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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHALLENGES FACED BY ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

In the age of globalization, adolescent girls often struggle with certain specific challenges not experienced beforehand. Issues such as gender discrimination, eve teasing, alcoholism, drug abuse, trafficking, early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, rape and cybercrimes are quite rampant today. In order to understand various challenges of adolescent girls a study was conducted among the sample of 600 adolescent girls from 15 schools of Malappuram district in the state of Kerala. Analysis of the present study reveals that adolescent girls face many challenges related to gender role perception, conflict of emotions, safety issues, lack of role models, peer pressures, confusions regarding inter personal relationship, accepting bodily changes, menstrual hygiene and reproductive health, curiosity regarding sex and sexuality, choice of career, educational aspirations, gender discrimination and usage of ICT. Among these, safety issue is the most pertinent challenge faced by girls and other challenges follow them. The study highlighted the need to think about long term action plans with a feminist perspective for addressing these challenges with cooperation from every segment of the society.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescents (10-19 years) constitute about 22% (232 million) of India's population with girls constituting almost half (111million) of this group. For every individual "Adolescence" is a challenging time as it is a period accompanied by many significant biological, economic, social, moral and psychological events which later on set the platform for adult life. These changes pose numerous developmental challenges like increasing need for independence, evolving sexuality, transitioning through education and commencing employment, consolidating advanced cognitive abilities, and negotiating changing relationships with family, peers and broader social connections to the adolescents, definitely at a varying pace (Cameron and Karabanow, 2003). If not properly addressed, they in turn lead to various behavioural and emotional problems that gradually become severe and become chronic stressors (Reddy *et al.*, 2005). In a developing country like India with its own specific familial and socio cultural features, the problems and challenges faced by the adolescent population are unique. In addition to the common challenges of adolescents, the adolescent girls face some specific issues. The girl child is still discriminated against from the moment of birth, through her childhood, adolescence and into her womanhood.

She is conditioned to believe that she is inferior and subordinate to men. Sons are idolized and celebrated (Kuruvilla, 2012). Such patriarchal mind-sets of the society often enforce helplessness and invisibility upon the girls as they grow up. With the onset of puberty, restrictions are put upon the mobility and activities of girls while their counterparts enjoy more freedom and privileges. Girls are often forced into household work and sibling care, school dropout and low education attainment, child marriage and early child bearing, trafficking for sexual exploitation, risk of HIV/ AIDS and discrimination even in terms of nutrition and food (Jha, 2012).

UNICEF (2013) observes that the nature and quality of young people's future lives, as well as a country's future social and economic development, depends largely on how well adolescents navigate this transitional stage. There has been political commitment by the government to meet the specific needs of the adolescent population. Policies have been put in place to ensure access to equitable education, reproductive health services and information targeted especially for adolescents; programmes initiated to provide nutrition to adolescents and laws enacted to protect the young from exploitation in the workplace or through trafficking. However, violence faced by adolescent girls is startlingly high, with as many as 26.3% (8,877 victims out of 33,764) are teenage girls in the age group of 14-18 years (NCRB, 2014).

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Even in colleges and campuses girl students are at high risk because of sex rackets targeted at them. Today computer, internet and mobile phones are helping adolescent girls to improve their information access, entertainment, shopping, communication and wellbeing. Even though the internet and mobile has consistent positive impacts on modern society, it has also created various problems related to privacy, security, pornography and cybercrime. Younger girls become victims of cybercrime more often than older age groups. According to Chandrakant (2012) mobile is the technology which is cheaply available in the market and plays a prominent role in the harassment of adolescent girls.

Adolescent girls are heavy consumers of media. Studies have proven that teenage body image is greatly influenced by what they see on television and in movies and magazines (Brandon, 2011; Gilmartin, 2009; Olson, 2009). The ability of media marketing to affect adolescents today has evolved through many different means and has taken a negative toll on many aspects of adolescent lives. It is entwined with entertainment, fashion and music, making it almost impossible to differentiate reality from fantasy. Teen-age girls who view commercials depicting women models with the unrealistically thin-ideal type of beauty make them feel less confident, angrier, and more dissatisfied with their weight and appearance (Hargreaves, 2002).

Studies from different parts of the globe report increasing trends of drug addiction and suicide rates among girl students (Pirkis and Blood, 2010; Steffenak, 2014). The state of Kerala despite being referred to as God's own country is no exception in this regard. The statistics on crimes against girls and women for the first six months of the year 2015 prepared by the State Crime Records Bureau of Kerala shows the highest number of crimes in Malappuram District of Kerala State. There are numerous instances of molestation and trafficking promoted by own parents which often remain unreported to the police. The impacts of such crimes on growing minds are so severe that girls develop a sense of helplessness, incorrect body image, low self-esteem, feelings of insecurity and dependency. Most of the adolescent girls are uninformed about their rights and that would be one of the major reasons for the escalating rate of violence.

In the age of globalization characterized by rapid social change, consumerist culture, stiffer competitions, disruption of families, increasing violence, loss of tolerance, increased individualism and selfishness, there is an alarming rise in the intensity of crimes against girls and women. Only through proper education can we instil the knowledge, capacities and skills in women, girls in particular that would equip them with the coping strategies inevitable to cut one's safe path amidst violence and atrocities and lead a successful life in the modern society. In the midst of adversities, our girls must be enabled to ensure their own safety and progress whereby their self-empowerment is facilitated. Review of the related studies reveals that studies done on adolescents highlight their developmental challenges related to physical, emotional, intellectual and academic achievement. Questions related to social security, safety needs, life goal and gender role perception are rare in the Indian context.

Such studies on adolescent girls are to be taken up to address the increasing rate of violence for which adolescent girls fall easy victims. Girls should be enabled to weave a safety net around them along with increased awareness regarding their right to live with dignity. In this context the investigators have taken up the present study to assess the major challenges faced by adolescent girls in Kerala society.

Objectives of the study

The study has been designed to attain the following objective:
1. To analyse the major challenges faced by adolescent girls of Kerala society in the era of globalisation.

METHODS

In order to understand the various challenges of adolescent girls a pilot study was conducted. After analysing the primary data the researchers developed an inventory for analysing the important challenges of adolescent girls. The sample, tool and procedure of data collection used are discussed below.

Pilot Study with Curiosity Box

The pilot study was conducted among 100 adolescent girls studying in five higher secondary schools of Malappuram district of Kerala state. The schools were selected randomly. Two hours adolescence education class was imparted to the students in their respective classrooms. At the end of the session the girls were asked to pen down their anxieties and queries on paper slips distributed to them, without writing their names on the slip. Each of them was asked to write down at least one query or problem for which they need clarification and put the slips into the curiosity box passed along. Clarifications were given for the queries one after another. The problems were related to sexuality, menstrual hygiene, fears regarding harassment at home, public space, train and bus, love affairs, life goals, media messages, mobile phone calls, selection of career etc. The experiences with the curiosity box provided an insight and motivation to take up the present investigation on the challenges of adolescent girls.

Main Study

Sample

600 adolescent girls studying at plus one level of 15 higher secondary schools of Malappuram district were selected as sample by using simple random sampling techniques.

Tool

An inventory on challenges faced by adolescent girls has been used for collection of data from the respondents. The inventory consists of 36 statements related to 12 dimensions which include gender discrimination and gender role perception, emotional conflicts, safety issues, role models, peer pressures, inter personal relationship, bodily changes, menstrual hygiene and reproductive health, usage of ICT, choice of career, educational aspirations and curiosities regarding sex and sexuality.

There are three statements each based on each dimension in the inventory to which the respondent is to mark her agreeableness using a '√' mark. If the respondent has marked at least one item under a particular dimension as applicable to her, it is taken as a challenge faced by her. If none of the three statements under a dimension is marked as applicable to her, then it is not considered as a challenge in her present condition. Separate space was provided at the end of the inventory to write down any issue that is felt as a challenge other than those listed earlier.

Procedure of Data Collection

The principals of the higher secondary schools were contacted in advance and the date and time for the adolescence education class followed by data collection was fixed. The researcher herself has administered the tool directly to the students and collected the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to find out the various challenges faced by adolescent girls in the present situation. Analysis of the data reveals that adolescent girls face many challenges related to gender discrimination and gender role perception, conflict of emotion, safety issues, lack of role models, peer pressure, confusions regarding inter personal relationship, inability to accept bodily changes, menstrual hygiene and reproductive health, curiosities regarding sex and sexuality, choice of career and usage of ICT. Among these, safety issue was found to be the most important challenge faced by majority of girls. The details of challenges marked by the sample in the decreasing order are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Challenges Faced by Adolescent Girls

| Si. No. | Challenges | Percentage |
|---------|---|------------|
| 1. | Safety issues | 76.8% |
| 2. | Menstrual hygiene and reproductive health | 74.4% |
| 3. | Gender discrimination | 74% |
| 4. | Curiosity regarding sex and sexuality | 73.3% |
| 5. | Gender role perception | 73% |
| 6. | Conflict of emotions | 72.5% |
| 7. | Usage of ICT | 67.6% |
| 8. | Confusions regarding interpersonal relationship | 65% |
| 9. | Peer pressure | 62.8% |
| 10. | Accepting the bodily changes | 59.4% |
| 11. | Choice of career and lack of role models | 58% |
| 12. | Educational aspirations | 53% |

Challenges Related to Safety

As evident from Table-1, safety issue is the major challenge for majority of (76.8%) adolescent girls. Almost all of them agreed that they are scared of being attacked by antisocial elements while going out and do not know how to face the staring and peeping eyes on the roads and public places. In addition to this, they were unaware of what to do and whom to approach in such cases. Eve teasing, sexual abuse from close relatives, teachers, neighbours and the very fear of violence are the major safety issues faced by girls. A study conducted by Kuruvilla and Suhara (2014) on 'response patterns of girl students to eve-teasing' found that eve teasing acts as a control

on most women by censoring their general mobility and accessibility to public spaces, thereby affecting their sense of personhood and security. Studies also highlight that girls' experiences with sexual harassment increase with age during adolescence (Leaper and Brown, 2004; McMaster *et al.*, 2002). This study brings the reality that besides all the policies and programmes for supporting the safety of adolescent girls the problems are still prevalent in the society.

Challenges Related to Menstrual Hygiene and Reproductive Health

Menstrual hygiene and reproductive health is the second important challenge among adolescent girls (74.4%). Most of the girls responded that they are scared of white discharge and doubtful about the connection between the use of sanitary pads / wearing jeans with infertility. Confusions about the right age for marriage and getting pregnant is another issue raised by the girls. All these issues reveal the misconceptions of adolescent girls with regard to reproductive health and sexuality. Poor hygiene during menstruation has been associated with serious ill-health ranging from reproductive tract infection, urinary tract infection, bad odour and many more (Akpenpuun *et al.*, 2014). Some researchers report that girls suffer from various discomforts like stomach ache, vomiting, headache, back pain and depression (Kamalam and Rajalakshmi, 2005; Rani, 2005) during menstruation and white discharge (Khanna *et al.*, 2005). All these studies and the findings of the present study point out the need of more intensive awareness classes for adolescent girls on menstrual hygiene and reproductive health.

Challenges Related to Gender Discrimination

The fourth significant challenge is gender discrimination (74%).The respondents opined that they often feel that their mobility and freedom of opinion is restricted just because of being girls. As conveyed by almost 60 percent of the sample they do not have a mobile phone of their own while their brothers do possess it. They want to be treated the same as their brothers and they think that if they were boys they could run around and play on their courtyards and school ground. Discrimination and stereotypical role assignment existing in mainstream society sustains the secondary status of girls and women. As pointed out by Mensch *et al.* (2003) when girls enter puberty, they experience an abrupt shift in what is considered appropriate behaviour, and at that point, they become aware of the restrictions placed upon them as women. Her family and society limit her opportunities and autonomy, particularly the activities outside the home, much more than those of the adolescent male siblings.

Challenges Related to Sex and Sexuality

Curiosities regarding sex and sexuality were found to be the next major challenge faced by adolescent girls (73.3%). The girls were found to be confused whether premarital, extramarital sex relations and masturbation are a sin or not and fail to find a person with whom they can clarify such doubts. According to Reddy *et al.* (2005) growing interest in sex makes adolescent girls seek more and more information about

it and consequently they take advantage of whatever sources of information are available to them and this acts as a major source of stress among them. The present study also reveals that the adolescent girls are less informed and misinformed about sexual matters and they are very much in need of sex education.

Challenges Related to Gender Role Perception

The fifth significant challenge is related to gender role perception (73%). Majority of the respondents are of the notion that women must finish domestic chores before going out for work and cleaning and cooking should be considered as responsibilities only of women themselves. Likewise, they also shared the opinion that employed women will not be able to take care of their children properly. The shaping of gender role perception is largely dependent upon the type of socialisation that one receives from the various agencies. The inappropriate gender role perception of girls often leads to improper choices in all spheres of life. During adolescence, once the stereotyped gender-role mind set is formed, it is very difficult to change. The findings of the study conducted by Kuruvilla and Nisha (2015) point out that despite the higher literacy rate and gender development index in Kerala, traditional views and stereotypes regarding gender roles are still prevalent in the society. Appropriate gender role perception among adolescents is also regarded as essential for healthy transition from childhood to adulthood.

Thus there is an urgent need to gender sensitise adolescent girls and enable them to realise their abilities and roles in the society. As opined by Kuruvilla and Nisha (2015) due to the inappropriate gender role perception existing in the society as a whole, girls/women are forced to comply with the traditional roles of wife and mother and accept the secondary status as natural. This might have contributed to the lower work participation rate of women in Kerala (18.23) when compared to the national average (25.63) as per Census 2011. Even if women go out for work, their career options are narrowed down and jobs like that of teaching and nursing are preferred for them. Girls and women who break the stereotypes are susceptible to much resistance, very often in the form of ridicule and violence. The amounting rate of gender based violence and low percentage of Keralite women in the state assembly and the Indian parliament are also aftermaths of this traditional gender role perception existing among men and women in the society. Hence, there is an urgent need to gender sensitise all socialisation agencies and make adolescent girls realise their social and economic potential which in turn would advance themselves, their families, and their communities.

Challenges Related to Emotional Conflicts

Adolescence in general is proven to be a period of stress and strain and this is equally applicable to girls and boys. In the present study 72.5% girls accept emotional conflicts as a major challenge to them. Among this, majority of girls agreed that they tend to be easily irritated and often get angry. They feel depressed and lonely at home and also inferior in being a girl. The girls do not get proper guidance and counselling to channelize their emotions.

Studies have found that adolescent girls suffer from emotional problems such as anxiety, anger, irritations, loneliness, inferiority and depression (Mishra and Sharma, 2001). They undergo a complex process of emotional, physical and social changes and sometimes they fail to adjust with these changes leading to mental health problems. Hence adolescent girls need special attention and care for emotional adjustment. The social conditioning that makes girls feel inferior to their counterparts is to be discouraged at the early stages itself.

Challenges Related to Usage of ICT

The rapid development of computer, internet, mobiles and other communication technologies yields numerous opportunities and benefits for adolescent girls. On the other side, it has created numerous chances for new forms of crimes like morphing, pornography and traps in the social networking sites. In the present investigation 67.6% of the sample expressed usage of ICT as posing a challenge to them. Only 40 percent of the sample possess a mobile phone of their own while almost all of them admitted that their brothers including younger ones do possess a mobile of their own.

Most of the girls are scared of being cheated in the social networking sites. Some of them admitted that they are addicted to watching TV and few of them agreed that their parents often scold for their lengthy watching of TV, sitting with laptop or chatting over phone. The study reveals that adolescent girls are not aware of using technologies properly and adopting online safety strategies. Haneefa and Sumitha (2011) points out from their study that a good number of students convey issues related to security and privacy and fear of misusing their personal information as the major problem while using social networking sites. A number of studies also have highlighted the negative outcomes such as overuse of the mobile phone and related financial problems (Billieux *et al.*, 2008; Funston *et al.*, 1999) and addiction to the mobile phone in young adults and adolescents (Bianchi and Phillips, 2005; Funston *et al.*, 2004). The present study reveals the need for mobile literacy to adolescents as how to use it judiciously and awareness regarding cybercrimes and cyber laws to prevent the trapping in networking sites.

Challenges Related to Interpersonal Relationship

Interpersonal relationship is another persistent area of challenge for 65% of girls in the total sample. They are confused as how to maintain a good relationship with opposite sex and not sure whether adolescent love affairs are to be discouraged or not. Less than fifty percent of the girls believe that there is nothing wrong in having healthy relations with boys. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2005) investigated adolescents and found that the support from friends is necessary to withstand emotionally challenging circumstances and to cope up them effectively. The formation and maintenance of stable interpersonal relationships is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) and research findings have consistently indicated that poor quality relationships are linked to negative mental health outcomes in young people (Allen *et al.*, 2007; Branje *et al.*, 2010).

Adolescence is typically a time when young people begin to engage in romantic relationships and the likelihood of having a romantic partner during this period increases with age (Shulman and Scharf, 2000; Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999). Attraction towards opposite sex and maintaining healthy friendship are always been an issue of adolescent girls. Findings highlight the importance of guidance and counselling for girls for maintaining healthy inter personal relationship.

Challenges Related to Peer Pressure

Peers play a greater role in adolescent girls' life and at times it becomes difficult for girls to resist the peer influences. The results of the present analysis show that 62.8% of girls have challenges related to peer pressure. These girls opine that even when they realise that what their friends do is something wrong, they have to support them. Other issues raised by them include pressures from friends to have romantic affairs and the worry over not having a mobile phone like their friends and brothers. Several studies report that adolescence is a period in life when the establishment of friendships and interaction with peers takes on increasing importance (Hartup and Steven, 1997; Arnett, 2007). It may be in positive and negative ways like peer influences in academic achievement and prosocial behaviours (Mounts *et al.*, 1995; Wentzel *et al.*, 1997) as well as problem behaviours such as drug and alcohol use, cigarette smoking, and delinquency (Urberget *et al.*, 1997) or social relations with friends and romantic partners to be a common source of depressed mood in adolescence (Larson and Richards, 1994; Petersen *et al.*, 1993).

Thompson (2015) explains that if peers are using drugs or having sex, the teen is much more likely to do the same. Peer relationships also may serve as an important protective factor (Pikoand Fitzpatrick, 2003). Success in managing peer relationship is linked to critical adolescent behaviours and mental health (Buhrmester, 1992). They need relationships with peers who can serve a variety of functions, including providing guidance, companionship and intimacy (Furman and Buhrmester, 1985). For adolescents' social development, peer relationships have shown its importance in the literature and in practice (Miller, *et al.*, 2000). Peer relationships have been found to be positively related to many indicators of psychological and social adjustment (Bishop and Inderbitzen, 1995). Being neglected or rejected by peers during adolescence is linked to serious problems such as delinquency and depression (Merten, 1996). The results of the present study indicate that learning to resist unhealthy peer pressures is an important developmental task for adolescent girls.

Challenges Related to Accepting Rapid Bodily Changes

During the time of adolescence, girls have lot of problems related to bodily changes and menstruation. In the present study 59.4% of girls report that they face problems related to accepting the bodily changes. They agree that they are embarrassed due to rapid bodily changes and get much irritated by the monthly periods. Some of them feel that they are not attractive enough. Studies reveal a significant association between body dissatisfaction among teenage girls and their exposure to thin models in the media (Cafri *et al.*, 2005;

Hausenblas *et al.*, 2003). Many girls suffer from negative feelings about their body shape and this can influence their wellbeing and have a negative impact on different aspects of their lives. Awareness about body image encouraging a more open and public conversation is to be developed along with highlighting the value of personal worth so much more than just physical appearance.

Challenges Related to Choice of Career and Lack of Role Models

58% of girls responded that they are utterly confused as how to choose an appropriate career and they lack proper role models. They are worried that the interest of their parents regarding choice of their career is different from what they have in mind. The sample also agreed that they have a strong tendency to imitate the models from media. Selection of an appropriate role model is considered to be essential for enhancing adolescent girls' self-efficacy and motivation for attaining their life goals. The findings reveal that girls are far behind in selecting an appropriate role model. Career aspirations are influenced by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, race, parents' occupation and education level, and parental expectations (Domenico and Jones, 2006). Women often perceive barriers and role conflicts as obstacles in their career development process (Albert and Luzzo, 1999; Brownand Barbosa, 2001; Luzzo and Mc Whirter, 2001). The inappropriate gender role perceptions might be a barrier and contributive factor to the inability to choose the right career or an appropriate role model.

Challenges Related to Educational Aspirations

The results of the study reveal that 53% of adolescent girls have confusions related to their own educational aspirations. The respondents feel that dowry and marriage expenses are hurdles to higher education of girls. They conveyed that their parents are of the opinion that it would be difficult to get bridegrooms for educated girls.

Also, they doubt whether their parents would support their aspirations for professional education. Gendered stereotypes around domestic responsibilities and restrictions most often out of fear about safety, pose a major barrier for girls to get good education, employment and participation in public activities. Generally, parents give more attention to save money for dowry to be given at the time of marriage of their daughters than investing in their education. For securing girls' future, parents may compel their adolescent daughters to marry before the age of 18 which in turn results in school dropout and social isolation. The present study is based in Malappuram district of the state of Kerala which is noted for its higher number of adolescent marriages and pregnancies. Very often the young girls fail to resist their parents and may have to yield in before their compulsions for marriage and forget their aspirations for higher education.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study highlight the specific challenges pertaining to adolescent girls in the Kerala context.

The girls are well aware of the rampant atrocities against girls and women in the society and the fear of violence is a major threat to the mobility and aspirations of young girls and the public must be made aware how this fear is negatively impacting upon the wellbeing of our girls. Along with strict enforcement of laws and programmes for developing awareness regarding the legal provisions and rights of women, every effort to bring about a change in mind sets of people is needed to curtail the rising atrocities against women. Boys must be taught from the childhood to respect the individuality and dignity of women. More of gender sensitisation programme are required for men to enable them treat women as equals and respect them in proper ways.

Despite the awareness classes rendered as part of various programmes of the government and NGOs and the adolescence education classes in the school curriculum, girls still have lots of apprehensions and doubts regarding menstrual hygiene and reproductive health. Similarly adolescence is a phase where the sexual urges develop and it is quite natural to have curiosities regarding the various aspects of sex and sexuality. But unfortunately there is no reliable source of information available to Indian adolescents during this stage. Parents in most Indian families keep a distance with their adolescents whereby children become reluctant to clarify their doubts with parents. Even in schools when young adolescents learn about reproductive system, teachers are reluctant to explain the details or answer the queries of children.

This condition must change. Parents and teachers must realise the need for sex education and open discussions in matters related to sexuality with adolescents. Training to handle adolescence education classes effectively must be given to the teachers and other concerned team. Proper clarification of the doubts of youngsters is more important than the simple transaction of adolescence education classes. Youngsters often have a reluctance to ask their doubts out of shyness and fear of peer ridicule. The stigma and secrecy surrounding sexuality in the Indian society add up to this reluctance. Based on the experiences from the present study, the investigators strongly recommend the use of 'Curiosity Box' in such sessions wherein the adolescents feel very free and open in raising their doubts and apprehensions.

The gender discrimination experienced at the family is highlighted by the findings of the study. Hence the need for treating and upbringing boys and girls alike is to be stressed in parental awareness classes conducted under the auspices of the PTA. The do's and don'ts put forth by parents must be made equally applicable for their boy and girl children. Then only the children learn the lessons of gender equality from the home front. The need for respecting the individuality of girls must be taught to boys from the very early days. What the boys learn from their Indian homes is detrimental to the concept of gender equality. As highlighted by Kuruvilla and George (2015), in a family set up where the head of the household is engaged in commanding rather than sharing, ordering rather than doing things on one's own, likes to be served and pleased, demands love and respect but forgets to give love and respect, interested in scolding and battering rather than discussing and resolving issues, the values caught by children from their

parents will not contribute to gender justice. When the turn of the children comes to become a husband /wife, whatever they have learned from their role models through observation will be repeated and perpetuated. In developed countries with high indices of gender equality, children learn lessons of egalitarian relations from their parents itself. But in a highly patriarchal society like that of India, children rarely get opportunities to be witnesses of egalitarian family relationships especially between husband and wife. In Indian families wives generally display utmost respect and reverence to the husbands and directly teach their children to respect fathers while they rarely see the fathers openly respecting their wives. When children grow up, the sons demand strict obeisance from their wives just like their role model fathers and daughters naturally imbibe the mental dispositions of their mothers to be passive and submissive whereby the unequal power relations get transmitted from generation to generation (Kuruvilla & George, 2015).

Adolescence in general is regarded as a period of emotional mood swings. The need for freedom confronted by additional restrictions at the adolescence stage on mobility, play and dressing style might be a major reason for the adolescent girls reporting to be irritated and often getting angry. Mobile phones have become the most desired daily means of communication among the adolescents. There is no doubt that the mobile phones have made the life more easy and comfortable. One of the major disadvantages of using mobile phone is the probability of different forms of cyber crime activities, particularly those targeted towards adolescent girls. The ban of the technology at school alone can't solve the issues of cybercrimes. Instead of stressing the ban of mobile phones, the judicious use of the technology is to be highlighted.

Higher education of girls is showing a progressive trend in recent days with more and more parents willing to send their adolescents to professional education. But unfortunately this is a change markedly noticeable among educated parents. But even in the Kerala context, in several parts of the state there are parents who still hold the notion that the safety of girls could be ensured only through marriage. Such parents may either not send their girls for higher education or may send them till a good alliance is secured. As per the findings of study conducted by Kuruvilla and Anjana (2014) on attitude of parents towards higher education of girls in Malappuram District, among the total sample of 318 parents studied 14% of sample have less favourable attitude, 67% of sample have moderate attitude and 19% have more favourable attitude towards higher education of girls.

This study also highlighted that Christian parents have the most favourable attitude and muslim parents have least favourable attitude towards higher education of girls. Another study conducted by Hameed (2014) on Female education and demographic transition in Kerala with special reference to Malappuram district found that one fifth of the sample are not willing to educate their boys and girls equally. The findings also revealed that respondents who prefer to educate their boys' up to the desire of their children is certainly high when compared with the respondents who prefer to educate their girls' up to the desire of their child.

The attitude of parents towards higher education of girls is still not so favourable as seen from outside where exceptional cases of positive attitudes though highlighted are much fewer than the instances of less favourable attitudes. Investment in girls' higher education needs to be promoted at par with that of boys. The findings reveal the confusions and inability of girls to choose appropriate careers. Majority of the sample have mothers who are home makers and only very few have employed mothers to be taken as their role models. Depictions in the print and electronic media can strongly influence the human mind which has a natural tendency to imitate whatever it is exposed to, especially in the magic box.

Negative portrayal and degrading images of women depicted in the visual media serve to sustain the gender stereotypic images of men and women where women always are at the loser side. Awareness is to be generated among men and women so as to facilitate a selective internalisation of the real and rejection of the unrealistic fantasies depicted in the media through media literacy programmes. Media literacy also includes the awareness for not being misguided by the representations given in the media and making a judicious and logical screening between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Media literacy is to be provided to all, irrespective of gender and age to develop correct gender role perceptions (Kuruville, 2015). Career guidance must be made compulsory component of the higher secondary school curriculum so that the youngsters get an opportunity for informed choice of the right career and enter into the right stream of higher education.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the challenges faced by adolescent girls in the Indian context, specifically in the Kerala society during the era of globalisation. On one side the prospects for development of adolescent girls are amounting while on the other side new forms of challenges spring up each day. The age old notions of parenting and socialisation need to change as per the changing needs and challenges.

We need to think about long term action plans for addressing these challenges from a feminist perspective with cooperation from every segment of the society. Strict punishment of the offenders without any chance of mercy and humanitarian consideration if implemented will serve a lot in curbing the rising atrocities against women. Appropriate components on proper body image, sex and sexuality, menstrual hygiene and reproductive health, respect for opposite sex, trafficking and sex rackets, cyber-crimes – mobiles, internet and pornography, legal provisions and rights of girls, stress management etc. must be included in the school and college textbooks. Also, additional programmes in the form of talks, awareness classes, discussions, field works, film shows, debates etc. should be conducted in schools and colleges to generate gender awareness among the youngsters. The steps taken by the NCERT to include a paper on gender studies at the Plus Two CBSE classes is to be appreciated as a timely intervention in this direction. Instead of making it an optional paper it is to be made mandatory for all students. The SCERT must also include such a paper on gender studies in its school curriculum.

Teachers must be given training in imparting adolescence education and gender studies classes effectively through adding appropriate components in pre service and in service teacher training. Parental education is yet another area which needs to be revised as per timely needs.

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