



## **A study of social and psychological problems related to puberty among high school students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A survey was carried out among teenage students of two high-schools in Kathmandu on the problems they were facing due to changes caused by puberty and their knowledge about the normal puberty changes.

Forty-five percent of the boys and seventy percent of the girls thought that a girl becomes weak as blood is lost from the girl's body during menstruation. 15% of boys and 40% of girls thought that a boy could lose all energy by having nocturnal emissions. 35% of the girls and 30% of the boys thought masturbation was harmful to health. 35% of boys and 60% of the girls felt that boys and girls should sit separately in high school. 45% of the boys and 70% of the girls felt that a girl should not be married once she starts to menstruate.

Fifty percent of the students were frightened and 32.5% of them were very happy by the changes that were taking place in their bodies. 55% of the girls and 50% of the boys were apprehensive when hair started to grow around their private parts. 10% of the boys and 25% of the girls felt that it was bad for a boy to have a small penis.

Only 20% of the boys and 35% of the girls had been informed about the oncoming menstruation or nocturnal emission. 70% of the girls felt that they should be informed about menstruation when they reach the age. 65% of the students were using their friends, 15% sisters and 10% mothers and teachers as their source of information. 60% of the girls and 45% of the boys liked to read magazines dealing with sex. 50% of the girls and 45% of the boys were satisfied with the information. 60% of the students felt that their curriculum should include sex education. 60% of the boys and 65% of the girls were of the opinion that prior information about the changes occurring at puberty would have made puberty easier for them.

Ten percent of the boys and 5% of the girls felt that God creates a baby in the mother after marriage. 15% of the students thought that after adolescence, if a girl wears the under-clothing of a boy, she will get pregnant.

*Keywords: Psychological problem; puberty changes; high-school students; Nepal.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

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"Puberty is that stage in development during which maturation of the sexual apparatus occurs and reproductive capacity is attained. It is accompanied by changes in somatic growth and psychological perspective".<sup>1</sup> These changes bring about a sense of apprehension and fear in the person, which is compounded by the situation of extreme social inhibition prevalent in the society.

Puberty is more than a time of rapid physical development. It is a time of adjusting to a strange and unfamiliar body, of new relationships with members of the opposite sex, and becoming aware of emerging intellectual powers. Interview studies have shown teenage years to be stressful. As Dunbar has explained, "The affective reaction to change is largely determined by the capacity to communicate. Communication is a means of coping with anxiety which inevitably accompanies stress".<sup>2</sup>

Nepalese society does not allow a young teenager to ask questions about anything relating to sexual matters; so, any query they may have regarding the changes that are occurring in them remains unanswered. In other words, our Nepalese teenager is ill prepared for puberty. As Thomas has said, "Rare is the child who even partially understands the basic nature of the changes taking place in him and his peers".<sup>3</sup> When pubescent children are not informed about or are psychologically unprepared for both the physical and the psychological changes that take place at puberty, then undergoing these changes maybe a traumatic experience. As a

result, they are likely to develop unfavourable attitudes towards these changes – attitudes that are more apt to persist than disappear. The unhappiness caused by this maybe reinforced to the point where it will become habitual and persist long after puberty has ended. Moreover, the conditions that contribute to unhappiness at puberty are likely to be persistent unless remedial steps are taken to change them. Just because these adolescents will grow up to be adults in another 10-12 years, it does not mean that they will acquire new knowledge and become wiser. Their level of knowledge will not increase just by growing up and becoming parents themselves.<sup>4</sup> This study is aimed at finding the level of knowledge of high school students about pubertal changes and their attitude and concepts towards these changes.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

### **Research Tools**

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed by the investigator using terminology that is used in the science book of the curriculum of the government school. At places some colloquial but printable words were also used to make the questions clear. As this was the first work of its kind to be done in Nepal, the research tool could not be cross validated against any known and established tool.

### **Sample & Sample size**

Purposive sample of 40 students.

### **Data Collection**

Two schools, one private and one government, were selected from

Kalanki/Naikap area of Kathmandu district. Ten boys and ten girls were chosen at random. The names were drawn, among the students who had attended school on that day. The students were not informed about the questionnaire prior to the actual distribution so they had no time to prepare. It was ensured with the respective teacher that the chapter on reproduction which was in their science book had not been officially taught in class.

## RESULTS

### Description of Respondents

A total of 40 students were included for the quantitative portion of the study. 20 were from a government school, out of which, 10 were boys and 10 were girls. 20 students were from a private school, out of which, 10 were boys and 10 were girls. The average age of the students was 15.42, the range being from 14 years to 17 years. The average age of boys was 15.25 years. The average age of girls was 15.6 years. Both boys and girls in the government school were one year older than those in the private school.

### Knowledge of students about pubertal changes

Most of the girls felt that the breasts start to develop between 11 and 12 years whereas the boys felt that the breast should start to develop at the age of 12 to 13 years. 45% of the boys and 70% of the girls thought that a girl becomes weak as blood is lost from the girl's body during menstruation whereas 40% of the boys and 30% of the girls denied this. Similarly, 15% of the boys and 40% of the

girls thought that a boy could lose all energy by having nocturnal emissions and 55% of the boys and 35% of the girls did not. 35% of the girls either thought that masturbation was harmful to health and did not know about it. 30% of the boys thought that it was not harmful to health whereas 55% of them did not know about it. 35% of the boys and 60% of the girls felt that boys and girls should sit separately in high school whereas 60% of the boys and 40% of the girls did not. 45% of the boys and 70% of the girls felt that a girl should not be married once she starts to menstruate and 25% of the boys and 20% of the girls thought that they should. The majority of the boys and girls in the group felt that the girls should marry at the age of 20 years and the boys should marry at the age of 25.

Fifty percent of the students were frightened and 32.5% of them were very happy by the changes that were taking place in their bodies. 55% of the girls and 50% of the boys had become apprehensive when hair started to grow around their private parts; 20% felt good and another 20% felt very happy. The remainder of the boys were also divided in the same way. One of the preoccupations that the teenager has is about the physical aspects of their bodies. In this sample, 10% of the boys and 25% of the girls felt that it was bad for a boy to have a small penis. 25% of the boys and 20% of the girls denied this.

Only 20% of the boys and 35% of the girls had been informed about the oncoming menstruation or nocturnal emission. 70% of the girls felt that they should be informed about menstruation when they reach the age

but the boys were not so sure. When the students were asked about their potential sources of information concerning changes that were taking place in them due to puberty, 65% of them said that it was their friends, 15% said sisters and 10% said mothers, and teachers. No one said father or brother as a source of information. 60% of the girl students and 45% of the boys liked very much to read magazines having materials about sexual matters. 50% of the girls and 45% of the boys were satisfied with the information they got but 30% of the boys and 35% of the girls were not satisfied. 60% of the students felt that their curriculum should include topics about sex education. 60% of the boys and 65% of the girls were of the opinion that had they prior information about the changes to be expected during puberty, it would have made puberty easier for them.

Ten percent of the boys and 5% of the girls felt that God creates a baby in the mother after marriage. 75% of the boys and 80% of the girls denied this. 15% of the students thought that after adolescence, if a girl wears the under-clothing of a boy, she will get pregnant whereas 57% of them denied this.

The tendency to bluff was very low with 80% of the students saying that they would give information about puberty to others if they knew. 55% of the girls and 70% of the boys thought that students got involved in drug addiction due to bad company.

## CONCLUSION

Puberty is that stage in development during which maturation of the sexual apparatus occurs together with new adjustments having to be made to a strange and rapidly growing body, strange and new relationships being developed towards the opposite sex and new constraints and responsibility being bestowed on to the person. This brings about anxiety to the person which is made worse by the society which label the natural inquisitiveness of this period as immoral, shameful and something to be hidden. An attempt was made to study the level of knowledge about puberty changes, the general attitude of the teenagers towards concepts about the puberty and the impact this had made on their minds. It was found that the students' explanation about the consequences of normal developmental changes were misleading and capable of producing stress. In many instances it reflected the general attitude of the sub-urban middle class Nepali families. The students recognized the deficiency in the present information system and felt that to decrease the stress, it would be better to include it in their school curriculum. Withdrawing from the friends and family was the most commonly used means of coping to tide over this stress.

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