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Youth and COVID-19 Pandemic

Background:

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can infect a range of hosts. The outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in humans were caused by these viruses. Coronaviruses are classified together on the basis of the crown or halo-like appearance of the envelope glycoproteins, and on the characteristic features of chemistry and replication (Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK7782/>).

Available literature shows that the disease transmission is usually by airborne droplets released by an actively infected person during sneezing, coughing and blowing of nose to the nasal mucosa of a healthy person. As on 10th November 2020, total cases of the world stand at 51,407,005 with active cases 13,936,427, recovered cases 36,198,734 and total deaths of 1,271,844. Among the countries, United States of America is on the top with more than 10.4 million cases and 244,519 deaths followed by India with 8,594,698 cases and 127,133 deaths. (source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>).

Youths and COVID-19:

The coronavirus outbreak has exacted a hidden toll on the younger mass as it has continued to eat up our health like a **TERMITE** especially in the psychological aspect. The lives and prospects of young people in particular are changing fast and are set to do so in the years to come. Keeping a mindset of positivity and indomitability is gradually becoming a difficult task on our part. This unseen, unknown virus has just fallen on us like a guerilla. Not only our country but the whole world has witnessed so many advancements in the field of virology that are worth praising, but COVID-19 has left all of us in awe. Our lives have become analogous to 9 to 5 jobs. From a pre-school child to primary school children, high school children to graduates everybody is living under anxiety.

Even the little children who have boundless thinking, who can start a story from fairies and end it at universe are unable to gain practical knowledge. It's like they are learning the steps to drive a car just by reading it from the book. They are not able to witness failures in life which is an indispensable part of learning. Concepts like playing for hours in public parks, socialising and making new friends have now become a little alienated. Prolonged school closure and home confinement during a disease outbreak is having a negative impact on the all-round development of children which will surely hamper their overall personality development in the long run. All this has contributed to weight gain, increase in screen time and lack of balanced diet.

A remarkable decrease in job opportunities because of COVID-19 has pushed many families into poverty. The young minds (ambassadors of the future world), which should be involved in creating their childhood memories, are now thinking about the stress for survival that their family is constantly going through. This situation has proven to be a curse for them. Moreover, in this era of 'online education', where an android phone is the ultimate necessity, many children are not able to access quality education. Along with stress, many parents have a feeling of guilt nowadays because they are not in a position to provide an android phone to their ward. Also, some incidents relating to a child pressurising his / her parents for an android mobile phone have been reported, which is extremely saddening. On the other hand, some children are not openly expressing it before their parents, as they don't wish to put their parents under stress and this is giving rise to mental distress.

Perhaps, a more important but easily snubbed issue is the psychological impact on the adolescents. The vicious cycle of fear of missing out, frustration, boredom, seeing financial stress in the family have further aggravated the problem. In these times, the parents and the other family members have to take the stand and address these issues. Schools do have a critical role not only on delivering educational materials but also in offering opportunity to the students to interact with their teachers and acquire some psychological counselling. Being constantly surrounded by the pandemic related news has alleviated their anxiety level. This is the time we have to remain self-motivated, focused, need to keep ourselves engaged in different activities so that negative thinking does not grip us. Rather, we need to think positive all the time about how to use the time judiciously for all creative and positive outputs.

According to a report by the World Bank, more than 40 million internal migrants within countries have been affected due to COVID-19 and around 50,000–60,000 individuals migrated from urban to rural areas of origin within a period of few days. Glimpse of such scenario was heard only in the context of world war or the great economic depression which happened long time back. None of us had imagined that we would have to witness such a situation.

Conclusion:

Governments (both union and state governments) have taken many initiatives to address the challenges posed by COVID-19, including issues related to youths and the mental health of citizens and the government agencies have been conducting a series of webinars on mental health so as to generate awareness on management of mental health of citizens including youths. So, in these distressing times, while we should keep ourselves engaged in positive and creative works, we also need to adhere to COVID appropriate behaviours (regular hand washing, using of mask, avoiding joining crowd, maintaining physical distance) to save ourselves from COVID-19.

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