Approximately 36 million (35% of the total population of 1025 million) in the country, consists of youth (between 15-24 years as per WHO definition). In 1981, the youth population was approximately 125 million and 171 million at the beginning of 1991. It was over 230 million at the beginning of 2001. Keeping in view the important role which the youth can play towards national development as well as the emerging health problems of the youth, WHO declared 1985 as the International Youth Year. In the last few years, due to socio-economic and political factors, there have been increasing health problems among the youth: unemployment, suicide, alcoholism, sex-related offences and general adjustment problems in the youth. Today, the youth in India form one of the most vulnerable groups, who on the one hand are expected to be the leaders to determine the destiny of India, and on the other hand, are an exploited and confused group.

This paper outlines the major stresses which the youth in India experience. It outlines some suggestions which the society and the youth could use towards better adjustment, productivity, and health of the youth. It also outlines some suggestions for schools and parents for creating an environment at home and schools for adjustment of the youth.

I. Stressers in the Youth

A. Role and Value Conflicts

India has moved from the traditional stable society, mostly agrarian, to a highly developed, industrial and space society. The traditional joint cohesive family has changed to a micro and incohesive family. There is a change from rural to urban living. In such a society, where the youth came from various strata of the society, with diverse cultures, religions, economic status, language and life styles, the youth experience difficulty in adaptation to the changing roles and value systems. This results in alienation, withdrawal, interpersonal relationship difficulties, depression and even suicidal behaviours. The problem gets aggraved when the parents come from different religions and cultures and expect their children to be mature and develop their own value systems and roles without appropriately guiding them. What are the core value systems of the Indian Culture? Who are the role models in India in different spheres of life?

B. Pressures for Performance in Schools and Colleges

With growth in the youth population and limited opportunities for admission in schools and colleges, and specifically in professional courses, the youth are under great pressure to perform. The previous academic standards of first class and second class are hardly adequate in modern India. The parents, right from the nursery level, make higher demands on their children to study hard and get good marks or ranks. The admission fees at various levels, both in public and private institutions have increased considerably which makes a heavy economic burden to the parents. Having made such payments, the parents create guilt feelings in the children as "bad boys", "bad girls", and, "irresponsible children". Such demands from the parents and the society serve as stresses upon the youth. India has maximum number of rich people in the world. Aspiration levels of the youth have increased. What is success? What is the process of achieving success?
C. Career Decision and Unemployment

Unemployment in all sections in India is increasing, particularly in the higher educated groups. The inflation rate is also increasing. To cope up with the economic demands of life, the youth experience a conflict between economic survival in a competitive society vis-a-vise pursuit of inner human interests and services to the society. A high percentage of youth, after graduation at Bachelor’s level or at post-graduation levels in engineering, medicine, law, nursing, and other disciplines remain unemployed or are under-employed and under-paid. It has been observed that one year of unemployment reduces the life expectancy by five years. Hypertension, cardiac problems, psychoneurosis, depression, suicide are rising among youth as also other behaviours including joining anti-social groups such as terrorists, naxalites etc. Alcoholism, drug addiction, smoking, and rash driving behaviours have increased. These behaviours are to take revenge against the society which has made the youth develop low self-esteem due to unemployment or not being able to be a productive member of the society. The suicide rate in the high school going children has been increasing steadily. It is estimated that 67.2% of the youth are unemployed. As compared with the general population, incidence of psychiatric problems is much higher among youth (12-15% as compared with 5% among general population): the youth are under great pressure to make a success in life, to prove themselves to their parents and the society, and yet the opportunities are limited.

D. Emotional and Sexual Adjustment

Youth is a period of life which is heightened in its emotional aspects. The sexual drive is highest at this time of life, which the youth need to be able to control and sublimate through socially approvable behaviours. This is a period where right interaction with the opposite sex is learned. It has been estimated that reproductive health problems are steeply rising - teenage marriage and pregnancy, teenage pregnancy outside marriage, sexually transmitted diseases (2/3rd of STD problem is estimated to be affecting the youth); AIDS is reported to be a critical problem among the youth in major metropolitan cities and drug addicts; high rates of anaemia in female adolescents after menarche. Accidents are also steeply rising - (about 15 to 20,000 accident deaths and 15-20,000 permanent handicaps in youth every year which is projected to increase to 30,000 deaths and an equal number of handicaps every year by 2000); suicide (15-20,000 suicidal deaths every year by youth and 15-20 lakh attempted suicides); smoking, alcohol and drug abuse (10% of male non-student youth were estimated to be smokers). The youth do not know where to go and seek medical and counselling help for their reproductive health problems.

E. Coping with Pressures of Living

The youth today is face with much greater pressures of coping with living as compared with their parents. In most cases they have to move away from their parents to urban cities, some of them even settling in foreign countries. Housing, transport, medical services, number of children, care of the children, education of the children are some of the issues facing the youth before marriage. Lack of social/familial support and guidance lays great personal responsibility on the youth to evolve their own life styles to successfully adapt to the society, keeping in view the social and family norms and expectations. Many a youth do not wish to conform to the social and familial norms and they wish to live in the society with unconventional value systems such as remaining single; living with opposite sex without marriage; marrying someone of the different religious, cultural, and social background; deciding not to have any children or having one or two children; both the husband and the wife working outside the house and leaving the children with the ‘baby-sitters’; husband and wife working and living in different cities, etc.

F. Pressures of Dowry

Many young girls feel that they are an economic burden on parents and commit suicide. The girls are also exploited by the inlaws to ask for continuing favours from their parents. This results in emotional conflict and psychiatric problems in the female youth.

II. Suggestions for Coping with Stress

These suggestions are at two levels - - (a) at social and familial level, and (b) at individual level.

a. For adjustment and health of the youth, it is suggested that technical and skill oriented educational programmes be initiated by the public and private institutions in India. A good pioneering work has been initiated by the Indira Gandhi National Open University which offers skill-oriented short term and long term programmes at very low fees. Similarly many schools in the private sector such as Pardada Pardadi Girls Vocational School at Anupshahar, a remote village in Uttar Pradesh are doing pioneering work. This would help minimize unemployment.
b. Both the society and the individuals should change their value systems towards nature of work, earnings, and productive employment. On the one hand in India, we compare ourselves with the Western countries, yet on the other hand we hardly adopt the good value systems of the Western countries which result in individuals and national productivity. In Western countries, there is dignity in work. Many senior officers, such as university heads, professors and managers drive taxies, work as salesmen, and perform what we consider as low level manual jobs, as labourers to supplement their income. The youth rather than being unemployed, should be trained to develop an attitude to work on any odd job to gain experience or earn while learning. Most of the young people should be encouraged in India to do some part-time work whether manual or otherwise, while still being educated at schools and colleges.

c. The youth should be encouraged to pursue careers in line with their vocational interests rather than being attracted to those careers which give better status and income. The ultimate factor of job satisfaction, personal fulfillment and creative realization will depend on whether the person has chosen a career which is in line with one’s aptitudes, interests and capabilities.

d. The schools, colleges and other institutions should have facilities for vocational and emotional counselling, and voluntary organizations can play an important role in offering such counselling services.

e. The voluntary organizations can offer counselling services regarding marriage, family planning, drug addiction, alcoholism, STD, AIDS, etc.... Many voluntary and industrial organizations, such as Bharat Petroleum have taken the initiative by producing films regarding drug addiction and adverse effects of alcohol. Such films should be made available to all educational and welfare organizations to show to the youth for creating awareness. The medical and health services for creating awareness. The medical and health services should be easily accessible to the youth through public and private hospitals, dispensaries, health posts, and sub-centres in villages.

f. The parents should find time to spend with the youth to understand the adjustment problems which the youth might be experiencing and be friends with them, in guiding them with regard to studies, friends, vocational choices, decisions regarding marriage and concerns regarding marital adjustment.

g. The youth, at all levels, should be involved in various kinds of programmes by the government and voluntary sectors. This will not only occupy them but will give them rich experience in planning and management of various aspects of life.

h. Keeping in view the socio-economic conditions of the country, competitions and opportunities available, the youth should set up realistic goals and priorities. Greater stresses are experienced when the goals are unrealistic.

i. Both in the family and in the educational institutions, the youth should be trained in yoga, meditation, and other techniques to cope with the distress situations.

j. The parents should always accept their children, irrespective of the sex and love their children irrespective of their performance in the schools and colleges or in life. Acceptance and love should not be performance-oriented. This would help build self-esteem and feeling of worthwhileness.

k. The youth should be engaged in social services and attempt to do some good to others without expecting any returns. Such an orientation will give feelings of usefulness and long term happiness.

l. The youth should also be encouraged to develop a feeling of pride in our country irrespective of the social and economic hardships rather than being encouraged or being attracted to greener pastures in foreign countries.

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