

Current Advances in Multidisciplinary Research

EDITORS

Dr. R. Shashi Kumar
Prof. Suman Aggarwal

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GANDHIJI'S VISION OF HEALTHY YOUTH AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Youth symbolizes action, speed, change and dynamism. Throughout the history, young people have always played a major role in shaping the destinies of nation, be it in wining wars, achieving economic progress or in changing social norms. Recognizing the importance of youth in the wake of the rapid economic development, urbanization and changing life style in one of the greatest challenges India is facing.

The role of youth in bringing about change, growth and development in art, culture, education, health and politics has been very significant as they constitute about 35% of the total population of the country. It is therefore, necessary to see that youth keep themselves physically, mentally and morally healthy so that they can contribute in the process of development and progress of the nation.

This paper makes an attempt to focus on and highlight the issues related to social factors and health of youth in India which manifest that the society plays a crucial role to promote, protect and maintain health of youth like Mahatma Gandhi quoted:

"Youth are the hope of the future. It is from these young men and women that the future leaders of the nation are to rise".

Keywords: Youth, India, health, resource, social change

INTRODUCTION

"Healthy youth is the best resource for the development of any nation if their potential energy is tapped and the impression of their being rebellious, unpredictable, short-sightedness, sloppy and wild is removed by the society and political leaders."

Youth in India is a big force to reckon with that can contribute greatly in all aspects of national life. As they have to offer something to the nation, the nation in turn has to give to them so that they feel socially and economically secured and lead morally and physically healthy life. Sound health is a prerequisite for any individual in general and youth in particular to perform his expected role because it is the section of young people that is engaged in labour and employment. The health problems such as drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, stress and strain, prostitution etc are the by-product of our social system that specially affect the youth. Proper guidance and effective education to the young people by the individual family and society at large is imperative to avoid wasteful of life of young people. Youth of today tends to deviate from performing socially and culturally accepted roles, tend to disrespect socially accepted norms, thus generating conflict between two cultures - old and new.

This is not because he has inborn drive to do so, but many a times he is forced to act in the fashion he likes by the compelling situations created by a host of social factors and agents of social change in the society. In India, collective efforts by the government and voluntary agencies involving the youths themselves in the programmes for their overall development bear a testimony of the nation's commitment to the young people. Nevertheless, it is not to be mistaken to think that if society, family and those institutions responsible for nursing the young people do not come forward, the young people will have a sound ground to create their institution as individual or groups and turn to deviant and destructive behaviuor. Considering these reality issues, this research paper will highlight the intricacy of the problems relative to the health of youths.

Characteristics of Youth

As per the latest statistics, of our total population, 35% is constituted by the youth, unfortunately, most of it remains unutilized in India.

Whenever we think of youth, a mental picture emerges before us, one half of which gives a feeling of freshness, fitness, energy, enthusiasm and idealism and the other half gives the impression of being rebellious unpredictable, short-sighted, sloppy and wild. It is because of these negative traits of the youth, coupled with lack of political will the potential of youth energy remains untapped.

HOW CAN YOUTH PROVE TO BE THE BEST RESOURCE?

The youth will become a resource only if they are made to feel confident and capable. They don't want to be watched, judged or criticized. They want to participate as co-equals. If his opinion is not respected he would retaliate, leading to negative achievements to show his capability.

India is a country of great diversities and contrasting characteristics. It has a large population and very low resource consumption. The yield efficiency of the land is poor. And its per capita Gross National Product (GNP) is a country of great diversities and contrasting characteristics. It has a large population and very low slow Giant strides in the economic field can be achieved if youth energy is exploited for productivity.

Before a dam was constructed on Sutlej River at Bhakra, the water resource was not only wasted, but it resulted in floods, leading to loss of life and property. The same is true for youth resource. The idle youth is not only a waste, the tide of this un-utilized energy can result in development in the negative in the field of health and economy. The youth can be our best resource if they are healthy and if their energy is exploited for building a better society. The potential energy of youth has to be channelized with understanding, support and technological know-how.

Enthusiasm, initiative and idealism of youth can play a big role in the field of health care and education. Fortunately, majority of youngsters do want to help themselves and other to achieve healthy and happy style. The love of sharing and joy of giving to the physically handicapped or weak brings satisfaction and brightness on the faces of youth.

China has shown us the way by finding jobs for its many million young people in the last few years. This is proving useful for the settlement of the youth as well as for the upliftment of the society. On the other hand, the Government of India, had over the years not carried out a valid cost-benefit analysis of population growth. It has entirely neglect the benefits from growth of youth population. But in the past decade there are ample opportunities provided by the Government to uplift the status of the youth by providing them with employment and other necessary prerequisites.

Today's youth also stand at the threshold between traditional and modern ways of life. The modern youth can take a wider and global view of the problems and the means to solve them. They can rise above the narrow and partisan compartments of villages and cities, castes and religions, as also states and countries. They can surge forward in this 21st century to foster the close ties of international brotherhood and understanding.

In recognition of the potential of the youth and to harness the youth energy, the year 1985 had been declared and celebrated as International Youth Year all over the world. In a message on the World Health Day 1985, Dr. H. Mabler, the then Director General of the World Health Organization has suggested that:

"In the drive towards health, every community should take stock of its youthful resource and nurture it for all its promise".

And even after so many years of this saying we can see it still holds relevance even in today's time. Encouraging the world to look on its young people positively as a resource instead of as a problem had been one of the major aims of international youth year. If a negative picture is repeatedly reinforced by the media, it may force the youth into the role of a rebel of the three themes of the International Youth Year - "Participation, Development, Peace" - participation comes first. And rightly so, if the energy and ideas of the young can be attracted to health programs then change will follow.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH?

Hallmark of youth period is fitness, which is defined as freedom from disease and provide strength, power, ability, balance, flexibility, muscular endurance, heart and lung endurance and co-ordination.

It is to be emphasized that fitness is not an unearned income of the youth hood. Improper intake of food, coupled with inadequate or complete lack of exercise is the rule rather than an exception in India. The youth of today prefers to eat fast food which is referred to as "Mac Donalization" of our culture. This reluctance about nutrition and exercise has unfortunate results soon after the glory of youth start declining. Many successful men and women let their health suffer and consequently find themselves inefficient or their careers cut short by diseases associated with physical and mental deterioration, hyper-acidity and dyspepsia, stress, ulcers in stomach, limb pains and lethargy, neurosis, hyper-tension, heart attack, cerebral stroke etc.- are simply too high a price for laziness and lack of initiative in fitness. On the other hand with a minimum amount of training and by watching one's diet one can protect health as well as raise their energy level. Many eminent personalities from various backgrounds have started to be the brand ambassadors for fitness. E.g: Cricketer Virat Kohli propagating the Fit India Movement initiated by our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modiji.

Setting up of youth health clubs and center's at various places can go a long way to ameliorate their lot. The youth can visit such places freely to sort out their own problems and to plan services for the weaker sections of society. They can discuss such subjects as sex (pre-marital, extra-marital or marital), STD's, drug abuse, rape and violence, unwanted pregnancy and contraception, diet, obesity, prevention of accidents and fitness programs. On the other hand, they could contribute to improve the lot of other e.g. programs of immunization of children and youth, family planning and nutrition, adult education, shaping of hospitable environment, organization of eye camps, yoga camps, blood donation camps, health camps etc. We read in newspapers how youths belonging to NCC, NSS, Bharat Scouts are involved in such camps like polio drives and Teach India programs which is a good beginning. The pandemic of COVID-19 saw a surprising input from the youth where they contributed in ways more than one. Also TV shows like Shark Tank etc only show the entrepreneurs that our country youth have.

The need to set up such center in rural areas, where the huge reservoir of youth power is not only un-utilized but also lacks support and guidance completely. The same youths can take the responsibility of immunization, nutrition education, hygiene and environmental control in their own areas. Outstanding among such youths could become a human resource development officer to control a few such center's. As a group of youths succeed in such a venture, it will attract more and more young people. In this manner the youth will join the main stream of society and participate in this new alliance between the government and the community. With the current government's policy of employment it has tried to provide employment mostly to youths of rural areas by making them part of tourism projects. Here they are employed as tour guides, car drivers, hotel managers, event planners etc.

Marriage is being delayed in general, the age of first intercourse is dropping, with the obvious implication the pre-marital sex explosion is becoming very common now. The need for early sex-education is being felt all over the world. The adverse consequences of sexuality tend to team from ignorance and not from permissiveness. Many abortions and their attendant risks could be prevented if contraceptive services were easily available, well understood and adequately applied. It is our duty as a nation not to leave the youth alone, in ignorance to cope with the tremendous demands of intense sexual impulses. We should not allow our youths to swim in troubled waters without guidance, support or experience.

The psychic craving for only chemical substance licit or illicit, which results in an individual's physical, mental, emotional or social impairment is called drug abuse. Youth tend to pick up the habit mostly due to peer pressure and at times just for fun. To fulfill the growing need of the drug, the youth freely indulges in crimes of various types. The celebrities are often seen getting involved in this and they are thereby setting example for common man to idolize them. How we wish if there was a vaccine which could save our youth from drug abuse!

"A leading cause of mortality and morbidity among the youth it the traffic accidents, for which the well-established vogue for mopeds and motorcycles coupled with alcoholism, psychological stress and speed are largely to be blamed. The mortality rate of boys in such accidents is much higher than in girls."

But should we accept this loss of human life as inevitable, as a price of speed? Are we vitally concerned with the fact that every year around a quarter of a million people must die and a million more be injured? quite apart from the loss in human terms, the financial costs involved are incalculable. We need not accept massive death and injury as the price of progress.

GANDHIJI'S VISION OF YOUTH AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Gandhiji envisaged great role for the youth of this country in the establishment of the new social order. His simple life itself was the best source of inspiration.

Gandhiji said: "Youth must take part in party politics. They may not resort to political strikes. They must do all sacrificial spinning in a scientific manner. They should be khadi users all through and use village products".

He underlined young student's importance in ensuring uniform distribution of all resources. In the same context of **environment** another weapon that Gandhiji has provided us with is Patriotism. The nation, he emphasized, is built on the foundation of selfless devotions by its citizens. Young people are vibrant, energetic and enthusiastic. They should show the same enthusiasm when the nation demands for sacrifice of their wealth, their lives, their families etc. Gandhiji often recited a verse in Sanskrit stating that Mother and Motherland are superior to Heaven. He went to the extent of coining his own definition of Patriotism wherein he described it as a sense of loyalty and affection to the soil, the national symbols etc. This feeling, sentiment or attitude of patriotism, he believed would make youth serve the nation selflessly.

Gandhiji had stressed upon youth participation in bringing out various during his struggle for independence in the Sati Pratha, Polygamy, Child marriage, Education of women, Widow remarriage, Untouchability, Caste system, Exploitation and Religious misguidance. And the attributes that make youth swim through were Non-violence, Co-operation, Justice, Equality and Love. Non-violence, Gandhiji advocated, has a religious, social, spiritual and personal significance. Force or aggression leads to a total destruction of society. Violent feelings provoke conflicts which grow in strength and threaten the very society it was initially supposed to protect.

About **justice** he said that there exists a close relationship between equality and justice. Youth must know that justice is done when equality is established and when equality exists justice is done.

Gandhiji also pointed out that each one of us should strive to attain Excellence at the **personal as well as the social level**. He implored the youth to pursue this value without any reservations. This would ensure not only holistic development of the individual, but also progress of the society at large. **Truth** was Gandhiji's favorite human value which inspired his autobiography "My Experiments with Truth" Satya Meva Jayate was his slogan. This is as human value which leads to non-existence to human race. Youth must differentiate between truth and blind belief. Gandhiji wanted every individual and society to practice truth at any cost. He emphasized that all religions, philosophies, societies have unambiguously advocated truth. According to him truth was God and that truth must manifest itself in the thought, word and deeds.

He wanted the young men to be aware of the **culture** they inherit. The youth must perpetuate the present rural civilization and endeavor to rid it of its acknowledged defects. Gandhiji exhorted the youth to be beware of the seven social sins, politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice.

The Policy Environment for Young People's Health

The weapons Gandhiji gave were not just meant to overthrow the British but to be used at all times. Today we require these weapons more than ever to build a better society. Even after 75 years of freedom we are still struggling to gain independence in the true sense; to pull ourselves out of the clutches of violence, crime and corruption which have rendered our entire society sick. Although free from foreign rule, we are still enchained by foreign influences which are corrupting our youth and driving them astray. The very agents of social transformation are engulfed by the fatal diseases of poverty, illiteracy, over-population and unemployment.

While every country has some policy basis for action to promote adolescent and youth health, too few national health policies give specific attention to young people. Nonetheless, most United Nations specialized agencies

are working to ensure that regional strategies and national plans for adolescent and youth health are being developed, published and acted upon.

A successful adolescent and youth health policy, strategy, service, programme or project will almost certainly be interdisciplinary and extend beyond the health sector. The role of various social sectors is already known and the effectiveness of youth participation acknowledged. The planning and policy frameworks exist at the international level and are to a large extent nationally adopted, though so far this has not guaranteed that community responses are appropriate, effective or efficient.

Frameworks, statements, guidelines and policies already touch upon adolescent and youth health in general and often cover the health and development concerns of adolescent girls and young women. Adolescent and youth concerns receive brief mention in assessments of mental health, violence and injury prevention, and HIV /AIDS prevention and care. Adolescent sexual and reproductive health is as yet largely under protected by effective laws and policies.

The systematic documentation, evaluation and dissemination of projects and initiatives in which young women and young men act as agents of change will influence and if necessary reorient how youth health projects are managed. Norms, standards and indicators for evaluations, as well as technical guidelines, are still being developed as part of the overall effort to achieve large-scale adolescent and youth health programming in which young people are fully involved alongside clinicians, technicians and politicians.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The time is ripe for an uprising & we must all awaken and revolt; a non violent but effective war needs to be waged keeping in mind all that the great Mahatma taught us years ago. As we progress into the next millennium, we need to carry forward his ideologies with us.

It is hoped that this paper will stimulate action to build on existing experience in adolescents and youth policy and to help accelerate programming in order to ensure the physical, mental, emotional and social health and overall well-being of young people.

- Creating a positive environment for promoting the right of young people to participation, development and peace as milestones on their road to better health;
- Equipping young people with adequate knowledge, self-esteem and life skills to ensure their healthy development and to advocate for their provision at the family, school and community levels;
- Enhancing the concept of gender equality between young men and young women and redressing the imbalance in the provision of opportunities- particularly for adolescent girls at risk of early marriage and consequent high-risk pregnancy;
- Providing care and protection for all young people - whatever their health, disability, vulnerability or risk status, their age, gender, sexual, orientation or class is supported by appropriate legislation, clinical procedures and health services including counseling.

KNOWING THIS, WE MUST ACT.

What a difference it makes to our youth when they have places of quality and compassion that care about their healthy development - when our schools and communities are places of welcome that prepare them for a future full of options. What a difference it makes when young people have opportunities for active engagement and valued contribution. What a difference it makes when there are imaginative advocates who refuse to see adolescents only as a set of risk factors and problems. This is the kind of imagination and advocacy we need. Our youth deserve this from us; and we cannot afford to do otherwise.

We must remember - The young are the future of society but they are very much it's present!

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