

**ADOLESCENT SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING**

by

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**Abstract**

Adolescence is the life stage that bridges childhood and adulthood. Adolescents face a range of developmental issues. During the transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood the individual is undergoing rapid social development. During this time, the adolescent's peer group becomes increasingly important as a source of information, experience and support. Adolescents strongly identify with the contemporary youth, culture and begin to push for autonomy and responsibility in resistance to parental control and authority. Peer groups provide a context for personal relationships and a sense of belonging. Adolescents who fail to pass successfully through the turbulence adolescence transitional years are prone to exhibit social behaviours that tend to be hazardous. Some of them include drug and alcohol abuse, juvenile delinquency, adolescent pregnancy, depression and eating disorders. In view of the hazards associated with adolescent's social behaviours, it becomes pertinent for parents and other significant social role models to ensure that their adolescents begin early in life to develop specific social skills and techniques, certain social understanding and tolerance, that will enable them to satisfy their social needs and lead a wholesome social life.

**Keywords:** *Adolescent, social development, implications, teaching and learning*

**Introduction**

Adolescence is a time of major changes in a person's life. During this critical period several drastic changes occur in the social development of the adolescents. During the childhood stage, children often play with members of the same sex, and have little to do with those of the opposite sex. When asked to sit in the class, one will notice a clear demarcation between the section where the boys are sitting and that where the girls are sitting.

During adolescence, interest is on the opposite sex. Most discussions by adolescents of the same sex are usually concerned with the opposite sex. The social horizons of the individuals widen during adolescence. They become more outgoing. This is particularly more common in boys. Woolfolk (2007). During this period, the individuals view themselves as people who are matured enough to act without taking permission from the adults. They will attend parties or other social activities without permission from parents. This struggle for independence by the adolescence is usually resisted by the parents and where the situation is not properly

handled, it could lead to serious conflict and misunderstanding between adolescents and parents.

The psychologist is therefore concerned with the study of the relationship between the adolescent and other non-adolescents on the other hand. Denga (2001).

Adolescent is an interesting phase in human development. Ogwudire (1987) divided this period into early adolescence (11 to 14yrs) when puberty sets in; and later adolescence (15 to 18yrs) when adolescent characteristics become quite pronounced and behaviour assumes a more complicated nature. Adolescence is a transition stage that is ushered in by puberty. Marocopa (2000) observed that puberty is a gradual process, and that it is hard to pin point the beginning and end of puberty. He added that growth spurts that accompany puberty occur at the average of 12.5years for boys and 10.5years for girls.

Generally, adolescence is characterized by many features such as:

- i. It is a period of soaring idealism and paradoxically a period of frustration with self, family, friends, indeed, with the world as a whole, sometimes.

- ii. It is also a time when friends and peers are perhaps more important than at any other period.
- iii. Adolescence can be defined in terms of social and personal changes, span of years of increasing, but mixed responsibilities and skills.
- iv. During adolescence, human behaviours is modified from child-like to adult-like. It can be said that adolescence ends with the achievement of adulthood, defined in terms of self-governance.

Adolescence has been observed by Phelps (1999) to possess two salient features. These include the fact that adolescence seems to make a universal appearance in human development, and it is primarily a physiologically based event, influenced very little by the environment in that its appearance cannot be delayed or sped up significantly either by the adolescent or by interested or concerned parents.

Socially, the adolescents have already spent years interacting with parents, friends and teachers. Social life in Nigeria is characterized with life with extended family, age grades and by adult informal educators. This continues through childhood until the individual achieves a reasonable amount of independence from his own immediate family.

#### **Characteristics of adolescent social behaviours**

During the transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, the individual is undergoing rapid social development. Heaven (1994). The individual's relationship with his family members also changes. These changes typically characterize adolescent social behaviours which are manifested in the following activities.

At this time the adolescent's peer group becomes increasingly important as a source of information, experience and support. Peer interaction no doubt provides the opportunity for developing social competence. Adolescents strongly identify with the contemporary youth culture as shown in the under-listed:

- i. Social activities (such as parties, cults, going out)
- ii. Misconduct (such as drug use or sexual activity),
- iii. Conformity (such dress styles, slang, jargons and slogans)
- iv. School related activities (such as attitudes to academic matters) and
- v. Family issues (relationships with parents and older siblings). It is important to note that this identification is generally abandoned once the individual becomes an autonomous adult.

Adolescents begin to push for autonomy and responsibility in resistance to parental control and

authority. During this period parents and children may find themselves in turmoil which can generate frustration, crisis and stress. However, the best change is a gradual one wherein the parent relinquishes control step by step, and retains a secure attachment or connectedness to the adolescent, which will promote more competent relationships for the adolescent later in life.

Peer pressure is strong during this stage, cliques become visible, groups and crowds become more heterogeneous and heterosexual, and dating becomes very important to the adolescent. This enables the adolescent to establish healthy heterosexual relationship with peers of the opposite sex as a mark of advancement from the boy-boy or girl-girl peer relationship of middle childhood. In our diverse world, there is increasing contact between adolescent of different cultures and ethnic groups. There is no doubt that ethnic and social class influence adolescent development. The advent of computer services and information technology has enabled adolescents to enjoy cross-cultural relationships (e.g. pen-pals).

Adolescents are at this time trying to form an identity for themselves as they prepare for a search for a long term partner. Falling in love is said to involve attachment, the existence of caring and an intense interpersonal bond called intimacy.

#### **The adolescent and peer group**

As individuals move into adolescent, an increasing amount of time is spent with members of their peer group and the amount of time spent with family decreases. The implication is that peer interaction provides the opportunity for developing social competence and a sense of identity and independence. Forming satisfying friendships and relationships with members of peer group is an important effect on later friendships and relations with the community as well as their sense of self and ability to get on with people.

Peer groups provide a context for sociable behaviour, the exploration of personal relationships and a sense of belonging. They also foster learning and a concern for the integrity of the self; they are a source of self-esteem and help to build reputation, they provide an opportunity to earn status with group and are a source of companionship. Peer groups also generate social activities. They can also provide support when adolescents have been rejected by their parents.

Peer groups support the adolescents in their dealing with adult authority by acting as a pressure group. Schools play an important role in the formation of peer groups and also support the development of affiliate behaviour because they organize students

into same age grades which result in the concentration of numbers of adolescents at similar levels of cognitive and biological development. Adolescents therefore have to spend large amounts of time interacting with other adolescents.

### **Hazards associated with adolescent social behaviours**

Adolescents who fail to pass successfully through the turbulent adolescent transitional years are prone to exhibit social behaviours that tend to be hazardous. Some of the hazards associated with adolescents' social behaviours include:

**Drug and alcohol abuse:** The indiscriminate use of drugs and alcohol by adolescents and youths is increasing tremendously. Ofojebe (2004) discovered that young people begin using drugs for various reasons. He claimed that some use drugs because of peer influence, others use alcohol to imitate parents or other significant adults.

**Juvenile delinquency:** Juvenile delinquency as exhibited by adolescents refers to a variety of behaviours, ranging from socially unaccepted behaviour (such as acting out in school) to status offences (such as running away) to criminal acts (such as burglary).

**Adolescent pregnancy:** The issue of adolescent pregnancy has become a national dilemma. Maricopa (2000) pointed out that on the average, one out of every ten adolescent females become pregnant each year. The consequences are not far fetched. These include increased possibility of health risks and the mother usually drops out of school, engages in early marriage, fails to gain employment and becomes dependent on parents.

**Depression:** Depression is a growing problem among adolescents. Factors that can trigger depression include high adolescent stress, loss of a dear one (boy friend or girl friend), poor school grades, an unwanted pregnancy or earlier experiences such as family instability and unhappiness or family separation. There is no gainsaying that adolescents' depressive mood can be hazardous to healthy living.

**Eating disorders:** Two types of eating disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder that involves the relentless pursuit of thinness through starvation so as to maintain a required physique. Bulimia on the other hand, involves a binge-and-purge-sequence on a regular basis. These are primarily female adolescent disorders caused by societal, psychological and physiological factors.

### **Implications of adolescents' social behaviour for teaching and learning**

Because of the hazards associated with adolescents' social behaviour, it becomes necessary for parents and other significant social role models to ensure that their adolescents begin early in life to develop specific social skills and techniques, certain social understanding and tolerance, that will enable them to satisfy their social needs and lead a wholesome social life. This is necessary because charity begins at home.

As adolescents push for autonomy and independence, parents and other family members may find themselves in turmoil. In view of the crisis and conflict attendant to the quest, parents and adults should be made to realize that the best change is a gradual one wherein they relinquish control step by step; and still retain a secure attachment or connectedness to the adolescent. This will no doubt, promote more competent relationships for the adolescent later in life.

Parents need to be oriented through the P.T.A. forum on the social developmental needs, tasks and problems of adolescents. This will enable them understand and appreciate their adolescent; and provide the much desired social support to them. It is expected that the school system comprising teachers, fellow students, curriculum planners and the various forms of learning experiences should equally be responsible for instilling socially accepted behaviours in the adolescents. This could be achieved through the organization of informal social activities like games, sport, debates, field trips, excursions, seminars and workshops which will avail the adolescents the opportunity of interacting with people of varied interests, needs, values, attitudes and socio-economic background. The experiences gained from such interactions will enable the adolescents develop adequate social skills necessary for wholesome living.

Since the problematic developmental social task which is bothering the adolescent is the ability to establish a healthy heterosexual relationship with peers of the opposite sex, it becomes imperative to mount functional sex education programme to give them the appropriate and desirable social behaviours towards sex and the opposite sex. This will gradually reduce adolescents' health risks, pre-marital sex, unwanted pregnancy, early marriage, abortion, untimely death or drop out of school. These constitute hazards to the adolescent in particular and family/society in general.

Special emphasis should be made on the adolescents' social-personal concerns so as to enhance their social and personal development. The adolescents need to be informed, directed and guided on how to handle personal, family and social issues.

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