

Editorial

Medical and Behavioral Problems among Saudi Adolescents

World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescents as young people aged 10-19 years. ⁽¹⁾ Globally there are 1.2 billion adolescents, one fifth of world population. Due to present demographic trends their number is increasing. Estimates suggest that approximately 25% of the populations in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are adolescents. ⁽²⁾

Adolescence is a journey from childhood to the world of an adult, a time of physical, psychological and emotional change. Adolescents are no longer children, but not yet adults. They can put themselves at risk without thinking of the consequences. They get fascinated by many rowdy and thrilling adventures and actions and start living in world of dreams imagining them to be an unbeatable personality.

A study in Riyadh city among adolescents found that overall prevalence of cigarette smoking 12.7% (n=187) among the study sample, the habit is more common in males (19.0%) than females (4.0%). Finding of same study indicate that adolescents males who drive car 45% of them had a car accident. The prevalence of drug use in this survey was 6.4% (10.6% in males and 0.8% in female study subjects), volatile substance was commonly abused among adolescents. ⁽³⁾

Mental health problems frequently start at this age group. A study carried out in Tiaf Governorate, Saudi Arabia, revealed that most important problems were anxiety (13.5%), somatic disorders (12.2%) obsession (10.8%), aggression (8.1%), delinquency and depression (4.1%). ⁽⁴⁾

Recent evidence indicates that emotional and behavioral disorders frequently lead to poor school performance and dropping –out of school. This wastes education resources and seriously impairs the economic and social potential of such children. ⁽⁵⁾

Saudi society is different from western societies in many respects. It is conservative society with strong Islamic values. The pattern of adolescent's problems is expected to be different from that in the west. For example illegitimate teenage pregnancies are common in western world, but do not exist in KSA.

Most causes of mortality and morbidity in adolescents, such as road side accidents cigarette/ shisha smoking and drug abuse can be prevented by simple measures including health education and counseling. If adolescents are properly cared for and groomed, physically and emotionally at homes and schools, they will enjoy good physical & mental health. School environment and behavior of teachers play a critical role in character building and personality development of adolescents. Importance of school health clinics for health education & counseling has important role.

Antismoking program should be established, including prohibition of the sale and use of cigarettes in public places, along with application of firm traffic laws forbidding adolescents aged less than 18 years from driving.

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