

**Socio –Psychological Problems of Undergraduates of  
Thiruvananthapuram City, Kerala**

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***Abstract***

*Thiruvananthapuram city is the capital of Kerala state with an urban agglomeration population of around 762,535 persons. It is located along the south west coast of India and spreads over an area 250km<sup>2</sup> with a population density of 4500/km<sup>2</sup> as per the census of 2011. It takes its name from the Malayalam word Thiruvananthapuram which means "The City of Lord Ananta". This city which is governed by the Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation is well known for its educational and research hub. The general area of the city extends from Thirumala to Shanghumukham and from Thiruvallam to Ulloor. It has many numbers of educational institutions including highly reputed higher educational institutions like professional colleges and research institutions to its credit. The colleges of Thiruvananthapuram city are mostly affiliated to Kerala University which has its headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram itself. There are around twenty colleges within the Thiruvananthapuram city limits. Socio psycho problems are often seen to have negative impact on the mental health of undergraduates. This research has been conducted to study the socio psychological problems among students, particularly of undergraduates in the colleges of the Thiruvananthapuram city. The study also examined the relationship between these two factors in these populations.*

**Keywords:** Behavioral disorders, Educational problems, Psychological problems, Social problems, Undergraduates.



## Introduction

Adolescence is the transitional stage of development between childhood and adulthood in which an individual experiences a variety of biological and emotional changes which he finds it very difficult to handle. This is the period when a child is no more considered to be a child or as an adult person. In this stage, as the child enters the college for higher studies he faces many problems including socio psychological problems. First of all there is a sudden change in the atmosphere of the institution as colleges do not follow hard and fast rules as in schools. Further the teachers, students and the environment is totally different from that of the school. Higher level of freedom is experienced in colleges compared to that of their schools. Developing good relationships at college could help a child to improve his overall personality. But at times some children face difficulty in coping up with the new environment. This could be because of the discriminations he face from his classmates and peers or could be due to the behavioral disorder of the child or from any of his personal problems.

The children come from different streams of higher secondary educational institutions like the CBSE, ICSE or from State syllabus are seen to have different educational level due to the difference of the curriculum in various streams of education. Likewise the standard in English of the children coming from the schools where the curriculum is taught in mother tongue is different from that of the children coming from english medium schools. Similarly children coming from the villages to the college in the city

for their higher studies feel it difficult to mingle with the culture of the children coming from posh family background of the cities. They have the feeling that their personal appearances and behaviors are different from that of the others and so wishes to be in isolation from the main stream. Further, in some cases there is a chance for the children to get ragged by the seniors who just tease and bully them for their personal pleasures which further decreases the confidence level of the child.

The children tend to adopt to multiple ways to overcome the stressors they have to face. Due to their inefficiency to handle these troubles and tribulations which are beyond their control they take advice from their peer groups whom they think are facing problems like them. These armature advisers are usually anti social in behaviour and so lead the child to follow their ways to tackle the problem or would advise not to bother much about the problem but to free himself from the problems, by resorting to high risk activities or anti social activities like substance abuse.

## **Research methodology**

Tools like questionnaire, confidential interviews and Y-PSC (psycho-social screening) were used to facilitate the recognition of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral problems in undergraduates so that proper intervention could be taken to help the children at the earliest. A positive score on the evaluations suggested that some undergraduates have moderate to serious impairment in psycho-social functioning which needed a further detailed clinical evaluation.

## **Observations and Interventions**

It is seen that in undergraduate students there are problems relating to socialization. Many children are seen to face discriminations based on his caste & community, colour, personal appearance, financial stability and on the basis of his poor academic performance. Intellectual deficiencies, developmental disorders, learning difficulties, conduct & emotional problems or poor cognitive development are also seen to pull back the students from their peer groups. In some cases the jobs of the parents or their

criminal background are also reasons for being secluded from the main stream. Similarly poor parenting, which causes lack of parental care and affection, is seen to affect the overall growth of the child. Likewise, family problems like divorced parents, single parenting or separated parents do create an insecure feeling in those children. This could in turn lead the child to social isolation or into the hands of high risk antisocial gangs who would motivate them for substance abuse, consumption of alcohol, smoking and even unprotected sex.

The study observed that for the overall growth and development of a child a suitable environment is needed in his immediate society where he has the freedom to express his thoughts and can share his feelings. It should be a space where he should be valued and his personality recognized. Proper motivation and encouragement is needed for every child and they expect to have it like others around them. During this period along with education trainings should be given to gain firsthand experience on the learned facts. There should not be any gender difference so that the children should feel to have the equal rights and responsibilities. The cognitive development should be given equal importance as for the physical growth.

### **Conclusion**

Transitional stage of physical and psychological development is the period of identity formation and role fulfillment. This is the period of trials for developing and maintaining an identity of one's own for gaining a social status. In this stage children try various methods by assuming different roles in search of the best identity to suite them. The undergraduate period is the transitional period from puberty to adulthood where a child expects himself to be made free but has to be done so with proper monitoring and guidance along with motivation. A systematic and structured methodology has to be adopted to supervise and support the children who needs attention and who are in conflict the regular social norms of the society. This is obviously a period of mental disturbance and psychological confusions. To solve this, confidence level of the children should be made to improve. As non acceptance of the peer groups is a major stressor for teenage turmoil children should be taught to accept

their peers for their good qualities and to ignore their shortcomings. This would help in reducing the potential danger of the children being absorbed as a part of the anti social groups and thus getting isolated from the society. The high risk group of children with character disorders, which later gets modified to behavioral disorder in the later stage, has to be identified at the younger age itself to give proper psycho-social interventions which would help the child from turning into an anti social activist. "Psycho-social training comprises of the structured activities designed to advance the child's psychological, social development and to strengthen the protective factors that limits the effect of adverse influences (WHO 2011)." Implementation of this program has to be done at personal level, familial level, institutional level and at community level for getting the desired results and for avoiding teenage tumult.

Another major cause for psychosocial dysfunction in some undergraduates was due to the frequent family disputes. This significantly was associated with the symptoms of anxiety and depression in the children who came from this type of unstable family background. Female undergraduates were found to have more of anxiety problems as compared to males. The emotional regulation strategy used by them was seen to be positive coping strategy to deal with the crisis situation. It was also seen that they used less suppressive strategies than the male undergraduates. It has also been noted that anxiety disorder developed in undergraduates was through the interplay of biological, psychological and social factors. It has a high risk rate of suicidal tendencies. Early detection of behavioral inhibitions would help in better intervention and treatment. Behavioral strategies can also be adopted to potentially lower the risk for developing anxiety disorder.

Undergraduates faced problems like physical bullying through threats and verbal attacks and also cyber attacks from their peer groups. It is seen to have caused anxiety, depression, stress, poor self confidence and even suicidal tendencies among students. Also peer pressure on day to day basis influence them to follow the peer trends in clothing, hair styles, behavioral patterns and even in joining them in their illegal activities like smoking, alcohol consumption and substance abuse. The fear of refusing the offer of their peers which could make themselves to be left out from the company

forces them to join these groups. At times due to curiosity it is their preference to have a trial of what their peers are enjoying which makes them an addict to the illegal activities in course of time. Peer pressure also often encourages risky behaviors like rash driving, skipping classes, cheating, stealing, unsafe sexual activities or even breaking laws.

Erikson (1963) proposed adolescence as the stage in which individual search for an identity Personal identity provides a feeling of individuality to an individual and involvement in the society. Undergraduate students are seen to be more egocentric as they desire to have a strong personal identity. This is even used as a protective mechanism to hide their negative feelings and psychological difficulties & its related problems. Since the first year undergraduates faces a more stressful situation of getting adapted to the new atmosphere of the college, the level of their egocentration is seen higher during this period. Identity crisis occurs due to motivational crisis and identity deficit which is due to inadequately defined self. Stressors like staying away from home for studies, peer influences and demands of the curriculum also affects the students to a considerable extend which triggers their emotional reactions quite often.

Procrastination is yet another common problem seen in the undergraduates. It is an intentional postponement of the assigned work or duties with wastage of time, despite the awareness of the possible consequences. It might be due to the lack of interest & boredom or due to the absence of self regulation or low self efficacy which would later lead to poor academic performance and increased stress to complete the matter within the remaining limited span of time. Increased exposure to the social media and to the life events takes their attention away from their regular responsibilities. This might cause conduct disorders and may even lead the student to anti social activities. The study proved that the major problem faced by the female undergraduates was anxiety problems where as in males the predominant problem was of conduct & anti social problems.

The normal stressors of a child in his everyday life often revolve around his social issues which comes as part of the child's socialization efforts. A proper understanding of the child's problem and giving him support to cope up with the socio psychological

problems would help him to come forward in the society with self-confidence. Improving his self esteem and teaching him how to handle a difficult situation or a social problem will help him to be self reliant and contented individuals. By encouraging open communication and by offering empathy and understanding would help in developing a supportive environment for the undergraduates. This has to be done both at home and in the college. An early detection of the problem would be very effective for getting quick assistance to overcome it. Every single child in the college should have a motivator & a counselor to whom he can disclose his problems freely and could get proper guidance and the right solution for his problem. Students should be made aware of his social roles and responsibilities and should be helped to develop a feeling of self worth. Encouragement should be given to maintain a positive relationship with parents, siblings and elders at home. Effective behavioral assessment and training should be provided to each child along with guidance for conflict management & coping with social and psychological stressors. He should be alerted on the ill effects of alcohol consumption and of illicit drugs like marijuana. Social skills like empathy, sharing, caring, concern and leadership quality should be developed in all children, especially undergraduates. Self care and family care tasks should also be entrusted on them. Familial financial responsibilities should be shared with them by developing the practice of saving & spending the money wisely at the same time teaching them to plan economic goals for future. They should be helped to develop skills for maintaining high quality relationship in life and to create a positive relationship with their peers without any discrimination to anyone. It should be advised to value cultural and traditional norms and values followed by the society. Maintaining of proper physical and mental health should be ensured. A comprehensive sex education should be provided for the undergraduates along with the formal education. They should be made aware of their legal rights and privileges and to inform the authorities if something happens to them against the law.

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