



Declining Health Status of Young Women in India: A Cause of Concern

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Health is important in every stage of life but the foundation of quality of old age majorly lies in the young age. Now a days due to modernisation and westernisation a major shift in lifestyles of young generation has been observed globally. Young women health status has shifted to a great extent towards deterioration as per recent researches in India. Many studies conducted on young women and college going females have concluded high percentages of subjects under the risk of obesity, diabetes, hypertension and poly cystic ovary syndrome. These chronic diseases are well known for other serious medical complications. The presence of risk of such diseases in the young females is really a cause of concern as to build a healthy and progressive nation, it is essential to preserve the health of the youth. The decline in health of young women can be a threat to their future health. Realising the importance of well-being of young women, present review article presents data on health status and prevalence of diseases among them.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Health in young life determines the health of adulthood and quality of old age. Youth is the last growth spurt of the human life cycle experiencing a series of biological changes and a window of opportunity paving the foundation of a healthy and a productive adulthood with less possibility of health-related problems in later stages of life [1]. In India, as per National Youth Policy 2014, 'youth' is defined as the persons between the age group of 15-29 years. Young population is every country's precious human resource and is the most energetic and productive section of every society. The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, in July 2020 projected the contribution of the young population aged 15-29 years with a percentage distribution of 27.8 and 26.6 by males and females, respectively in the total population for the year 2022. Such a huge young population makes India one of the youngest countries in the world [2]. The health of youth is crucial to the development of any nation, as it directly impacts the future workforce, economic growth, and societal well-being. Healthy young people are more likely to excel in education, contribute effectively to the economy, and lead active, productive lives. Investing in youth health ensures a robust and dynamic work force, reduces healthcare costs in the long term, and fosters a more resilient society. By prioritizing the physical and mental well-being of the younger generation, nations can build a stronger foundation for sustainable development, innovation, and overall progress.

2. HEALTH OF YOUNG WOMEN

Women represent the cornerstone of a nation's overall health. A healthy woman can contribute with better potential in personal and professional fields ensuring a healthy family, healthy community and healthy nation. However, the health of women is to be taken care of since young age is still a challenge. It is presumed that most young girls are healthy, but a much greater number suffer from illnesses hindering their ability to grow and develop to their full potential [3]. The health of young women in India is vital for the country's progress and well-being. As future leaders, mothers, and contributors to the workforce, their health directly influences their potential and productivity. Ensuring their physical and mental well-being not only improves their quality of life but also strengthens the nation's

social and economic fabric. Addressing health issues such as nutritional deficiencies, reproductive health, and mental health challenges among young women can lead to better educational outcomes, enhanced workforce participation, and healthier future generations. By prioritizing their health, India can achieve significant strides in gender equality, economic development, and overall societal advancement. The picture of the health status of young girls in India depicts a serious concern. In the report titled "Youth in India, 2022" by Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India, 31 August, 2021, presented some observations on young girls clearly indicating their greater susceptibility for health deterioration. Malnutrition is hollowing this population and inviting many more health complications eventually. Around 40 % girls of 15-19 years and 21% girls of 20-29 years are undernourished with a Body Mass Index below 18.5. An increase in the prevalence of obesity in this population is also noticed in the report. Rise in malnutrition has been the major cause for the increasing prevalence of anaemia in young girls which is about 59% during 2019-21 [2]. Deprivation from nutritional adequacy leads to increased mortality and higher prevalence of infectious diseases is also brought to notice in the report.

3. PREVALENCE OF CHRONIC DISEASES AMONG YOUNG WOMEN

Recent studies and articles have highlighted an increase in various health issues among young girls, such as hypertension, high cholesterol, and metabolic syndromes. The healthcare sector has already documented several gynecological concerns, including Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) and infertility [2]. Additionally, data released by the Government of India in 2022 reveal a decline in the country's fertility rates. Research indicates that young girls are experiencing deteriorating mental health due to suffering, low self-esteem, and complications from multiple health problems, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and depression at a young age. The range of health problems that begin early in life can become more complex and dangerous over time, posing significant health risks to a crucial segment of society [4].

Studies from various regions in India have reported high rates of overweight and obesity

among college students [5,6,7,8]. The primary contributors to obesity in this group include insufficient physical activity, excessive screen time, and the consumption of fast foods, processed foods, ultra-processed ready-to-eat foods, high-calorie and fatty foods with low dietary fiber, and frequent eating out [6,9].

Hypertension is another growing issue among young women and is a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases (CVD), which are major causes of global mortality and disability. High blood pressure among teenagers and young adults is increasingly recognized as a serious public health concern. Research indicates that approximately 3%–6% of adolescents (ages 10–19) and 12.5% of young adults (ages 20–28) are affected by high blood pressure [10]. Elevated blood pressure is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular events, arteriosclerotic changes, high cholesterol, and insulin resistance, all of which contribute to a greater disease burden later in life [11]. Studies have observed a high prevalence of elevated blood pressure among college-going students which draws attention to their risk of developing hypertension at an early age [12,13,14,15].

Recent research also indicates that college-aged women are at risk for diabetes. Studies in India have reported a high risk of diabetes among university students using the Indian Diabetes Risk Score (IDRS) across various states [16-20]. Factors such as central obesity, high BMI, waist-to-hip ratio, and abnormal fat distribution have been significantly linked to the prevalence of PCOD [21,22]. Additionally, high consumption of junk food and physical inactivity are strongly associated with menstrual irregularities in young girls [23]. Adopting lifestyle changes, including regular exercise, weight management, and healthy eating habits, has been shown to improve PCOS and enhance reproductive health among college women [24,25,26].

4. CONCLUSION

Protecting young girls from health risks is important to the future of countries' health and social infrastructure and for the prevention of health problems in adulthood [15,27]. However, now there has been a greater awareness for the inclusion of the younger population in the quest of universal health coverage yet, there is a significant gap in taking proper progress of improving health related initiatives for young women still remains a major neglected group. Hesitation, social fear, taboos and ignorance

leads to delaying action on early signs of health-related problems which grows with time and lands up as full-fledged clinical disorders/diseases [28,29,30]. In India, there is an urgent need for comprehensive policies focused on the dietary and overall health needs of young women. As rising trends in obesity, hypertension, and metabolic disorders among this demographic highlight significant health concerns, tailored policies can play a pivotal role in addressing these issues. Implementing educational programs that emphasize balanced nutrition, promoting physical activity, and providing access to healthy food options are essential. Additionally, policies should aim to integrate mental health support and regular health screenings into educational institutions. By prioritizing these aspects, we can help ensure better health outcomes, enhance the quality of life for young women, and reduce the long-term burden on the healthcare system [31].

National government needs to critically assess the countries' adolescent and young women's health needs to determine the most appropriate evidence-based intervention and prioritise these within their national health programming. More efforts on this issue will help in providing the basis for the formulation of effective intervention programs for young women which is an extreme need of this hour [32]. The health of families and communities are no doubt tied to the health of women. Thus, the health of young women plays a vital role in our communities. A healthy and strong woman of today will be a confident and versatile lady of tomorrow. Let us together *"Improve young women's health to strengthen the foundation of future nation's health"*.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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