

## Conference Report

# “Empowering Adolescents for a Healthier Future”

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## I N F O

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## A B S T R A C T

**Background & Rationale**

Adolescence is a distinct stage of human development characterized by rapid physical, psychological, and social transformations. Addressing the health needs of this group is critical for shaping the nation's future. With this vision, the Department of Community Medicine at NC Medical College & Hospital, Israna, in collaboration with the Indian Association of Adolescent Health (IAAH), organized a one-day national conference on September 20, 2025, with the theme “Empowering Adolescents for a Healthier Future.”

The conference aimed to bring together experts, faculty, researchers, and students to discuss current challenges, evidence-based practices, and innovative strategies in adolescent healthcare.

**Inaugural Session**

The event began with a traditional lamp-lighting ceremony

- **Chief Guest:** Dr Jitendra Kadiyan (Director, NHM), Shri D. V. Gupta (Hon. Chairman NCMCH)
- **Guest of Honour:** Dr Prema Bali (Founder President), Dr Jugal Kishore (General Secretary, IAAH), Dr Tanu Anand (Joint Secretary), Dr Charan Singh (Treasurer)
- **Welcome Address:** Dr. Major General (Dr.) P. K. Singh, VSM (Retd.), Principal, NC Medical College & Hospital
- **Inaugural Remarks:** Emphasized the pressing need to address issues like nutrition, mental health, substance use, and sexual health among adolescents.

The dignitaries appreciated the initiative and stressed the importance of multi-disciplinary approaches to adolescent health.

**Scientific Programme****Panel Discussions**

The conference featured six thematic panel discussions with experts from diverse fields:

- 1. Adolescent Mental Health: From Screening to Support Systems**
  - Focused on early detection, counseling, and integrating mental health services into primary care.
- 2. The New Epidemic: Nutrition, Obesity & Lifestyle Risks in Adolescents**
  - Addressed unhealthy dietary patterns, physical inactivity, and the growing double burden of malnutrition.

### 3. Digital Lives: Screen Time, Gaming, and Mental Well-being

- Explored the impact of excessive digital exposure on social interaction, academic performance, and mental health.

### 4. School Health Programs: Strengthening Community-Based Adolescent Care

- Highlighted school-based interventions, peer support systems, and the role of teachers as gatekeepers.

### 5. Sex Education: Essentials for Adolescence – Why and How

- Emphasized comprehensive, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive sex education.

### 6. Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Services (special add-on session)

- Focused on accessibility, confidentiality, and adolescent-friendly health services.

Each panel concluded with an interactive question-and-answer session, engaging both faculty and students.

### Oral & Poster Presentations

- Oral Presentations: Around 50 research papers were presented by faculty and postgraduate students on adolescent health issues, including anemia, menstrual hygiene, reproductive health, and behavioral concerns. Dr. Vikas Soni was awarded the Shri NemiChand Award for the best oral presentation, along with a cash prize of ₹ 1100.
- Poster Presentations: Over 40 posters highlighted innovative approaches in health promotion, awareness campaigns, and community-based research. The Best Poster award, which was named after Smt. Shanti Devi was tied between undergraduate students Ms. Anshul and Ms. Tejaswini.

### Participation

The conference attracted over 300 delegates from across the country, representing more than 30 medical colleges. Participants included:

- Faculty members from pre-clinical, para-clinical, and clinical departments

- Postgraduate students presenting research work
- Undergraduate students actively engaging in discussions
- Representatives from adolescent health NGOs and public health institutions

### Valedictory Session

The conference concluded with a valedictory ceremony, chaired by senior dignitaries.

- A summary report of the day's proceedings was presented.
- Certificates were distributed to paper and poster presenters.
- The importance of sustained dialogue, collaborative research, and advocacy for adolescent health was highlighted.

A vote of thanks was proposed by the Organizing Chairperson and Secretary, acknowledging the contributions of the management, faculty, students, sponsors, and volunteers.

### Key Takeaways & Outcomes

- Recognition of adolescent health as a multi-dimensional priority
- Emphasis on integrating school-based health programmes and community outreach
- Recommendations for training medical students in adolescent-friendly communication and services
- Encouragement for student-led initiatives in adolescent health promotion
- Strengthened partnerships between academia, clinical practitioners, and public health agencies

### Conclusion

The one-day national conference, "Empowering Adolescents for a Healthier Future," proved to be an enriching academic event. It provided a platform for exchanging ideas, sharing research, and generating actionable strategies. The collective insights from the sessions are expected to contribute significantly to strengthening adolescent health policies and practices in India.



Inauguration of the conference by Dr. Prema Bali (Founder President IAAH),



Picture: from Left to right front row (Dr Jugal Kishore, Prema Bali, Dr. Mahender Singh, Adv )



Picture: President's Address on Sexuality and reproductive health by Dr Prema Bali



Picture : Dr Jugal Kishore, Presenting on “Mental Health in Adolescents: Identification and Early Intervention.”

### “Mental Health in Adolescents: Identification and Early Intervention.”

Dr. Jugal Kishore, Director Professor Department of Community Medicine, VMMC & SJH, New Delhi; Secretary General of IAAH.

A Mentally Healthy Adolescent is one who realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, works productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community. However, mental health problems are common among adolescents.

#### Burden of mental health problems

- 15% of the adolescents aged 10-19 in India (Global Burden of Disease, 2021).
- 7% of adolescents aged 13 to 17 (The National Mental Health Survey 2015-16): approximately 8 to 11 million adolescents requiring mental healthcare at any given time.
- 23.33% of school children and adolescents have psychiatric disorders (Malhotra & Patra, 2014: An Indian meta-analytic study)
- Depression, Anxiety stress are more prevalent among school-going adolescent girls
- Other problems are common in adolescents: Behavioural problems such as oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder, eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, Addictive disorders, Alcohol and other substance use, violence. Addiction is a developmental disorder, and the highest proportion of addiction starts

- up to 60% of children aged 5-16 show behaviors indicative of potential digital addiction.
- 40%–90% of adolescents with depression have a comorbid psychiatric disorder, such as anxiety disorders, conduct disorders, substance abuse, and personality disorders
- 25% of deaths in adolescent boys and 50%–75% of deaths in adolescent girls are due to suicide
- Every hour, one student commits suicide in India, according to the National Crime Records Bureau report in 2015.
- other disturbing disorders commonly seen in adolescence, such as autism, learning disorders, and ADHD.
- Habits and Behaviors initiated in Adolescents have a lifelong impact, and almost the majority of adulthood diseases are initiated in adolescents.

Poor mental health is linked with the following problems:

- Unhealthy lifestyle,
- physical ill-health
- Rapid social change,
- social exclusion: Stigma about mental health and lack of education and awareness forms one of the factors for seeking psychiatric consultation
- human rights violations
- Lack of resources for mental health professionals, including psychiatrists and psychologists,

Risk factors for adolescents’ mental health

- Family Environment and Parenting Style
- Substance Use and Peer Influence

- Academic Pressure and Performance Anxiety
- Socioeconomic Status
- Violence, Abuse, and Trauma
- Gender, Identity, and Relationship Issues
- Urban vs. Rural Settings: Urban areas have a higher prevalence compared to rural areas (increased academic competition, social isolation, and reduced family cohesion in cities)

### Alarming Symptoms

#### Behavioral Changes:

- Withdrawing from friends and family, losing interest in hobbies, sudden aggression or outbursts, difficulty with focus and concentration.

#### Emotional Indicators:

- Persistent sadness, feelings of hopelessness, overwhelming fear, excessive guilt, or extreme mood swings.

#### Physical Symptoms:

- Sleep problems, unexplained tiredness, unexplained headaches or body pains, changes in appetite or weight.

#### Cognitive Issues:

- Confused or illogical thinking, problems with memory, or difficulty making decisions.

#### Social & Academic Decline:

- A drop in school grades, reduced participation in social activities, or difficulty maintaining personal care.

### Support Systems and Intervention Programs

#### School-Based Intervention Programs

- Single-Session Interventions (SSIs): These are brief, scalable mental health modules delivered through computers. SSIs focused on behavioural activation, gratitude, and growth mind-set exercises were found to be feasible, acceptable, and effective in Indian secondary schools.
- This smartphone-based intervention involved guided problem-solving sessions led by lay counsellors.
- Life Skills Programs

#### Community-Based Interventions

- Telephone Befriending Program: this initiative paired trained lay workers with youth via phone-based support.
- Feeling Good and Doing Well Program: A universal mental health promotion initiative
- A community-based participatory research (CBPR) model
- School to community education and care program

#### Technology-Enabled and Peer-Based Models

- Digital interventions and peer support systems can be powerful tools in increasing access, reducing stigma, and creating safe spaces for help-seeking behaviour.
- Peer Support Programs
- Culturally Adapted Digital Tools: Cultural sensitivity

and language adaptation were found to improve engagement with digital tools in India

- Government initiatives: Schemes like Tele-MANAS, a 24/7 helpline, and the District Mental Health Program are active.

In addition to the health sector, it is essential to involve the education, labour, justice, transport, environment, housing, and welfare sectors as well. A climate that respects and protects basic civil, political, socio-economic, and cultural rights is fundamental to mental health promotion, particularly in adolescents and youth.

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