



ISSN: 0975-833X

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ADOLESCENCE PSYCHOLOGY

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 08th August, 2012

Received in revised form

19th September, 2012

Accepted 14th October, 2012

Published online 21th November, 2012

Key words:

Adolescents,
health behaviour,
and relationships.

ABSTRACT

Adolescence stage is a period where biological factors are mainly recognized like brain development, increase in height, weight gain, motor skills and hormonal changes in puberty. This is the stage where adolescents' cognitive development is increased. They are able to memorize many concepts, they become very creative, they reason logically and are very imaginative. Their social development also improves a lot especially in developing relationships with members of opposite sex. Their emotional development changes to aggressive state especially when dealing with adults like their teachers and parents. Adolescence stage is characterized by a lot of adventure on both positive and negative health behaviour and it is the stage which acts as a junction to positive or negative health behaviour. Most of the health behaviours either positive or negative which are experienced in adulthood began in adolescence. The adolescents have little knowledge about health issues and they always imagine that health problems are for old people. This paper seeks to explore some few issues concerning the adolescence stage and it is hoped that all adolescents will benefit from it as well those who work closely with the adolescents.

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INTRODUCTION

This branch of psychology falls in applied psychology but in this case, it has been picked as unique branch of psychology and has been discussed in depth. This section will begin from definition of the adolescent. Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to early adulthood. Adolescence is a stage which is viewed by many people from different kind of perspective depending on where one comes from and personal early experience. According to Santrock (2001), some people view it as a stage where the adolescents have healthy self-image with healthy transition to adulthood, high self-concept and very optimistic about future. They are happy most of the time, they enjoy life, they perceive themselves as able to exercise self-control, they value work and school, and they express confidence about their sexual selves, show positive feelings about their families and feel they have capacity to cope with life's stress (Harter, 1989a).

He further observed that adolescence is viewed as a period of storm and stress, it is a problematic period of human life that youth, family and society has to endure (Santrock, 2001). Some adults view adolescents as more troubled, less respectful, more self-centred, more assertive, and more adventurous than they were when they were at that age. The way the adolescents develop is a reflection of the society. If the society is healthy, then the youth are expected to lead healthy lives but if the society is a problematic society then the problems are propagated to the adolescents and they will grow up unhealthy group of individuals in the society.

Nature of Adolescent Development

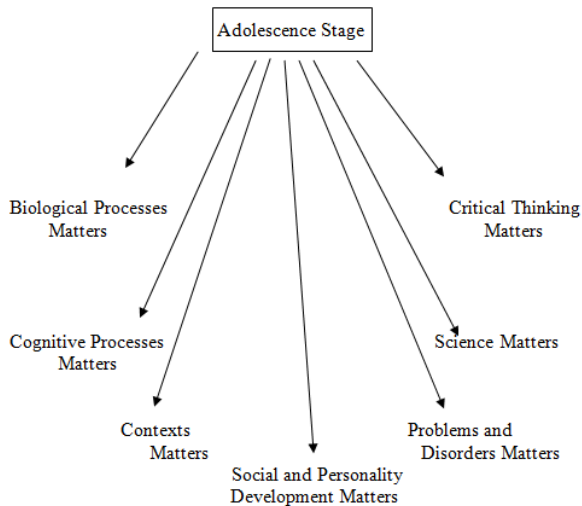
Development is the pattern of change that begins at conception and continues through the life span. Each individual has a unique pattern of development although we may be sharing some pattern of development (Petersen, 2000). Adolescence stage is a period where biological factors are mainly recognized like brain development, increase in height, weight gain, motor skills and hormonal changes in puberty (Lerner, 1998). This is the stage where adolescents' cognitive development is increased. They are able to memorize many concepts, they become very creative, they reason logically and are very imaginative. Their social development also improves a lot especially in developing relationships with members of opposite sex. Their emotional development changes to aggressive state especially when dealing with adults like their teachers and parents. At this stage, the adolescents have some special interest in career development, friendship with members of opposite sex and identity exploration (Arnet, 1996).

All adolescents are expected to pass through adolescence stage smoothly but some individuals may develop early at the age 10 years and these enter early adolescence stage while others start their adolescence late at the age of 20 years and they fall into late adolescence stage. It is expected that all adolescents will pass this transitional stage smoothly but majority may not be privileged in getting the necessary resources for smooth transition. It should be noted that adolescence experiences are interconnected with childhood and adulthood development. Majority of adolescents enter early adulthood after high school or when they are in colleges. This is the stage when they begin to make concrete decisions about their future life. They can

begin to get serious in intimate relationship and can learn to live with new persons more intimately (Santrock, 2001). They also tend to take their careers seriously and develop good relationships with their parents.

Conceptual Framework of Adolescence Stage

The development stage can be illustrated using the following framework adapted from Santrock, (2001, p.23).



Biological Processes Matters

Biological processes comprises of increase in size and weight as well as body changes. This is the stage whereby the adolescents are more concern with their bodies because they begin to create imaginary audience whom they think they are watching them. The biological process makes them experience some anxiety where girls become worried of their growing breasts and menstrual periods. Boys on the other hand are more concern of their breaking voices, uncontrolled erection and initial ejaculation. Early and late maturation also pose a lot challenge among the adolescents. They become worried and imagine that they are abnormal as compared with their peers. For boys, early maturing make them feel proud and have high self-esteem though they have to be forced to behave as adults while late maturing make boys have insecurity and low self-esteem and behave in childish manner (Torff, 1999). For girls early maturing make them feel shy, less social and have low self-esteem while late maturing make them more social, have high self-esteem and more popular among the peers.

Cognitive Processes Matter

Kuhn (2000), observe that during adolescence stage, the adolescents undergo a lot changes in their cognitive development. The adolescents advance in their thinking capacity and this help in solving many problems and are able to adapt to the society. This can help them in thinking and reasoning logically in how to handle many issues which are sometime beyond their control. At this stage they become more self-conscious, aggressive, and argumentative. At this stage, they begin to understand the moral concept and can be able to make good decision. They also find hard to make up their minds due to so many choices in all aspects of life.

Context Matter

There are four contexts which are very important in the adolescents and these are family, peers, school and culture. Buchanan (2000), argue that families have a powerful influence on the development of adolescents in terms of parenting styles and relationship in the family. Family with healthy relationship will influence the adolescents to grow up in an upright manner as compared with many problems like fighting, separation or even divorce. Peers also play great role in influencing the adolescents in either positive or negative manner. The adolescents will also want to conform to their social clique in order to feel a sense of acceptance. Schools are places where the youth can learn many things either from the teachers or the schoolmates. The culture of the society plays a great role in imparting some values, morals and beliefs to the adolescents. The culture with a lot of discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping make the adolescents to inculcate them as they grow (Cobb, 1999). Technology is another form of culture whereby the adolescent can learn new knowledge and be able to advance in technology depending on the given opportunity.

Social and Personality Development Matter

Adolescence stage is significant in the life of any individual. It is the time when adolescents begin to socialize with other members of the society in different way. Their adult characteristics become the sources of attraction and it is the time they want to show that they are growing. Erikson (1968) in his theory defines this stage as a period of identity versus confusion where they want to know who they are, what they are about and where they are going. If they are given chance and proper direction to explore different roles then they will develop positive and healthy identity. This is the stage whereby the adolescents broaden their social boundaries and their homes cease to be the ideal areas for socialization. They also find it difficult to socialize with their parents or teachers in school because they view them as unreasonable or their ideas are outdated and old fashion. They value socialization with their peers and they are prone to being influenced by their peers either positively or negatively.

The parents and teachers should be more understanding at this stage because the adolescents are going through tough time in their development. They reason in a childish manner and if the parents keep on reprimanding them all the time, they can easily become so volatile. The peers are sources of comfort to adolescents in the world of controlling parents (Spokane, 2000). They are provided mutual support and role modeling by their peers as they socialize with them. It should be noted that apart from being a period of spontaneous socialization, adolescence stage can be a stage of loneliness. This loneliness can only be overcome through socialization with other peers but not parents. So adolescents need to be given time to socialize with their peers but care is needed to check on the type of peers so that they may land into a group of bad characters.

Problems and Disorders Matter

The adolescents usually find themselves indulging in bad behaviour like drug addict, delinquencies and eating disorders,

irresponsible sex, abusive language and stealing (Escandon & Galvez, 2005). These problems are reflection on the type of family and society that we live in. These problems and disorders start in minor way where the adolescents want to experiment on so many things as they grow up and they ended up falling into indulging in such behaviours. These kinds of problems and disorders usually make them develop poor relationship with parents and teachers and in most cases the victims drop out of school. They also get influenced through media and they try to do what they see in the media and end up falling into problem.

Science Matters

There are so many studies which are currently being carried out on adolescence stage and these studies are revealing lots information on adolescence development (Torff, 2000). They play a great role in improving knowledge about adolescents. This will help in trying to validate what we are seeing and hearing about adolescents' development.

Critical Thinking Matters

Thinking critically means asking yourself how you know something (Santrock, 2001). Critical thinkers are open-minded and intellectually curious, look for multiple determinants of behaviour and often think like scientists (Halpern, 1996). At adolescence stage, the adolescents are able to think critically but sometimes they make hasty and irrational decision based on their thinking. Critical thinking can be manifested through language use, words used and forms of discourse (Tappan, 1998).

Adolescents' Health Behaviour

Adolescence stage is characterized by a lot of adventure on both positive and negative health behaviour and it is the stage which acts as a junction to positive or negative health behaviour (Petersen, 2000). Most of the health behaviours either positive or negative which are experienced in adulthood began in adolescence. The adolescents have little knowledge about health issues and they always imagine that health problems are for old people. This makes them take less interest on health issues like doing exercises, eating food with low level of cholesterol and not taking harmful drugs. The adolescents get engaged in health-compromising behaviour like drug abuse, violence, unprotected sex and dangerous driving (Maas, 1998). They also engage in health-enhancing behaviour like eating nutritiously, exercising, wearing seat belts and getting adequate sleep. It has been established that the adolescents who exercise regularly cope with stress more effectively than those who do not do exercise (Brown & Siegle, 1988).

Most of the adolescents lack adequate skills in health risks like the sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse, careless driving among others (Cobb, 1999). Adults usually imagine that the adolescents are knowledgeable on health behaviour and when the adolescents get into problem, adults push blame on them. The society has become too materialistic and most of the parents are so concern in looking for money and maximizing profit in their businesses at the expense of their children's health. The pessimistic knowledge of the adolescents is that as

they grow, such health risks will decrease only to find that those behaviours are consequential in their lives. The adolescents need support from parents and teachers on how to get equipped with health issues so that they may not fall into health problems.

Family Relationships and Adolescence

The general believe about the life of adolescents is centred on the type of family where they grow up. A good family is expected to bring up well behaved adolescents while dysfunctional families are in most cases expected to bring up ill-behaved adolescents. This may not be true in most incidences because the life of adolescent can be influenced by many factors. It has been established that the parents who get married early in their twenties are in most cases very strict in bringing up their adolescents as compared to those who get married in their late thirties or early forties. The latter are very warm, communicate effectively and are supportive to their children (Mac Donald, 1987). The parents' emotional state plays great in the emotional development of children. The effective socio-emotional state of children is manifestation of parents' positive emotional expression. Parents who are there to give their children comfort when they have negative experiences are initiators of constructive way of handling anger in future (Dix, 1991). Parental styles play a great deal in how the adolescents develop in the society.

The authoritarian parents are restrictive and punitive in the way they bring up their children. They command them to do what they said with no discussion from the side of adolescents. These adolescents will become anxious in life about social comparisons, they will not initiate any activity and they have poor communication skills. The authoritative parents are power assertive and respect dialogue from their children. They are warm and nurturing. The adolescents from authoritative parents are self-reliant and socially competent. Permissive parents bring up children who are socially incompetent and they lack control. The kind of behaviour which is portrayed by an adolescent is linked to the type of parents who brought him up (Baumrind, 1991). It is the role of the parents to try and bring up socially competent and self-reliant children.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to early adulthood. It is a stage where biological characteristics are mainly recognized like brain development, increase in height, weight gain, motor skills and hormonal changes in puberty. It is characterized by a lot of adventure on both positive and negative health behaviour and it is the stage which acts as junction to positive or negative health behaviour. Most of the health behaviours either positive or negative which are experienced in adulthood began in adolescence. The general believe about the life of adolescents is centred on the type of family where they grow up. It has been established that parental styles play a great deal in how the adolescents develop in the society. It is therefore the role of the parents to try and bring up socially competent and self-reliant children.

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