**MITIGATING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES DURING THIS LOCKDOWN**

A glaring problem:

A survey was taken by Population Foundation of India during the month of May,2020, in which over right hundred young people across three states took part in. According to the findings published by the study, a major population of women (especially young) were facing difficulties in availing sufficient access towards sanitary pads during the lockdown period. Across all three states, more than twenty percent of those aged between 15 and 24 stated that they experienced depression due to facing additional challenges as a consequence of the economic insecurity and sudden spike in domestic activities.

“68% respondents [sic] in Uttar Pradesh reported an increase in social media use during the lockdown. Of those respondents who reported feeling depressed, social media use is even higher at 92%”, stated the PFI report. When it came to students, three out of every five of them responded that their anxiety levels had increased due to the increased nervousness behind having to find a job with sustainable income at a time where all economic activity across the nation had slowed down. The most impactful primary challenge being faced by adolescent people during this lockdown is, not surprisingly, a huge increase in their share of domestic workload.

“COVID-19 will have far reaching consequences not only on [the youth’s] health, but also their education and social lives. It will increase vulnerability to violence and deepen existing inequalities. The studies released by PFT provide critical data insights”, reported Poonam Muttreja, PFI’s Executive Director. “Recommendations emerging from these studies will contribute to the development of more responsible and comprehensive policies, programs and interventions for adolescent health in India [sic]”, she added.

Recommendations provided by the survey:

Along with the problems being faced by the youngsters of the nation, the Population Foundation of India has also published a “key recommendations of the study” section, where they look at potential solutions to solve the problems currently being faced by the adolescent population of India. In a nutshell, they can be pointed out as follows:

1. Strengthening basic information being disseminated to the public during a national health hazard emergency, and an effort to make sure that such announcements effectively reach all the remote corners of our country.
2. Strengthening frontline health workers, and acknowledging and reinforcing the critical roles they play – including first reporters of information and potentially symptomatic persons, and as access keys to public health and healthcare facilities. Increasing their efficacy by providing key training should help strengthen the foundation of the public health system.
3. Providing for the needs of the reproductive health of the youth, and prioritizing the advocation of reproductive health especially during such trying times.
4. Unburdening those afflicted by heavy workloads, both domestic and public, in any way you personally can, and taking strides towards advocation of critical mental health care facilities and its delivery via trained channels.
5. Reimagining educational institutions (in order to rekindle and continue fostering interaction with students while not limiting the populace to school buildings or physical academic sessions) by the use of advancing technological services and digital tools, and ensuring such practices do not alienate those that cannot (or have not) access to such services.

At a public scale, such recommendations work wonders – by forming and overlooking various chains of essential deliveries, the government (in lieu with local organizations working for public welfare) can ensure that basic healthcare facilities and educational services are being provided to those that require it, and ensuring that the nurturing muscles of the youth of the nation do not atrophy.

Recommendations for personal care:

On the other hand, individual health is as important as the welfare of the public, if not more. While taking care of others is a requirement and maybe a necessity, make sure that you are in prime health prior to offering your services to your fellow social beings. Here are some ways you can ensure that you take care of yourself:

1. **Structuring your everyday habits** and chores can result in undisrupted daily routines that chug along as long as the lockdown lasts. Prior to the lockdown, work and domestic leisure were very distinguished, thanks to physical transport and a change in the social setting. Thanks to the quarantine measures, the pandemic has been contained to a maximum, along with your everyday habits. To ensure that such measures do not mentally affect your schedule, schedule. Thrive on the everyday routine you took for granted to ensure that your biological clock stays in place.
2. **Understand that it is okay to feel down**. The major disruption caused by the sudden onset of a lockdown has mentally affected even the strongest of minds. No matter how rational it might be, some small part of you may feel something indescribable – something along the lines of missing your pre-lockdown life. Various teenagers have been reported to breakdown, responding that by a chain of reasoning, this entire global pandemic has been their fault. It is important to understand that breaking down once in a while is okay, and letting it out is an important exercise. It may not be fun or light-hearted and may even be difficult to let go of, but it is an important step towards staying mentally and physically healthy. Practice various ways of releasing crumpled negativity while learning to build positive thoughts simultaneously. This way, the sanity and health of your mind is reinforced time and again by your self.
3. **IMPORTANT: Look after yourself.** This lockdown is a trying time for all of us as human beings, especially that we have established ourselves to be social animals. While being alone can result in some very emotional experiences, it is important to understand that everyone is going through the same, including your family and friends. While providing them with support and affection is a kind gesture, it is secondary to bolstering your own self. You may not always be taken care of, so it is best that you devise activities and save some time to ensure that you take care of yourself and stay healthy. Once you are reinforced mentally, take care of others. Under such intense measures, various people react to the situation in different ways, and it is important that you understand their coping mechanisms. Such emotional outlets help them (and you) keep your mind and body sane. Notice an emotional sign hanging around someone’s neck, screaming for help? Help them first, and let them know later. This way, you help them understand that you are supporting them voluntarily, and not out of need or guilt.

Psychology experts from the University of Reading have created a very helpful course online for supporting young people feeling low or depressed, titled “COVID-19: Helping Young People Manage Low Mood and Depression”. With such tools available far and wide, it is only a matter of time before everything returns to normal activity, if not pre-lockdown peak levels. Stay safe, stay sane.