

A Study on Physical, Cognitive & Social Development among Adolescents

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Abstract-

The stage of human development known as adolescence—which is most commonly characterized as ages 12–18 years—is a time of great change as people go from childhood to maturity. It's worth noting, too, that the idea of adolescence as a discrete developmental stage is a relatively new one in history. In reality, until the twentieth century, the particular developmental demands of this period received little attention. The transition from childhood to adulthood in ancient societies was mostly determined by biological maturity and reproductive readiness. Children were guided by the cultural influences of their civilizations as they moved to adulthood with the support and guidance of extended families. In this article we will discuss about physical, cognitive, social and emotional development during adolescence. The data collection was done from secondary data sources as text books, research articles etc

I. Introduction

Adolescence is the transitional stage from childhood to adulthood that occurs between ages 13 and 19. The physical and psychological changes that take place in adolescence often start earlier, during the preteen or "tween" years: between ages 9 and 12.

Physical Development during Adolescence:

The beginning of adolescence is signaled by a sudden increase in the rate of physical growth. While this growth spurt occurs for both sexes, it starts earlier for girls (at about age ten or eleven) than for boys (about age twelve or thirteen). Before this spurt, boys and girls are similar in height; in its early phases, girls are often taller than boys; after it is over, males are several inches taller, on average, than females. This growth spurt is just one aspect of puberty, the period of rapid change during which individuals of both genders reach sexual maturity. During puberty the gonads, or primary sex glands, produce increased levels of sex hormones, and the external sex organs assume their adult form. Girls begin to menstruate and boys start to produce sperm.

In addition, both sexes undergo many other shifts relating to sexual maturity. Boys develop facial and chest hair and their voices deepen. Girls' breasts develop, and their hips widen; both sexes develop pubic hair. There is great individual variability in all these respects. Most girls begin to menstruate by the time they are thirteen, but for some this process does not start until considerably later, and for others it may begin as early as age seven or eight. Most boys begin to produce sperm by the time they are fourteen or fifteen; but again, for some the process may start either earlier or a bit later.

Facial features, too, often change during puberty. Characteristics associated with childhood, such as large eyes, a high forehead, round cheeks, and a small chin, give way to a more adult appearance. We'll examine, what makes people physically attractive, some members of both genders retain relatively childlike facial features; for females such "baby-faced" appearance can be a plus, because many males find it attractive. Being baby-faced does not confer such advantages on males, however. In fact, recent findings indicate that adolescent males who are baby-faced may attempt to compensate for this by behaving in antisocial ways (e.g., committing crimes).

Gender differences also exist with respect to the effects of early sexual maturation. Early-maturing boys seem to have a definite edge over those who mature later. They are stronger and more athletic and often excel in competitive sports. Partly as a result of these advantages, they tend to be more self-assured and popular and are often chosen for leadership roles. In contrast, early sexual maturation can have negative implications for females. Early-maturing girls are taller than their classmates frequently taller than boys their own age and their increased sexual attractiveness may invite unwanted sexual advances from older persons. In short, the timing of puberty can play an important role in adolescents' developing self-identities and so in their later social development.

Cognitive Development during Adolescence:

Adolescents become capable of logical thought. However, this does not mean that they necessarily demonstrate such thinking. In fact, only about 40 percent of adolescents can solve the kind of problems used by Piaget to test for formal operational thinking. Moreover, if they do show such logical thought, it may be restricted to topics or types of problems with which they have had direct experience. In addition, adolescents' theory of mind, their understanding of how they and others think continues to change and develop. Younger children take what has been described as a realist approach to knowledge; they believe that knowledge is a property of the real world and that there are definite facts or truths that can be acquired. In contrast, older children and preadolescents become aware of the fact that experts often disagree; this leads them to develop a relativist approach, which recognizes that different people may interpret the same information in contrasting ways.

Preadolescents go a bit farther, adopting a defended realism approach, which recognizes the difference between facts and opinions. Yet they continue to believe that there is a set of facts about the world that are completely true, and that differences in opinion stem from differences in available information. Still later, adolescents come to realize that there is no secure basis for knowledge or for making decisions; at this point, they adopt an approach described as dogmatism-skepticism, in which they alternate between blind faith in some authority and doubting everything. Finally, some adolescents, at least, realize that while there are no absolute truths, there are better or worse reasons for holding certain views, an approach described as post skeptical rationalism. This, of course, is the kind of thinking democratic societies wish to encourage among their citizens, because only people capable of thinking in this way can make the kind of informed judgments necessary for free elections. In sum, cognitive development does not stop in childhood; on the contrary it continues throughout adolescence and results, ultimately, in more mature modes of thought.

Social and Emotional Development during Adolescence:

It would be surprising if the major physical and cognitive changes occurring during adolescence were not accompanied by corresponding changes in social and emotional development. What are these changes like? Let's see what research has revealed.

- **Emotional Changes: The Ups and Downs of Everyday Life:**

It is widely believed that adolescents are wildly emotional—that they experience huge swings in mood and turbulent outbursts of emotion. Is this belief correct? To a degree, it is. In several studies on this issue, large numbers of teenagers wore beepers and were signaled at random times throughout an entire week. When signaled, they entered their thoughts and feelings in a diary.

Results indicated that they did show more frequent and larger swings in mood than those shown by older persons. Moreover, these swings occurred very quickly, sometimes within only a few minutes. Older people also show shifts in mood, but these tend to be less frequent, slower, and smaller in magnitude. Other widely accepted views about adolescent emotionality, however, do not appear to be correct. For instance, it is often assumed that adolescence is a period of great stress and unhappiness. In fact, most adolescents report feeling quite happy and self-confident, not unhappy or distressed. Moreover, and again contrary to prevailing views, most teenagers report that they enjoy relatively good relations with their parents.

They agree with them on basic values, on future plans, and on many other matters. There are some points of friction, of course. Teenagers often disagree with their parents about how they should spend their leisure time and how much money they should have or spend; and to some extent parents and teenagers disagree about sexual behavior, although the gap is not nearly as large as you might believe. In general, though, teenagers are happier and get along better with their parents than is widely assumed.

- **Parenting Styles and Their Effects on Adolescents:**

The fact that most adolescents get along well with their parents is, in one sense, surprising; after all, there are growing sources of conflict between parents and children during these years.

In particular, parents must come to terms with the fact that their children are turning rapidly into adults, and this means giving them the increasing freedom they seek at least up to a point. How should parents react to these changes? Growing evidence suggests that while there is no single "best" parenting style, some broad patterns or styles of parenting have more beneficial effects than others.

Two key dimensions seem to underlie differences in parenting styles. One has to do with parental demandingness the extent to which parents are strict or controlling. Parents high on this dimension seek to control their children through status and power, and confront them (often angrily) when they do not meet the parents' expectations. A second dimension is that of parental responsiveness the extent to which parents are involved in and supportive of their children's activities.

Parents high on this dimension listen actively to their children, respond to their requests, show warmth, and focus on their children's concerns and interests during conversations with them. Together, these two dimensions yield the parenting styles. Authoritarian parents are high in demandingness (controlling) and low in responsiveness. They establish strict rules for their children and don't give them much say in decisions.

Authoritative parents, in contrast, are high in both demandingness and responsiveness: They establish rules for their children but show great interest in, and responsiveness to, them. Permissive parents are high in responsiveness but low in demandingness. They are warm and responsive, but they set no rules or standards for their children and don't hold them accountable for their actions. Finally, rejecting/neglecting parents are low in both responsiveness and demandingness, they just don't seem to care what children do or what they become.

Not surprisingly, these contrasting styles have strong and lasting effects. Growing evidence suggests that an authoritative style may yield the most beneficial effects. Adolescents whose parents adopt this approach are generally competent both socially and cognitively. That is, they are confident yet friendly and cooperative, and they tend to do well in school. In contrast, adolescents whose parents show a rejecting/neglecting style tend to be lower on both dimensions.

Moreover, they often show unsettled patterns of behavior, rejecting their parents and engaging in various forms of antisocial behavior that can get them into serious trouble. Children whose parents adopt an authoritarian or permissive style tend to fall in between. So, again, contrary to what Harris (1998) suggested, parents do indeed seem to matter where the adjustment of adolescents is concerned.

- **Social Development- Friendships and the Quest for Identity:**

Important as they are, parents are only part of the total picture in the social development of adolescents. Friendships, primarily with members of their own gender, but also with members of the other gender, become increasingly important.

In fact, most adolescents are part of extensive social networks consisting of many friends and acquaintances. Girls tend to have somewhat larger networks than boys, and these networks tend to become smaller and more exclusive as adolescents grow older a trend that continues throughout life. One motive for forming friendships during adolescence seems to be the developing need to belong the need to have frequent positive interactions within ongoing relationships. This need strengthens during early adolescence and leads many preteens and teenagers to reject parental influence and to identify with their peers.

Thus, they adopt the dress, style of speech, and overall style of their chosen peer group, sometimes to the point where parents worry that their offspring have entirely surrendered their unique identity. Within a few years, however, this tendency subsides, and teenagers begin to conform less and less to their peer group. Friendships and social success also play an important role in another key aspect of social development during adolescence, the quest for a personal identity. This process is a key element in a famous theory of psychosocial development proposed by Erik Erikson (1950, 1987), a theory well worthy of a closer look.

Finally, some adolescents, at least, realize that while there are no absolute truths, there are better or worse reasons for holding certain views, an approach described as post skeptical rationalism. This, of course, is the kind of thinking democratic societies wish to encourage among their citizens, because only people capable of thinking in this way can make the kind of informed judgments necessary for free elections. In sum, cognitive development does not stop in childhood; on the contrary it continues throughout adolescence and results, ultimately, in more mature modes of thought.

II. Summary and conclusions

The goal of adolescence is to gain independence and establish a secure identity. Adolescents' cognitive development can result in abstract thinking that can predispose them to risk-taking behavior and a sense of invincibility. Clinicians can use the primary care visit to promote independence and prepare parents for the features experienced during adolescent development. Parental or supervisory monitoring is critical in ensuring that teens remain safe while gradually becoming more independent.

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