



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS OF ADOLESCENTS

Bimal Charan Swain, Ph. D.

Reader in Education, Radhanath I.A.S.E., Cuttack (Odisha)

Abstract

Adolescence is the most crucial and significant period of an individual's life. It is a complex transitional period that is developmentally distinct from childhood. During this period boys and girls move from childhood to adulthood, physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. The rapid growth of body brings about moodiness, irritability, emotional tension and restlessness. Some emotional characteristics marked during adolescence are heightening of emotions, variations in emotional moods, complexity in emotions, emotions of love, fear, anger, worry, jealousy etc. Peer pressure plays an important role in adolescents life. The adolescents have difficulty in adjusting to the needs and demands of parents and peer group standards which leads to different problem. Parents, school and society have joint responsibility for the desirable growth and development of adolescents.

Key words: *Social and Emotional Problems, Adolescents.*



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Adolescence is the most significant period an individual's life. It emerges from childhood and merges into adulthood. This is also known as the "teenage period". It is a period of rapid revolutionary changes in the individual's physical, mental, moral, spiritual, sex and social outlook. It is the period of anxieties, worries, ambitions, conflicts and complexity. The rapid growth of the body brings about moodiness, irritability, emotional tensions and restlessness.

Characteristics of Adolescence

Elizabeth B. Hurlock (1990) in the book "Developmental Psychology - A Life Span Approach" describes the characteristics of adolescence as follows:

- **Adolescence is an Important Period**

Adolescence is an important period because the physical and psychological effects of this period on the individuals are important.

- **Adolescence is a Transitional Period**

The adolescents are in a period of transition. Their status is vague and there is confusion

about the roles they are expected to play. If they behave like children they are told to act their age. If they behave like adults they are accused for being one.

- **Adolescence is a Period of Change**

According to Stanley Hall, adolescence is a period of "new birth". According to him marked changes take place within the individual during this period with the result that his/her total personality is radically changed. The cause of this was seen by him/her to be the biological changing and sexual maturing.

- **Adolescence is a Problem Age**

The rapid changes that take place during this stage create problems for the adolescents. An important problem of adolescence is that at this stage the individual experiences a strong feeling of being out of step. The adolescents feel that they are no more children, at the same time they feel that they are not granted the status of adulthood. This is due to the experiences growing out of the treatment meted out to them by their parents and other members of the society. This state of affairs is central to the adolescence phase of development and is responsible for the "Storm and Stress".

- **Adolescence is a Time of Search for Identity**

Adolescents begin to develop individuality in their dress, behaviour, manners and personal style. This search for identity leads to identity crisis in some adolescents.

- **Adolescence is a Dreaded Age**

The belief that adults have poor opinions of adolescents make the transition into adulthood difficult. By doing so, it leads to much friction with their parents and places a barrier between them and their parents which prevents them from turning to their parents for help in solving their problems.

- **Adolescence is a Time of Unrealism**

The aspirations of the adolescents are more idealistic and less realistic. The more idealistic their aspirations are, the more angry, hurt and disappointed they will be.

- **Adolescence is the Threshold of Adulthood**

As adolescents approach legal maturity, they are anxious to shed the stereotype of teenagers and to create the impression that they are near - adults. Dressing and acting like adults, they discover, are not always enough. So, they begin to concentrate on behaviour that is associated with the adult status - smoking, drinking, using drugs and engaging in sex. For example, they believe that this behaviour will create the image they desire (Hurlock, 1990).

G. Stanley Hall's (1904) Book "Adolescence" was the first publication on the subject of

adolescence. He made an intensive study on the nature of adolescence and described its characteristics as follows:

"Adolescence is a new birth, for the higher and more completely human traits are new born..... Development is less gradual and more salutatory, suggestive of some ancient period of storm and stress when old moorings were broken and a higher level attained..... Important functions previously non-existent arise..... Every step of the upward way is strewn with wreckage of body, mind and morals..... sex asserts its mastery in the field, and works its havoc in the form of secret vice, debauch, disease and enfeebled heredity..... There are new repulsions felt toward home and school, and truancy and runaways abound. The social instincts undergo sudden enfoldment and the new life of love awakens. It is the age of sentiments and of religion, of rapid fluctuation of mood, and the world seems strange and new. Interest in adult life and in vocations develops. Youth awakes to a new world and understands neither it nor himself character and personality are taking form, but everything is plastic. Self-feeling and ambitions are increased, and every trait and faculty is liable to exaggeration and excess. It is all a marvelous new birth".

Adolescence : A Period of Storm and Stress

G. Stanley Hall (1904) describes the period of adolescence as "a period of great stress and strain, storm and strife". An adolescent comes under social pressure and faces new situations for which he/she received little training during childhood. It is a stage of development which, in most societies presents many problems. The behaviour of the adolescents during this period is frequently found to be "unbalanced," "unpredictable" and "unstable". Often the adolescent become unreasonable. At this time they have to shed many unwanted habits and behaviours acquired during childhood. They also learn many new and desirable modes of behaviours necessary for reaching maturity.

Emotional problems arise from life-situations or conditions of life which upset the adolescents and arouse emotions in them. They are situations which frustrate them and hence are painful. In this stage, adolescents have a strong need to be loved and liked by their parents and peers. They write love letters. Fredrick Tracy in the book "**The Psychology of Adolescence**" writes "*This is the period of more complex emotions such as, admiration, awe, reverence, gratitude, scorn, contempt, hatred, joy, grief, pity, shame, as well as aesthetic feelings and the sentiments of moral approval and disapproval.*"

The underlying mechanism of any emotional problem has two main components: a psychological need arising within the child and a frustrating environmental situation which he/she is unable to cope with. Describing the characteristics of adolescents girls Richmond says, *“the restlessness, the changing moods, the flaming enthusiasm, often short lived, the romantic fantasies and the tendency to day dreaming, the self conflict and self-assertion characteristics of the girl in her teens arise from the deepest recesses of her nature. Adolescence is the herday of the emotional life, the blossom time of all those feelings and emotions which depend at bottom upon sex”*.

Social and Emotional Problems of Adolescents

The social, emotion, adjustment and other related problems of the adolescents are discussed as under:

Adjustment to Physical Growth

Because of rapid and unbalanced growth in height, weight and physique the adolescent feels embarrassment in the group which he/she moves. The disturbing physical factors for girls are fatness, tallness, facial features etc. The disturbing physical factors for boys are fatness, unusual facial features etc.

Adjustment to Mental Competition

Because of mental development the adolescent becomes critical and fault finder. He/she wants to broaden his/her mental horizon by knowing everything he/she comes across.

Adjustment to Emotional Disturbances

Emotional disturbances in the adolescents are due to the rapidly changing physical structures, abnormal functioning of the nervous and glandular systems and his/her widening social experiences. His/her emotional moods vary from elation to depression.

Problem of Home Adjustment

The problems of home adjustment arise due to his/her increased needs and parents are not able to fulfill those needs. The adolescent begins to behave as an independent individual.

Problem of Sex Adjustment

According to Anna Freud, daughter of the famous psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, infantile sexual history is recapitulated at a higher place at the adolescence stage. Hence there is adolescence turmoil. There is reawakening of the repressed sexual impulses. Three different phases mark the development of sexual urge at adolescence stage. These are (i) Auto -eroticism (ii) Homo - Sexuality (iii) Hetero - Sexuality.

Problem of Adjustment with Society

The adolescent sometimes face the problem of adjustment with society. The

adolescent can not stand the customs and traditions that stand on his/her free will.

Vocational Problem

By the end of adolescence period, the adolescents are worried about their if career. If due to family pressure, troubles or bad financial condition they are compelled to join some profession early, their worries increase tremendously.

Student Activism

Student agitations is expressed in many forms such as strike, collective walkout, buses put on fire etc. Student agitations reflect the conflict between the old and the new. Sometimes the agitations of the adolescents are a result of great tension and conflict and a sense of aimlessness.

Use of Alcohol and Drugs

Use of alcohol and drugs in adolescents is on the increase. Use of drugs is the result of feeling of inadequacy, helplessness and alienation.

Quarrels

Domestic quarrels and quarrels with his friends increase the mental tension of the adolescents. Some adolescents always feel they are not treated properly.

Impatient Behaviour

Adolescents show impatience in their behaviour. They jump in a work for immediate satisfaction. They are unmindful of possible consequences.

Uncompromising Behaviour

Uncompromising behaviour is observed by the adolescents to accept complexities of life, the shades of gray, including compromise and co-operation.

Increased Peer - Group Influence

Peers have a greater influence on adolescent attitudes, speech, interests, appearance and behaviour. If members of the peer group experienced with alcohol, drugs or tobacco, adolescents are like to do the same, regardless of how they feel about these matters.

Robert F. Biehler and Jack Snowman in their book "Psychology Applied to Teaching" describe the emotional problems of adolescents as follows :

- (i) Many psychiatric disorders either appear or become prominent during adolescence. Including among these are eating disorders, substance abuse, depression and suicide.**

Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder. This disorder occurs predominantly in females (about 94 percent of the cases) and usually appears between the ages of fourteen and seventeen (Halimi, 1987). Bulimia nervosa is a disorder in

which binge eating (uncontrolled, rapid eating of large quantities of food over a short period of time, followed by self-induced vomiting, is the predominant behaviour. Schizophrenia (a thinking disorder characterized by illogical and unrealistic thinking, delusions, and hallucinations) is rarely found among adolescents.

(ii) **The most common type of emotional disorder during adolescence is depression**

Estimates of depression among high school students range from 7 to 28 percent depending on the level of depression being examined and criteria being used for depression. Individuals from Low-income families are typically the most depressed. Females may exhibit greater tendencies than males to be depressed. Common symptoms of depression include crying spells, suicidal thoughts, threats and attempts. Additional symptoms are moodiness, social isolation, fatigue, hypochondriasis, and difficulty in concentrating (Petti and Larson, 1987).

(iii) **If depression becomes severe, suicide may be contemplated**

Suicide is now a major cause of death among adolescents and young adults. The single most important signal of a youth at risk for suicide is depression. Along with the common symptoms, "signs of depression include poor appetite, weight loss, changes in sleeping patterns, difficulty in concentrating, academic problems and poor self-concept. These symptoms take on added significance when accompanied by a family history of suicide or parents who commit abuse or use drugs and alcohol excessively (Strother, 1986).

In adolescent stress (1991), edited by Mary Ellen Colton and Susan Gore fourteen authors discuss such sources of adolescent stress as negative emotions, conflicts with parents, drug use, pregnancy, and abuse at home and how adolescents try to cope with them. Robert D. Ketterlinus and Michael E. Lamb (1994). in "*Adolescent Problem Behaviours: Issues and Research*" describe how such factors as sexual behaviour, delinquency, risk taking and childhood victimization give rise to trouble some behaviour among adolescents.

Education of Adolescents

Regarding the nature of education during adolescence National Curriculum Framework of NCERT (2005) emphasizes that "*Adolescents need social and emotional support during this period to develop a comfortable relationship with themselves and the way they look and relate to others - especially the opposite sex. The absence of such support can lead to confusion and misunderstanding about these changes and also giving up supports and outdoor activities.*"

The following suggestions may be taken into consideration for the education of

adolescents.

- Adolescents need continued assurance from adults in order to accommodate themselves to assimilate the effects of constant change.
- Peer pressure should be recognized by the parents so that adolescents can be guided in the right direction.
- Each individual student and each sub - group of students needs extra support during this critical period. For example, the late - maturing boy needs help in developing confidence and needs assurance that he too will reach full maturity. Similarly, the early maturing girl needs special support to withstand some of the intense pressure she faces from both adults and peers.
- In physical education and health classes, the teacher should discuss with the students some facts of sexual growth and maturation. A few facts in this area may remove the mystery and correct some of the untruths that students often pass onto one another.
- Variety of school programmes, especially at the secondary level, involving peer and cross-age teaching, community internships, peer counselling, and teenage health "consultants" is important primarily because such role taking can involve genuine responsibility. In these programmes teenagers learn to teach, counsel, and care for young class mates. Such responsibility stimulate their own leadership development and psychological maturation.
- If a teacher notices that a student seems extremely depressed, he/she should give support to the child. The interest and sympathy of the teacher may prevent a suicide attempt. The teacher may refer the student to the school counselor or the school psychologist. His/her training and skills equip him to diagnose and treat depression.
- The teacher must develop warm and genuine interest in adolescents. Acceptance of emotionally disturbed students by their teachers is the basic principle which they must start. This helps the students to understand and deal with their problems.
- Relevant literature may develop in adolescents more realistic attitudes and understanding about the world.
- Since sex instinct is very intense at this stage there is an urgent need to provide adolescence education to the adolescents.
- To avoid day-dreaming qualities in adolescents, the teacher should keep them occupied in various co-curricular activities.
- Proper vocational guidance may be provided to adolescents with a view to select their

future career.

- An adolescent is impatient and eager for social recognition. So inspiration and proper education may bring desired changes. Given proper opportunities, an adolescent may be good in sports and games also.

To conclude, every adolescent has /her own needs and problems, on the basis of which he/she continues to create his/her own imaginary world within himself/herself. If proper opportunities are provided, the adolescent will not waste his/her energies in creating his fantastic world.

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