



Strengthening the Role of ASHAs in addressing Adolescent Health related Issues

Mahender Singh^{}, Rakesh Gupta^{**}, Prashant Jarhyan^{***}, Manish Kumar Goel^{****}*

Adolescent age (10-19 years) is a transitional stage of growth and development during which physical growth spurt and puberty occur along with psychological changes. During this period, adolescents try to establish behavior and make choices affecting their current and future health. Due to associated behavioral changes, this age is also vulnerable to risk behavior which may influence their future adult life. Adolescent period is associated with various health problems which includes reproductive and sexual health problems, substance/ drug abuse, mental health problems, violence/ injuries and accidents and medical and nutritional problems.¹

Healthy transition from adolescence to adult role requires a holistic approach from various stakeholders which includes family, educational institutions, civil societies, health system and other government agencies. A comprehensive approach is required to provide a good foundation, healthy and safe environment for building their future in the society. Health system currently addresses adolescent health issues through Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Program (ARSH) under Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK). However, studies have shown suboptimal utilization of health care system by adolescents, especially in case of sexual and reproductive health and mental health related issues.² Under National Health Mission (NHM), Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) provides health education regarding health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation to adolescents. She distributes iron and folic acid tablets and sanitary napkins to adolescent girls. She also conducts screening and referral of adolescents for health problems to Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics to address psycho- social and other

issues of adolescents. However, interaction of adolescents with ASHAs and other health personnel for their health care need is inadequate.² ASHA needs specific training to further strengthen the health care for adolescents. At community level, ASHAs can further serve as a link between the family, educational institutions and health system.

District health administration of Sonapat (a district in the state of Haryana) had started sensitizing ASHAs on issues related to adolescent health. ASHAs from the district attended one day workshop about adolescent health issues, lifestyle approach and their role in addressing these issues in this meeting held at Sonapat in November 2014. We hope that this will help ASHAs in addressing adolescent health related issues and can strengthen the existing adolescent health program.

Conflict of Interest: Nil

References

1. Sunitha S, Gururaj G. Health behaviors & problems among young people in India: Cause for concern & call for action. *Indian J Med Res* Aug 2014; 140: 185-208.
2. Santhya KG, Prakash R, Jejeebhoy SJ et al. Accessing Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics in India: The Perspectives of Adolescents and Youth. New Delhi: Population Council, 2014. Available from: http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2014PGY_A_FHC-IndiaReport.pdf. Accessed on: March 2015.

Date of Submission: 3rd Apr 2015

Date of Acceptance: 5th Apr 2015

^{*} Deputy Civil-surgeon & I/C NHM, Sonapat.

^{**} IAS, Addl Principal Secretary to Hon'ble Chief Minister, Haryana.

^{***} Project Coordinator – UDAY, Public Health Foundation of India, New Delhi.

^{****} Associate Professor, Community Medicine, LHMC, New Delhi.

Correspondence to: Dr. Manish Kumar Goel, Community Medicine, LHMC, New Delhi.

E-mail Id: drmanishgoel2000@yahoo.co.in