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Study on socio-economic, communication & socio-psychological attributes of slum dwelling adolescent girls in Kolkata, India

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Abstract

Adolescence is a critical stage of human development marked by significant physical, psychological, and social transitions. This study examines the socio-economic, communication, and socio-psychological attributes of slum-dwelling adolescent girls in Kolkata, India. A cross-sectional descriptive research design was adopted, with data collected from 200 adolescent girls using a structured interview schedule. The findings reveal that most respondents belong to low-income families, have limited educational opportunities, and experience multiple socio-psychological challenges such as fear of violence, poor living conditions, and lack of access to health and sanitation facilities. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve the overall well-being and empowerment of adolescent girls in urban slum settings.

Keywords: Adolescent girls, socio-economic status, communication, socio-psychological attributes, slums, Kolkata

Introduction

Adolescence (10–19 years) is a transitional phase characterized by rapid development and increased vulnerability. According to global health perspectives, adolescents form a significant proportion of the population and require focused attention for healthy development. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescents as those people between 10 and 19 years of age. Adolescence is a critical period of life marked by biological, social, and psychological changes for an individual. This is an impressionable period of life. Adolescence is a time for exploration, adventure and discovery of one's own body, capabilities and potentials. Sometimes expression of sexual urges by adolescents may lead to anger among adults, while among adolescents this may be a feeling of fear, guilt and shame. Family has a crucial role in shaping the adolescent's behaviour.

Urban slums in Kolkata represent marginalized environments marked by poverty, overcrowding, and lack of basic amenities. These conditions significantly affect the socio-economic and psychological development of adolescent girls. Previous studies indicate that slum adolescents face challenges such as poor sanitation, limited access to education, and increased exposure to violence and psychological stress.

The adolescent girls staying in slums from sub urban areas severely lack reliable resources to build knowledge regarding their health-related queries. The 50% adolescent

population is the girl population which is approximately 10% of the total population. The onset of puberty is pivotal time for girls, who, between the ages of 10 and 14 years, are developmentally different from their younger and older peers, and as discussed, face many specific challenges which are intensified during this stage in their life course. Especially those who live in slum areas.

It is very important to understand and empower adolescents as it will not only help in reduction of morbidity and mortality but also indirectly in the progress of the nation in many ways like—boosting the economy of the nation keeping the population under check. More than half of adolescent girls of slums are undernourished. About 56% of adolescent girls are anaemic. At this time of fighting against under-nutrition, the burden of overweight and obesity is increasing among the urban slum adolescent girls. Labile mental and emotional behaviour makes them prone to suicide and intentional self-harm. Another avoidable key challenge among adolescents is addiction.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Kolkata district of West Bengal in India. Kolkata Municipal Corporation contains 2011 registered and 3500 unregistered slums (Census 2001). Its area is 185 km with a crude density of about 24,759 persons/km. The total population living in the slums of the KMC was 22,14,90,811, i.e. about 30.72% of the total. In 2011, the total population was 4,496,694 (32.11%) of which

accounts for 1/3 rd. of the resident population living in slums.

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted. Selected slum areas under Kolkata Municipal Corporation were divided into 5 zones as North Kolkata (N.K.), East Kolkata (E.K.), West Kolkata (W.K.), South Kolkata (S.K.), and Central Kolkata (C.K.) in West Bengal. Total 200 no. of respondents were considered who were school going students of The Girl's High Schools at slum areas in different zones of KMC, comprised of all the 14-18 years girls for inclusion. There was one condition for selection of girls who must live in slum areas and who were adolescent girls. Random sampling method was used in this study. The data was collected by using a Pre-tested structured interview schedule and questionnaire covering socio-economic, communication, and psychological variables. Data were analyzed using percentages, frequency distribution, and comparative tables.

Results and Discussion

In the present study, the collected data was analysed in two parts i.e. Socio-economic and communication features as well as socio-psychological attributes of slum-dwelling adolescent girls in Kolkata.

Table 1: Some Socio-Economic and communication indicators, in terms of percentage distribution are being shown as follows

It was seen that, in the study that, the slum dwelling adolescent girls were in Kolkata Municipal Corporation as North Kolkata (N.K.), East Kolkata (E.K.), South Kolkata (S.K.), West Kolkata (W.K.), and Central Kolkata (C.K.) of the State West Bengal. The analysed data revealed that, 02 categories of respondents i.e. 14-15 years & 16-17 years of age group. In the case of analytical work, the majority of respondents (87.5%) lived with parents and 12.5% were living with relatives in W.K. & N.K. Larger no's of recipients (77.5%) living with parents in S.K. & E.K. In C.K. The majority of respondents (90%) were living with parents and 10% were living with relatives. The research activity delineates that, the majority of respondents (80%) have a good relationship with family members in W.K. The majority of respondents (85%) have good relationships with family members in S.K. & N.K. Similarly, the majority of respondents (87.5%) have a good relationship with family members & 12.5% have a tense relationship with family members in C.K.

In, Kolkata, the majority of respondents (60%) were between the ages 16-17 years of age group. In East Kolkata majority of respondents (55%) were between the ages 16-17 years of age group under study. Similarly in the case of

South Kolkata majority of respondents (57.5%) were between the ages 16-17 years of age group under study. In West Kolkata majority of respondents (55%) were between the ages 16-17 years of age group under study. Majority of respondents (50%) were between the ages 16-17 years of age group under study in Central Kolkata.

The study found that, source of income for the majority of respondents (80%) is daily labourer & 2.5% shopkeeper in W.K. & S.K. Almost all respondents (90%) source of income is daily laborers & 2.5% are shop keepers in E.K. The findings of the table depicted that, in W.K., N.K. & E.K. majority of respondents (95%) respondents belongs to income group between Rs. 3000/-15,000/- per month and only 5% in low income group i.e. Rs. Below Rs. 15000/- in the study. Similarly, majority of respondents (97.5%) respondents belongs to income group between Rs. 3000/-15,000/- per month and only 2.5% in low income group i.e. Rs. Below Rs. 15000/- in C.K. Poverty was a stark reality in all pockets of slums and the reality was that a vast majority of the people were living in houses with only one room which was used for sleeping, cooking and bathing. The majority of respondents belonged to low-income families (₹3000–15000 monthly income). Most families depended on daily labor as the primary source of income. A large proportion of parents had education below the 8th standard. Nuclear family structure was predominant. These findings align with earlier research showing that slum populations face income insecurity and deprivation of basic services.

Most girls were enrolled in school, but dropout risk remained due to poverty. Communication within families was moderate, but decision-making power was limited. Lack of awareness regarding health and hygiene practices was evident. Studies show that educational interventions can significantly improve knowledge and practices among adolescent girls in slums. In this study majority of respondents (86.5%) parents both alive and living together only 4.5% respondent's father died, 1% respondent's father and mother both died, 2.5% respondent's mother died and 5.5% respondent's father and mother were separated.

This investigation revealed that, zone wise, the total majority of respondents (47.5%) 'causes' of migration or coming to the city were poverty (36.5%), 9% natural calamities were the reason in W.K. In S.K.&E.K. Maximum (42%) causes of coming to the city were to search work, 2.5% were for other reasons and only 9.5% of the respondents gave no response about that. The study highlights that socio-economic deprivation directly impacts communication patterns and their well-being. Poverty, low parental education, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to limited opportunities for adolescent girls.

Table 1: Socio-Economic and communication characteristics of slum dwelling adolescent Girls in terms of Percentage (%) distribution from Kolkata district of West Bengal, India

S. No.	Items/Variables		West Kolkata		South Kolkata		Central Kolkata		East Kolkata		North Kolkata	
			Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
1	Age	14-15yrs	18	45.0	17	42.5	20	50.0	18	45.0	16	40.0
		16-17 yrs.	22	55.0	23	57.5	20	50.0	22	55.0	24	60.0
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
2	Weight	Under wt.	21	52.5	20	50.0	24	60.0	26	65.0	22	55.0
		Normal wt.	14	35.0	17	42.0	10	25.0	11	27.5	13	32.5
		Over wt.	5	12.5	3	7.5	6	15.0	3	7.5	5	12.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
3	Family	Nuclear	40	100.0	37	92.5	40	100.0	39	97.5	38	95.0

		Joint	0	0	3	7.5	0	0	1	2.5	2	5.0
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
4	Religion	Hindu	39	97.5	36	90.0	33	82.5	34	85.0	36	90
		Muslim	1	2.5	4	10.0	5	12.5	5	12.5	4	10
		Christian	0	0	0	0	2	5.0	1	2.5	0	0
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
5	Caste	Gen	22	55.0	25	62.5	25	62.5	22	55.0	18	45.0
		SC	16	40.0	14	35.0	14	35.0	16	40.0	18	45.0
		ST	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	1	2.5	1	2.5
		OBC	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	3	7.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
6	Class	IXth	20	50.0	20	50.0	20	50.0	20	50.0	20	50.0
		Xth	20	50.0	20	50.0	20	50.0	20	50.0	20	50.0
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
7	Schooling status	Yes	35	87.5	35	87.5	38	95.0	38	95.0	35	87.5
		No	5	12.5	5	12.5	2	5.0	2	5.0	5	12.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
8	If no why	Not applicable	35	87.5	35	87.5	38	95.0	38	95.0	35	87.5
		Work at home	3	7.5	2	5	2	5.0	2	5.0	2	5.0
		Parents do not allow	1	2.5	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	1	2.5
		No interest in study	1	2.5	2	5.0	0	0	0	0	2	5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
9	Living status of parents	Father died	1	2.5	1	2.5	2	5.0	2	5.0	2	5.0
		Mother died	0	0	2	5.0	0	0	1	2.5	2	5.0
		Both dead	0	0	0	0	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5
		Separated	0	0	5	12.5	2	5	2	5.0	2	5.0
		Both alive & living together	39	97.5	32	80.0	35	87.5	34	85	33	82.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
10	Parental educational qualification	Illiterate	2	5.0	3	7.5	2	5.0	1	2.5	0	0
		Less than 8th	28	70.0	31	77.5	33	82.5	32	80.0	26	65.0
		> then 8th	10	25.0	6	15.0	5	12.5	7	17.5	14	35.0
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
11	Living status of respondent	Living with parents	35	87.5	31	77.5	36	90.0	31	77.5	35	87.5
		Living with relative	5	12.5	9	22.5	4	10.0	9	22.5	5	12.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
12	Relationship with family members	Tensed	8	20.0	6	15.0	5	12.5	7	17.5	6	15.0
		Good	32	80.0	34	85.0	35	87.5	33	82.5	34	85.0
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
13	Source of income of family	Daily labourer	32	80.00	32	80.0	33	82.5	36	90.0	33	82.5
		Regular job	4	10.00	6	15.0	1	2.5	3	7.5	1	2.5
		Shop keeper	2	5.0	1	2.5	3	7.5	1	2.5	3	7.5
		Business	0	0	0	0	2	5.0	0	0	1	2.5
		Other	2	5.0	1	2.5	1	2.5	0	0	2	5.0
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
14	Monthly income	3000. 15000	38	95.0	37	92.5	39	97.5	38	95.0	38	95.0
		>15000	2	5.0	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	1	2.5
		<3000	0	0	2	5	0	0	1	2.5	1	2.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
15	Amount of saving:3000	No	37	92.5	38	95.0	36	90.0	38	95.0	36	90.0
		Yes	3	7.5	2	5.0	4	10.0	2	5.0	4	10.
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
16	Life insurance	NO	40	100.0	40	100.0	38	95.0	39	97.5	39	97.5
		Yes	0	0	0	0	2	5.0	1	2.5	1	2.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
17	Migrated	No	2	5.0	5	12.5	3	7.5	3	7.5	7	17.5
		Yes	38	95.0	35	87.5	37	92.5	37	92.5	33	82.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
18	Causes of coming city	00	2	5.0	5	12.5	3	7.5	3	7.5	6	15.0
		Poverty	19	47.5	12	30.0	9	22.5	18	44.0	15	37.5
		To search work	13	32.5	17	42.5	19	47.5	17	42.5	17	42.5
		Natural calamities	5	12.5	4	10.0	8	20.0	2	5.0	1	2.5
		Other	1	2.5	2	5.0	1	2.5	0	0	1	2.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0
19	Reason of setting in slum	Near to work place	2	5.0	1	2.5	4	10.0	1	2.5	0	0
		Inheritance	0	0	1	2.5	1	2.5	0	0	1	2.5
		Low income	37	92.5	33	82.5	32	80.0	36	90.0	31	77.5
		Total	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0

Table-2: Some Socio-psychological indicators in terms of percentage distribution are being shown as follows

A very high proportion of respondents (88.5%) reported experiencing depression. Regarding abuse, the study further delineates that, maximum respondents (81%) disagreed that they were physically abused by their family members and others, but 19% agreed that they were physically abused by their family members and others. Maximum stakeholders 73.5% had been faced with fear of violence. That related to the types of violence the adolescent girls might have been faced within their families or by the others in the slum. As for the forms of violence they faced, because respondents demonstrated little understanding of legal terminologies. The data on 20.0% of the girls reported being addicted to substances or harmful habits. Overall experience of living in slums was reported as dissatisfactory by 86.5% of the respondents. Psychological stress, anxiety, and insecurity were common. Research indicates that exposure to violence significantly affects adolescents' mental health, leading to anxiety and poor emotional adjustment. Most families migrated due to poverty and employment opportunities. The majority lived with both parents, but instability in family income affected well-being.

The slum adolescent girls faced tension, stress, anxiety and depression as major mental health problems. But the reality is that they did not think of it as a problem which required treatment.

The study highlights that socio-economic deprivation directly impacts communication patterns and psychological well-being. Poverty, low parental education, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to limited opportunities for adolescent girls. The findings indicate a concerning prevalence of psychological distress and adverse living experiences among the respondents. Mental health issues are highly prevalent in this population, possibly due to poor living conditions, economic hardship, and lack of emotional support. Insecurity and unsafe environments are major issues in slum settings, contributing to chronic stress and anxiety among adolescents. This overwhelming dissatisfaction highlights the poor quality of life and lack of basic amenities in slum environments. The findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the interconnectedness of socio-economic conditions and psychosocial challenges.

Table 2: Socio-psychological Characteristics of slum dwelling adolescent Girls in terms of Percentage (%) distribution from Kolkata district of West Bengal, India

Sl. No.	Particulars of item		Frequency	%
1.	Depressed	Yes	177	88.5
		No	23	11.5
2.	Abused	Yes	38	19.0
		No	162	81.0
3.	Fear of violence	Yes	147	73.5
		No	53	26.5
4.	Addicted	Yes	40	20.0
		No	160	80.0
5.	Overall experience living in slum	Satisfactory	27	13.5
		Dissatisfactory	173	86.5

Conclusion

The study concludes that slum-dwelling adolescent girls in

Kolkata faced multiple challenges across socio-economic, communication, and psychological domains. Poor living conditions, lack of awareness, and exposure to violence significantly hinder their life conditions including high levels of depression, fear, and dissatisfaction with life. These findings emphasize the urgent need for targeted interventions focusing on mental health support, safety, and overall improvement in living of slum dwelling girls in the area.

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