents had conflict with their parents in last 1 year, the proportion being significantly higher in males and 2.6% thought of running away from home. (Table-4)

Enquiry about the various thoughts and feelings that usually occur to the adolescents, showed that about 55% of the student had at least one positive feeling in last one month while about 30% had at least one negative thought during the same period. The rest (15%) were not sure about this type of feeling.

Discussion

Adolescence is the transitional phase when a child goes through physical, psychological and emotional changes. It is the period of acquiring new capacities and responsibilities, which may have life long consequences, especially on education, career and health. A higher proportion of males (49.2%) aspired for a professional career than females (29%). Although a higher proportion of males showed aspiration for professional careers it was very encouraging to find that almost half of the females wanted to join the workforce. Studies on gender and career aspirations in 1970s revealed that girls had more restricted career aspirations than boys and girls often opted for a narrow range of occupational categories. Recent studies refuted earlier findings and asserted that females have shown greater interest in a large number of careers and displayed more gender role flexibility in their career aspiration than males [5]. However, in the present study 32% of the females were not sure about their future aspiration. Poor health and poor school performance was also more common among the girls. This may be due to the fact that social norms for girls like involvement in household chores and early marriage, gender discrimination in respect to familial food distribution restrict them and make them unable to realize their hopes for continuing education, finding jobs or delaying marriage and child bearing. The need of the hour is to bring a change in these traditional attitudes.

General health problems and addictions were perceived as important problems of adolescents. While the girls mostly mentioned about the general health and nutritional problems, the boys mentioned about addiction and sex related issues.

This may be due to the fact that the females at this age are not exposed to addictions especially in the rural areas of our country due to family restrictions and are less concerned about the same. Studies have shown that the use of tobacco among adolescent males in other rural parts of the country is significantly higher than their female counterparts [6-7]. In India, discussion about sex related issues is still considered a taboo and this often leads to suppression of problems among females. Moreover, sources of information and contraceptive advice are rarely available or accessible to them. Campaigns on electronic media and educational programmes for school children may help to reduce their problems. Teen-centers that attract the adolescents and involve them in sports, music, athletics and other activities may prevent them from getting involved in addictions.

The study found that the adolescents mostly solved their problems by discussion with their friends (70.2%) followed by discussion with parents. Seeking help from the teachers was found to be very low among both the gender. This may be due to the fact that in India talking about sex and addiction is still considered to be a taboo and the adolescents do not feel free enough to discuss these problems with parents and teachers. As a result most of the problems are solved with the help of the friends. But as development takes place in the context of the home and school environment, teachers can serve as counselor and maintain a link between adolescent and their families. Parents play a critical role in promoting adolescent health and development. An analysis of data from six cross-national studies, representing 53 different countries, found that parent child relationships influence the likelihood of early sexual initiation, substance use and depression among adolescents [8]. The present study revealed that 56.4% of the adolescents communicated their problem with their parents in last one year, the females having communicated more than the males. Similar findings have been observed by Pick de Weiss S et al [9] among Mexican adolescents which revealed that 50% of the adolescents always discussed their problems with their mothers and another 30% did so occasionally. Sharing of personal issues often lead to easy resolution of queries and problems and help in the development of self-concept.

The present study revealed that 27.6% of the adolescents had conflict with their parents in last 1 year, the proportion being higher in males and 2.6% thought of running away from home (Table-4). It was found that disagreements mainly involved the normal, everyday events of family life such as household chores, family rules, school performances, personal choices and habits, and social relationships. Major issues like sex, drugs, politics, religion are less frequent. Fisher C.B and Johnson B.L found that american adolescents also reported frequent conflicts with their parents. These conflicts often arise because they feel that parents are not providing the emotional support they want or because youths or parents believe that the other generation is not meeting the expectations held for them or because of a lack of consensus about family and social values [10].

Since the adolescents will be the future productive population of the country, they must be given every opportunity to develop to their full potential as healthy individuals. Interventions at the community level like youth clubs for safe social

interaction and literacy classes, training of peer educators to teach life-skills, forums for parents and teachers to discuss their own concerns and those of the adolescents may help to design programmes that will contribute to greater financial independence and employment opportunities for adolescents. Educational institutions can play an active role to support the youths of today by guiding and encouraging the adolescents for a better future and act to bridge the gap with the parents.

Indian society is multicultural and multilingual, with a wide range in the income and standard of living among the population. It is expected that these factors could have impacted the findings. We hope future research will address these important issues. Out of school adolescents should also be taken into account since they might have different aspirations and problems. While addressing the issues of the adolescents through various programmes, these aspects should be taken care of so that they may be guided to a better future.

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