

Course Name: Adolescent Health and Well-being: A Holistic Approach

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Lecture 10 - High risk behaviour in Adolescents

Hello everyone. I am back again in this course with a new lecture on high-risk behavior in Adolescents. Now the various concepts that we will be covering in this lecture are types of high-risk behavior among adolescents, the reasons for high-risk behavior among adolescents, the burden of high risk behavior among the adolescent group, the harmful effects of high risk behavior and the protective factors for high risk behavior. The various keywords in this presentation are high risk behavior, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, sex and substance abuse. Now coming to the definition of what is risk behavior per say. Now there are various definitions given by eminent scientists.

So the one that I will be discussing for today's lecture is given by Moore and Gullone. So the definition goes like, "behavior that involves potential negative consequences but balanced in some way by perceived positive consequences." So the important things to keep in mind here are, there can be negative consequences as well as positive consequences. And also, another thing to note here is that the positive consequences are only perceived that these are perceived on the part of the people who are engaging in these risk behaviors.

Now what is high risk behavior? Now this high risk behavior can range from tobacco use, can be alcohol use, it can be other substance abuse, it can be risky sexual behavior as well. Now why do adolescents basically indulge in high risk behavior? There are various theories that have been put forward as to why do adolescents indulge in the high risk behavior. So I will be discussing few of these factors. The factors being psychology, basically this is at the individual level what are the factors playing, at the level of the society and then the environmental factors that have a huge role to play as far as indulging in high risk behavior is concerned. Now coming to the psychological factors.

Now these have a huge bearing as far as the indulgence of adolescents in high risk behavior is concerned. The first of these is sensation seeking. So basically the adolescence group, so

this is such a vulnerable phase where they are exploring new options, they are trying to experiment with their bodies and they are trying to sensation seek. That is the excitement of doing any particular activity at this age which overrides the potential dangers of obviously associated with alcohol, tobacco and such substance abuses and also this could be risky sexual behavior as well. The individuals, adolescents who feel they have low self-esteem and impulsivity, these factors also lead to rise in the risk taking behavior among the adolescents.

People, adolescents, with the increased symptoms of depression, again this amounts to increase risk taking behavior among the adolescents. Now these risk behaviors basically are a form of coping with emotions and mental health symptoms among the adolescents. They generally don't come out in the open, don't seek psychological help, proper professional help for their mental health and well-being, for their emotions in this very tender age of adolescence and as a form of coping mechanism, they resort to the things which they feel which they perceive, which are good for them, which they feel will give them some acute feelings of good health and well-being but which is not so. This is filled with lots of negative consequences not only in the adolescent period but in the later period of the life as well. The factors of stress, though adolescents who feel stressed out, they may resort to various high-risk behaviors just for a feeling of curiosity.

So, people are curious exactly, the adolescents they are curious that exactly what is the effect of these drugs, what is the effect of alcohol, tobacco, they see their peers doing the same and just out of this curiosity many people land up into various high risk behaviors. Just as a confidence booster. So for many adolescents, it is like a confidence booster, they feel that having alcohol, having tobacco, having various substance abuse can act as a confidence booster for them. So these are some of the psychological factors which lead adolescents or which leads them to indulge in various high risk behaviors. Coming to the various social or environmental factors, let's come to the peer and the family factor.

So the peer approval is often the most common reason why the adolescents indulge into high risk behaviors. It is often that just to get approval from a girlfriend, from a boyfriend, from your near friends, the people, the adolescents they start smoking, they just start smoking to impress these friends and many a times it is also that it happens that just to avoid getting thrown away from a peer group, just under that pressure many individuals, many adolescents just start for the sake of it and it is also considered very cool among the peers nowadays. Now this impact of peers is influenced by the presence or absence of other support system, this being the family and teachers. So if there is a good support system from the family level, be it the parents, be it the elder siblings or a good support from the teachers, this goes on a big way to influence the adolescent risk-taking behavior.

Nowadays there is mushrooming of these nuclear families over the last one or few decades as far as India is concerned. Now what this mushrooming has done, is the family support and supervision which used to be earlier due to presence of grandparents around the kids,

due to presence of the family around the kids is missing. Now this has led to free unsupervised time for the adolescents and this leads them to various indulgence and high risk behaviors. The next factor is emulating adult behaviors. So, family members who do substance abuse, so the risk among their children also increases for indulging in high risk behavior. If there is a conducive environment at family, this goes on a big way as far as the eventual landing up into the high risk behaviors is concerned.

So it is seen, the review of literature suggests that the fathers in families who perform substance abuse, so the children are likely to perform substance abuse as well and this risk or the proportion of children doing so rises when there is the elder sibling who smokes or who does substance abuse. The next factor is authoritarian parenting styles. So basically when the parents are too authoritarian, the children, the adolescents may rebel against the rules and this rebellion may make them susceptible to various high risk behaviors. Coming to the next factor social and environmental, next is the school. So basically, many of the adolescents, they fall into the prey of high risk behavior just because of failure in academics or this could be poor marks in the exams.

So out of sense of frustration due to these, they fall into the trap of high risk behavior. Next is difficulty in learning, another issue which many adolescents face and just to overcome that they fall into the prey of high risk behaviors and perform various forms of substance abuse. Low connectedness to school, so, many people, many adolescents who feel they are very low connected to school, they may also resort to high-risk behavior. The school environment, again the peers and teachers, it is important to have a good peer group, it is important to have the good support system in the form of teachers who act as protective factors for high-risk behaviors.

So if these are not intact, if these systems are not in place to have a supporting hand for the adolescents, so these act as risk factors for indulging in high risk behaviors. Now this figure I think almost everyone must be aware of. So this is Shahid Kapoor from the movie Kabir Singh portraying the character of Kabir Singh. So here this character was basically performing all sorts of substance abuse, be it tobacco, be it alcohol, be it any other substance abuse, be it risky sexual behavior and violence as well. So basically, in India, the actors, cricketers, these are demigods for most of the adolescents for most individuals.

So, they just emulate these individuals and do whatever these people do. If they advertise certain brands, the adolescents, these vulnerable people, they try and emulate them. So basically exposure to alcohol advertisements, this leads and specifically their own actors, cricketers if they are doing this, so the tendency of the individuals, of the adolescents to start drinking alcohol at a very early age just to emulate their adults is on the rise. Then there are many over the top platform that is the OTT platforms today. So, there is exposure to unsupervised content and that is very easily available.

So this also leads the adolescents to fall prey to this high risk behaviors. Then there is

exposure to sexual content in the media. Again this makes them fall prey to the early engagement in sexual activity and various high risk sexual behaviors. Again like I have already mentioned, there is exposure to violence in media. So this early exposure to violence over the OTT platforms or movies and other such advertisements makes the violent behavior in adolescents and makes them fall prey to this high risk behaviors.

So let's move at these high risk behaviors one by one. So, first coming to tobacco use among adolescents at the global level. So tobacco use is a leading preventable cause of mortality and morbidity worldwide. At least one in ten adolescents aged 13 to 15 years use tobacco globally. The majority of tobacco users start using tobacco well before the age of 18 years. Now this is significant. The global prevalence of cigarette smoking has been found to be 11.3% in boys and 6.1% among the girls. The global prevalence of tobacco products other than the cigarettes has been found to be 11.2% in the boys and 7% in the girls. Now globally one in every ten girls and one in every five boys aged 13 to 15 years use tobacco. Again these are huge numbers. Quite alarming indeed. So indeed when we come to tobacco use among adolescents, addiction to tobacco products by adolescents is assuming alarming proportions in India.

In India again nearly one in ten adolescents in the age group 13 to 15 years have ever smoked cigarettes. Almost 50% of these report initiating tobacco use before the tender age of 10 years. The prevalence of smoking tobacco has been found to be 5% while the prevalence of smokeless tobacco products in this age group has been found to be 10% in India. Now the common substances of use among adolescents are tobacco and alcohol followed by inhalants and cannabis. The initiation of alcohol intake is seen generally in adolescents due to the use of tobacco.

Tobacco is most often used psychoactive substance among the adolescents. Now there are various new trends which are emerging specially among the adolescents. Multiple substance abuse is one of them and this has various negative consequences not only in the adolescent life but in the later period of life as well. Various other trends that are emerging are the tobacco habit is very much increasing in the adolescent girls.

So again this is very alarming. Now coming to the harmful effects of tobacco use. So basically, there are a number of harmful effects of tobacco use. I will just try and enlist a few harmful effects of tobacco. So harmful effect of tobacco could be ischemic heart disease, this could be hypertension, could be various cancers specially lung cancer, throat cancer, tracheal cancer, oral cancer and it could be esophageal cancers as well. The tobacco use can lead to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in the long run. It could be lower respiratory tract infections also this can lead to male infertility as well.

Now coming to the alcohol use among the adolescents at the global level. So now alcohol use is a big public health concern globally. Globally more than a quarter of all people aged 15 to 19 years are current drinkers and this amounts to 155 million adolescents. Again this is quite an alarming number.

14% of adolescent girls and 18% of boys aged 13 to 15 years in low and middle income countries are reported to use alcohol. Now let's come to the figures of alcohol use among adolescents as far as India is concerned. The addiction to alcohol use by adolescents is a growing menace in India. The mean age for initiation of drinking ranges from 14.4 to 18.3 years in India. Now according to the NFHS-V data men aged greater than 15 years who consume alcohol are 16.5% in the urban areas and 19.9% in the rural areas. Again, according to the same data women greater than 15 years of age who consume alcohol form 0.6% in the urban area and 1.6% in the rural area. So again these are quite alarming numbers. Now let's come to the harmful effects of alcohol use.

Again, there are various harmful effects of alcohol use. I will be trying and enlisting a few of those. Reduced self-control, this happens with alcohol use and this may lead to increased risky behavior among the adolescents. They basically lose their self-control and then the activities which follow are even it is not under their control and this reduced self-control leads to various road traffic accidents and other non-intentional injuries on the part of adolescents. Reduced self-control also can lead them to violence. This can lead to intentional self-harm and suicide. This could lead to risky sexual behaviors leading to HIV and other infectious diseases.

Poor school performance, now as we have seen in the risk factors that people who have poor school performance, they lead to alcohol use and again the harmful effect of alcohol is poor school performance which is increased further. So basically this is like a vicious cycle. Alcohol use can lead to increased dropouts from school and junior colleges and this can also lead to poor employment opportunities among the adolescents.

So next coming to the other substance abuse among the adolescents. So other substance abuse can be grouped into four categories. These are cannabis, opioids, cocaine and amphetamines. Now according to the global burden of disease study the illicit drugs are estimated to have killed nearly 7.5 lakh people worldwide in 2017 and the estimated number of lives lost in India was 22,000 during the same period. Now cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug among adolescents with 4.7% of 15 to 16 year olds using at least once in a year in 2018 and the incidence of drug use among adolescents is definitely higher than the general population.

Now coming to the other substance abuse, these cause euphoria and this euphoria makes them more easy to get addicted compared to tobacco and these cause greater craving among the people who use them. The early onset of substance abuse is associated with higher risk of developing dependence and other problems during the later adult life and the people of younger ages are disproportionately affected by substance use compared with people of older ages. So it is important to have the interventions right at the very onset when these behaviors are beginning. Now coming to the harmful effects of substance abuse.

Now the harmful effects of using cannabis, the various products of which are marijuana, hashish etc. again there are a number of harmful effects, I will try and enlist a few of them. This could be impaired coordination from the use of cannabis, they may lead into anxiety, paranoia, the long term effects can be bronchitis and increased risk of stroke and heart disease for the people who are consuming cannabis. Coming to the harmful effects of opioids this could lead to confusion, nausea, constipation, long term effects can be coma and eventual brain damage. So these are alarming harmful effects.

Coming to the harmful effects of using cocaine. So this is a highly addictive substance. There are one in five overdose deaths that are reported from the use of cocaine. The other harmful effects can be asthma, there could be increased risk of HIV. Again coming to the harmful effects of using amphetamines, there can be anxiety, confusion, can be insomnia, paranoia and there can be aggression on the part of adolescents as well. So next coming to another important high risk behavior that is risky sexual behavior among the adolescents.

Now what basically is risky sexual behavior? This risky sexual behavior can be any form of unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse where the nature of the partner can be HIV positive individual, can be intravenous drug user or it can be non-exclusive partner having multiple sexual partners. Also sexual intercourse under the influence of substances such as alcohol or cocaine, these fall under the purview of risky sexual behavior. So there is a rise in such sort of sexual behavior mainly due to copying of the western culture in India. There is rise in early sexual debut among the adolescents, there is rise in live in relationships and all this have a huge impact as far as risky sexual behavior among adolescents is concerned. Now this risky sexual behavior among adolescents leads to various diseases like HIV and AIDS, it could be sexually transmitted diseases and a very important issue which is adolescent pregnancy also can happen due to risky sexual behaviors.

Coming to HIV/AIDS, an estimated 1.75 million adolescents were living with HIV globally in 2020. This is as per the UNICEF data. In 2020, 1.5 lakh adolescents newly acquired HIV, and 32,000 adolescents died due to HIV. Now these adolescents account for about 10% of new adult HIV infections with three quarters amongst adolescent girls.

Again these are enormous numbers. Coming to India, the number of PLHIV that is people living with HIV in young period that is 15 to 24 years is 1.7 lakhs. This is according to India HIV estimates 2021 and the newly acquired people living with HIV is 15,000. Now coming to the various routes of transmission of HIV/AIDS, so HIV/AIDS can be transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse with the infected partner. There can be perinatal transmission that is vertical transmission from the mother to the child.

This can happen in utero or also this can happen during delivery and this can also be passed from the breast milk from the mother to the child. There can be sharing of needles, syringes, and various injection drug use. These are also various routes of transmission for HIV/AIDS. Now coming to the other sexually transmitted diseases. Now basically these are

infections which are predominantly spread through the sexual route.

The most common adolescent sexually transmitted infections are gonorrhoea, chlamydia, and human papillomavirus infection. The adolescents and young adults they form 25% of the sexually active community and these people also form or account for 50% of all new sexually transmitted infections. Now the various routes of transmission for sexually transmitted diseases are; this can be transmitted through vaginal, anal or oral route. These can transmit through genital contact with source. Also, these can be transmitted through various bodily fluids like blood, vaginal fluid and semen.

Now coming to adolescent pregnancy. This is a separate lecture altogether so I will be just dealing it in brief. So approximately 12 million girls aged 15 to 19 years and at least 0.77 million girls under the age of 15 years give birth each year in developing regions and as far as India is concerned the women aged 15 to 19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the NFHS survey, this is 3.8% in the urban group and 7.9% in the rural areas, and complications from pregnancy and childbirth, these are among the leading causes of death for girls aged 15 to 19 years globally.

Now these adolescent pregnancies can lead to adverse outcomes for the mother and the child as well and pregnancy less than the tender age of 18 years is considered very risky for the female's overall development be it physiological, psychological or social development and these adolescent mothers have less access to the reproductive health services compared to the adult mothers. Now let us discuss few protective factors for high risk behavior amongst adolescents.

So basically when we know of the risk factors which make these adolescents indulge into various high risk behaviors, so basically intervening those risk factors are our protective factors for the high risk behavior among the adolescents. So the first and foremost is a good peer group so it is important to find a good peer group so the adolescents who are lucky enough to have them also monitoring on the part of their parents can lead them into good peer groups where the peers are determined enough to have a good career and they are well-oriented in their life so this goes on to play a huge role as far as the indulgence and high risk behaviors is concerned. Next is a strong sense of connectedness to the family and school so the people who are strongly connected who have good support system in their teachers who find a good support system in their family and who lend a good helping hand to them who lend a support to them in cases of distress in cases of problems, so this is again a huge protective factor as far as high risk behavior among adolescents is concerned.

Next is involvement in extracurricular activities so people adolescents who are involved into various extra curricular activities be it any hobbies that they love, be it sports, be it music, be it dance so involvement in such extra curricular activities this also makes divert their energies in a fruitful way, so again this is a protective factor. Supportive relationship with family members is important for dealing with any troubles dealing with the emotions and other issues cropping up in this adolescent delicate age group. On the part of the

schools, the schools can try and develop positive youth development programs, so these youth development programs can again channelize the inner energies of these adolescents into some meaningful skills, meaningful development programs and hence they are allowed not to deviate from the routine from the behaviors and not indulging into the high risk behaviors. Next is awareness about safe sexual practices is important so that these individuals do not resort to risky sexual behaviors so it is important to know the normal practices so it is important to know the protection, the various use of condoms and all. Not using condom during the first sexual intercourse, this has been reported among the adolescents, so important to have awareness about safe sexual practices.

Again life skills education, imparting these at adolescent age is important, and these life skills would keep them in good state when they go into the future for their families, for their other jobs, so these life skills would act as a savior for them. So these are some of the protective factors for high-risk behavior against Adolescents.

Now coming to the take-home message from this lecture. Basically adolescents, these are very vulnerable for high-risk behaviors due to the various experimentation that they do, the various changes that they feel in the body, the various emotional turmoil that they go, so very vulnerable. The various high-risk behaviors can be tobacco use, alcohol use, other substance abuse like cannabis, opioids, amphetamines and so on and risky sexual behavior.

The reasons for indulgence of these adolescents into the high risk behaviors are psychological factors that is at the individual level, various society factors and environmental factors as well. The peer approval is the most common factor as far as indulgence in high-risk behavior is concerned. These substance abuse causes harmful effects on adolescent health and they have profound negative consequences not only during the adolescent life but during later stages of their adult life as well. The protective factors are having a good peer group, a good connectedness with the family and the school.

So these are few of my references. Thank you so much. That's all from my end.