



## AWARNESS ON KNOWLEDGE AMONG ADOLESCENTS ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

### Home Science

**Dr. Santhi Sree Sunkara**

Assistant Professor (Contract Basis), Department of Home Science, SPMVV, Tirupati

**R. Varalakshmi**

Professor, Department of Home Science, SPMVV, Tirupati

### ABSTRACT

The transition from childhood to adulthood occurs during adolescence period, which is characterized by major biological changes such as physical growth, sexual maturation, and psychosocial development. The present study was carried out to assess awareness on knowledge on reproductive health among adolescent girls of Chittoor district. The findings implicated that one fourth of the respondents were not aware of reproductive health knowledge. On the other hand the information revealed that friends were the major sources of obtaining information. The major reasons for mentioning not knowing about the reproductive health knowledge was uninteresting and reluctance to discuss regarding. The research highlighted the need of motivating the adolescent girls towards the necessity of understanding the knowledge on reproductive health and the role in leading healthy life.

### KEYWORDS

Awareness, Reproductive Health, Adolescent girls, India

### Introduction

World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence as the period of life between 10 and 19 years of age. The adolescent experiences not only physical growth and change but also emotional, psychological, social, and mental change and growth. Adolescence is a period of increased risk taking and therefore susceptibility to behavioural problems at the time of puberty and new concerns about reproductive health. Adolescents constitute about 19% of the total population, yet remain a largely neglected, difficult-to-measure, and hard-to-reach population, in which the needs of adolescent girls in particular are often ignored.<sup>[1]</sup>

Adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years constitute 18% of the world population, i.e., about 1.2 billion. About 88% of them live in developing world. India has the largest (243 million) number of adolescents comprising one-fourth of the country's population. Adolescent health and nutrition status has an intergenerational effect, hence it is one of the important stages of the life cycle in terms of health interventions. But this period is often ignored. Nearly two-thirds of premature deaths and one-third of the total disease burden in adults are associated with conditions or behaviors that begin in their adolescence or youth, including tobacco use, lack of physical activity, unprotected sex, exposure to violence leading to unintended pregnancy, early pregnancy and childbirth, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and other sexually transmitted diseases, malnutrition, substance abuse, and injuries. Injuries and communicable diseases are prevalent among adolescents in 10-14 years age group; outcome of sexual behaviours and mental health problems become significant among adolescents in 15-19 years age group.<sup>[2]</sup>

Today, 1.2 billion adolescents stand at the cross roads between childhood and adult world. Around 243 million of them live in India (UNICEF 2011). The reproductive health needs of adolescents have long been neglected. In last 10 years, the importance of information on sexuality and reproduction is being increasingly emphasized. Reproductive health encompasses all aspects of adolescent health. It consists of several distinctive yet related issues such as sex education; menstrual hygiene; reproductive tract infections prevention; abortions; child birth; contraception; cancer screening and maternal mortality. The effects of globalization, rising age of marriage, rapid urbanization and greater opportunities for socialization have heightened the risk of STIs, H.I.V. and unwanted pregnancy. While adolescents have unmet needs for information on reproductive health and services, these are not addressed by parents, schools or the existing health care systems. Sex education should be a lifelong learning process based on acquisition of knowledge and skills and development of positive values and attitude.<sup>[3]</sup>

Adolescence, the second decade of life, is a powerful formative period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a time of physical development, identity formation, relationship development, and a time

when vocational direction and life goals are expected to be implemented. It is one of the most crucial periods in the life of an individual, because between the ages of 10-19 years, many key biological, social, economical, demographic and cultural events occur that set the stage for adult life. It is the period during which rapid physical growth, physiological, and psychological changes occur. The transition from childhood to adulthood occurs during adolescence period which is characterized by major biological changes like physical growth, sexual maturation and psycho-social development. During this phase of growth the girls first experience menstruation and related problems which is marked by feelings of anxiety and eagerness to know about this natural phenomenon. However, they do not get the appropriate knowledge due to lack of a proper health education programme in schools. Moreover, the traditional Indian society regards talks on such topics as taboo and discourages open discussion on these issues. This leads to culmination in repression of feelings which can cause intense mental stress and seek health advice from quacks and persons who do not have adequate knowledge on the subject. Such health seeking behavior by the adolescent girls is undesirable. Moreover, the routine health services do not have provisions for adequate care of adolescent health problems. This further exaggerates the problems manifold.

Reproductive health is an important component of general health, it is a prerequisite for social and economic and imperative because human energy and creativity are the driving forces of development. Adolescence is a period of increased risk taking and therefore susceptibility to behavioral problems at the time of puberty and new concerns about reproductive health. Majority of adolescents still does not have access to information and education on sexuality, reproduction and sexual and reproductive health and rights, nor do they have access to preventive and curative service. Providing adolescents with access to seek information education and services is thus the main challenge for future programmes. The vast majority of youth lives in developing countries and is at risk of adverse health outcomes that are preventable. Adolescence is also an important formative period during which many life style behaviors are learned and established. Thus, acquiring beneficial knowledge, developing positive attitudes, and establishing healthy practices and behaviors at an early age sets the stage for longer-term health.<sup>[4]</sup>

### Methodology

The study was carried out in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh to understand the awareness levels among the selected adolescent girls. The study sample comprised of 600 students in the age group of 17-19 years who were randomly selected from the six different colleges of three different revenue divisions in Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh. Two hundred students from each revenue division i.e. 100 students from each college (50 Science and 50 Arts respectively) were enrolled for the research.

The data was collected using structured schedule to collect information on awareness levels, source of information and the reasons for unawareness among the adolescent girls. The available information was expressed as frequency and percent distribution.

**Results and Discussion**

Adolescence is one of the most crucial periods of human life and it is a time of learning gender roles, life skills as well as sexuality and relationships. An adequate knowledge on Reproductive health would help the adolescents to have a better healthy life. In this context it is necessary to elicit the extent of knowledge possessed by the adolescents. The results thus obtained were illustrated under the following sub-heads.

**Awareness about the concept of “Reproductive Health”**

The selected respondents were asked to state whether they have adequate knowledge on the concept of reproductive health. The results obtained are presented in the table-1 below.

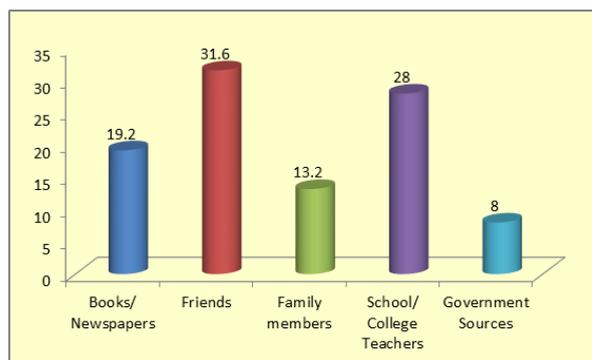
**Table-1: Percentage distribution of respondents according to the concept of Reproductive Health**

Awareness	Frequency (n = 600)	Percentage (%)
Aware	453	75.5
Unaware	147	24.5

It is clear from the table-1 that a sizeable number (75.5 per cent) of the respondents were having the adequate knowledge on concept of the reproductive health and the remaining 24.5 per cent of them stated that they do not possess any knowledge about the concept of the reproductive health. The data revealed that one fourth of the students were not aware of the reproductive which need to be considered for further focussing on the bringing the gap. This was really pathetic situation that in spite of having access towards major sources of knowing about reproductive health in these modern days.

**Source of Information about Reproductive Health**

The various sources from which the respondents have gained knowledge about reproductive health are given in Figure No-1.



**Figure No-1: Percentage distribution of respondents according to their source of information about Reproductive Health**

The findings from the figure indicated that friends (31.6 per cent) are the most important source from whom the respondents have gained knowledge on the facts and information about reproductive health. About 28.0 per cent of the selected respondents have come to know about reproductive health from their school/ college teachers. Books/ Newspapers (19.2 per cent) have also served as an important medium from which the adolescents have learned about reproductive health. Family members have informed about reproductive health to 13.2 per cent of the selected respondents. About 8.0 per cent of them have come to know about reproductive health from Government sources through posters, health camps, Short films have played a role in providing some information.

**Reasons for not knowing about Reproductive Health**

Those respondents who did not know about reproductive health were asked to mention the reason for their lack of knowledge. The results obtained are presented in the following table -2.

**Table-2: Reasons for not knowing about Reproductive Health**

Reasons	Frequency (n = 147)	Percentage (%)
No sources available	24	16.4
Not interested	63	42.8
Not aware of its importance	17	11.6
Feeling of reluctance to discuss	43	29.2

It can be noted from the above table-3 that among the adolescents who were unaware of the reproductive health, 42.8 per cent of the adolescents did not know about reproductive health because of their lack of interest. Feeling of reluctance and embarrassment has prevented 29.2 per cent of the adolescent girls from discussing the issues and facts about reproductive health with others. About 16.4 per cent of the selected adolescent girls have complained that there were no sources available for them from which they could obtain information on reproductive health. As they were not aware of its importance for leading a healthy life, 11.6 per cent of the adolescents did not make an attempt to know about reproductive health.

**Conclusion**

Majority of adolescents still does not have access to information and education on sexuality, reproduction and sexual and reproductive health and rights, nor do they have access to preventive and curative service. Providing adolescents with access to seek information education and services is thus the main challenge for future programmes. The study also recommends that health workers should concentrate more on imparting reproductive health among adolescent girls. Community groups, peer groups school curriculum and other such channels are likely to be more effective means of transmitting important health messages and advice to young women entering puberty.

Since adolescent girls comprise a major reproductive age group, their role is critical in determining the India's future population goal. This apart, evidence of change in sexual behavior and growing spread of HIV infection, has generated fresh reproductive health concerns, which need to be accounted for by policy makers to develop appropriate family life educational strategies.

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