CHAPTER SEVEN

Intervention Strategies

The health of adolescents is strongly linked to their development. Their physical, psychological and social abilities will decide what they do, how they act and with whom they associate. Technological advances have made the world a global village. It has made education and training necessary. This in turn has made adolescents depend on their parents economically for a longer period of time, more than in the earlier agricultural era. At the same time, today, adolescents are exposed to more information and cultural alternatives than in earlier periods. This provides the adolescent with culturally diverse choices, which cannot be easily exercised due to economic dependence. Ironically, the adolescent has to prepare for a global life of competition, comparison and independent functioning in a dependent environment.

The importance of social determinants to young people’s health, well-being and development is also clear. Theirs is a world of great opportunity in relation to health, education, occupation, social engagement, discovery and fulfillment. But it is also a world laden with risks that can affect their ability to and lead to isolation, frustrated ambition and disappointment.

Adolescence is a time when most young people have to make decisions (by choice, compulsion or default) that frequently have lasting consequences throughout the rest of their lives; to stay in school or not; to take college studies or some other training; to work according to plans that can be realised after a long period of
professional preparation or to accept jobs that require less training and bring an immediate economic return.

Mental health problems are increasing in this age of competition, stress and anxiety. Of the development period most affected are the adolescents. The conflicts and challenges faced result in emotional and psychological ups and downs. They require skills and training to deal with the day-to-day situations of life.

The present study based on adolescents in Goa has highlighted various findings with regards to the adolescent sample group. Results have indicated that adolescents in Goa reflect moderate or high quality of life. They use all the three coping styles of Problem focussed coping, Reference to others and Non productive coping to a great deal in different situations. Mental health and quality of life had significant influences on the coping strategies used by adolescents.

Enhancing Mental Health

Adolescents face rapidly changing challenges in their social and physical environments. Their cultural beliefs, family structure and support, peer relationships and educational opportunities influence their behaviour and adjustment. Adolescent Mental health can be enhanced by using the following strategies:

- Life skills training: It is increasingly attracting attention as an important element in children, adolescents and adults ability to cope with situations in life. It enhances ones abilities to cope with the changing environment and translate technical skills into work situations. Life skills empower people to make informed choices about their future. Adolescents can be trained to use
the following skills which target self awareness, self-esteem, acceptance of others and living a healthy life.

- Critical Thinking: Ability to analyse information and experiences in an objective manner.

- Creative Thinking: Ability that helps us look beyond one's direct experience and address issues in a perspective which is different from the obvious or the norm. It adds novelty and flexibility to situations in daily life.

- Decision making: The process of assessing an issue by considering all possible/available options and the effects that different decisions might have on them.

- Problem Solving: Having made decisions about each of the options, choosing the one, which suits best, following it through even in the face of impediments and going through the process again till a positive outcome of the problem is achieved.

- Interpersonal Relationships: A skill that helps understand one's relationships with relevant others and relate in a positive/reciprocal manner with them.

- Effective communication: An ability to express oneself both, verbally and non-verbally in an appropriate manner. This indicates an ability to express desires, opinions, fears, seek assistance and advice in times of need.

- Coping with emotions: An ability which involves recognizing emotions in others and oneself, being aware of how emotions influence behaviour and and being able to respond to emotions appropriately.

- Coping with stress: An ability to recognise the source of stress in one's life, its effects and acting in ways that help control the levels of stress. This may
involve taking action to reduce some stress by changing the physical environment, learning to relax etc.

- Self-Awareness: Includes one's recognition of oneself, one's character, strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. It is a pre-requisite for effective communication, interpersonal relationships and developing empathy.

- Empathy: An ability to imagine what life is like for another person even in a situation one may not be familiar with. It helps understand and accept others and their behaviours.

- Social support: Social support plays an important role in maintaining the health and well-being as it gives one a feeling of being loved, cared for, esteemed, valued and belonging to a social network. Supporting relationships like close friends or a supporting network contributes to an individual’s sense of security, positive evaluations of life experiences, personal worth and competence, and this in turn enhances well-being.

- Self esteem: Self esteem is an evaluation a person makes of himself and customarily maintains it. It expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which a person believes him or herself capable, significant, successful and worthy. Wells and Marwell (1976) and Bandura (1986) postulated that individuals with high self esteem are more functional and self accepting and therefore more likely to perform healthy behaviours.

A research by Mehrotra et al. (2013) titled ‘Feeling good and doing well: Development of a mental health promotion program for youth’ demonstrated that the themes pertaining to goal pursuit, application of one's strength and emotional
regulation are perceived as very relevant and interlinked by the Indian college youth and hence promotive programs that address such themes are likely to be well received by this population.

**Improving Quality of Adolescent Lives**

- **Cultivate Optimism**: Being positive can often be seen as naivety behavior. In actuality, optimism increases job performance, creativity, ability to weather stress and self-esteem. Optimism can be used in how one talks to oneself in the face of adversity, explain past events and think about the future. In the quest for the good life, positive expectations can be self-fulfilling. Cultivating an ability to be optimistic is beneficial to ones health and success.

- **Clarify**: When one is clear on what is important to them, there comes an incredible sense of freedom. He/She no longer live in a world of social comparison. They are running their own race. Goals, big decisions and small habits are surmountable and invigorating because one has a clear picture of what he/she want their life to stand for. Clarity does not come easily. It also evolves throughout one life, which requires gracious flexibility.

- **Connect**: Humans are social beings. Individuals crave connections to other individually, to their communities, to their world. It helps to pay special attention to ones family, the adored friends, colleagues and neighbors and explore and strengthen the connection to a Higher Power. Genuine curiosity & kindness are an amazing way to foster connections, new and old.
➢ Find Flow: Flow is being in the groove, totally engaged in ones present activity, challenged but succeeding with clear goals and feedback. It’s a glorious state to be in. For some it’s gardening, writing, cooking. Though it requires more energy than passive ways to spend time (reality tv, idle gossip, video games) it is important to seek out the activities that challenge, engage & satisfy.

➢ Love Yourself: One’s body is the vehicle that carries one through life. It is important to love oneself by treating the body with respect and care. Fuel it well with fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein. Move it daily. Don’t smoke, don’t abuse alcohol. Meditate. Sleep well. One needs to beware the ease in which he/she critiques oneself and indulge in praise instead.

Enhancing effective Coping

It may seem that there’s nothing one can do about stress. The bills won’t stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day, and one’s career and family responsibilities will always be demanding. But one has more control than one might think. In fact, the simple realization that we are in control of our life is the foundation of stress management. Managing stress is all about taking charge: of one’s thoughts, emotions, schedule, and the way one deals with problems

Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no “one size fits all” solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. It is imperative to focus on what makes one feel calm and in control.
Avoid unnecessary stress

- Learn how to say “no” – Individuals need to know their limits and stick to them. Whether in their personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities. Taking on more than one can handle is a sure recipe for stress.

- Avoid people who stress you out – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you cannot turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.

- Pen down a to-do list – Analyze schedules, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If one has got too much on their plates, distinguish between the “shoulds” and the “musts.” Drop tasks that are not truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

Alter the situation

- Express feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you do not voice your feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same.

- Be willing to compromise. When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you’ll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.

- Be more assertive. Don’t take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them.

- Manage your time better. Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you are stretched too thin and running behind, it is hard to stay calm.
Mental Health in relation to Quality of Life and Coping Strategies of adolescents

and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you do not overextend yourself, you can alter the amount of stress you are under.

➤ Adapt to the stressor

- Reframe problems. Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.

- Look at the big picture. Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.

- Adjust your standards. Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with “good enough.”

- Focus on the positive. When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

➤ Accept the things you can’t change

- Do not try to control the uncontrollable. Many things in life are beyond our control— particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
• Look for the upside. As the saying goes, ‘What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger’. When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.

• Share your feelings. Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what you’re going through can be very cathartic, even if there’s nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.

• Learn to forgive. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.

➢ Make time for fun and relaxation

• Set aside relaxation time. Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Do not allow other obligations to encroach. This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.

• Connect with others. Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.

• Do something you enjoy every day. Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.

• Keep your sense of humor. This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.
➢ Adopt a healthy lifestyle

• Exercise regularly. Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week.

• Eat a healthy diet. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.

• Reduce caffeine and sugar. The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you will feel more relaxed and you will sleep better.

• Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Do not avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.

• Get enough sleep. Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.
LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

- The data for the present study was gathered via self-report. As with all self-reported data, there is the possibility that responses may be inaccurate and/or biased.

- This study would have benefited from examining adolescents from single and dual parent homes. This variable was not considered in the present study.

- Since the items of the Adolescent Coping Scale were replicated for the General form and the Specific form, most adolescents had a tendency to replicate their responses for both forms despite the clear instructions for each form.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- An intervention based study on the effects of life skills training on adolescent mental health and their resilience to stress can be conducted.

- An assessment of quality of life of adolescents among children from single and dual parent homes can be conducted.

- A study on the specific mental health concerns of young women can be conducted.

- A study on mental health, quality of life and Coping Strategies on delinquent adolescents can be conducted.

- A study can be conducted on Mental Health and Coping Strategies of adolescents engaged in self-harming behaviors.

- Intervention based studies can be conducted on adolescents from special sections of society (example, adolescent children of alcoholics, adolescent children of criminals etc.)