

Adolescent Mental Health, Negative Consequences, and Ways to Improve It

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ABSTRACT

Adolescent mental health is a crucial aspect of overall well-being that has received increased attention in recent years due to the rise in reported mental health issues among this population. Negative consequences of poor mental health in adolescents can include academic difficulties, social isolation, and an increased risk for developing more serious mental health conditions. Scientific research has shown that various interventions can help improve adolescent mental health, including psychotherapy, medication, and lifestyle changes such as exercise and mindfulness practices. In addition, creating supportive school and home environments, reducing stress, and promoting resilience can also have positive impacts on adolescent mental health. The continued study and understanding of adolescent mental health and the development of effective interventions is crucial in promoting positive outcomes for this population.

Keywords: *Adolescence, Mental Health & Interventions*

Adolescence is a stage of human development that occurs between childhood and adulthood. It is typically defined as the period of life from the onset of puberty to the attainment of full physical maturity. The onset of puberty marks the beginning of adolescence and is characterized by physical changes such as the development of secondary sexual characteristics and growth spurts. The end of adolescence is marked by the attainment of full physical maturity, typically around the age of 18 or 21, depending on the individual and cultural context.

The term "adolescence" was introduced at the end of the 19th century. The term "adolescence" was first used in the late 1800s by G. Stanley Hall, an American psychologist, and educationist. He defined adolescence as a period of "storm and stress" characterized by emotional turmoil and conflict. This view of adolescence was widely accepted for many years and influenced the way society viewed and treated adolescents.

The Latin verb 'adolescere' which means 'to grow up' or 'to grow to maturity' explains the terminology 'adolescence'. The adolescence period is defined as an exclusive and influential time.

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During adolescence, individuals experience a range of physical, cognitive, and emotional changes. These changes can be challenging and can affect the individual's social, family, and school life. Physically, adolescence is characterized by growth spurts, changes in body shape, and the development of secondary sexual characteristics. Cognitively, adolescents experience a significant increase in their ability to think abstractly and process complex information. Emotionally, adolescents experience the increased emotional intensity and may have greater mood swings than before.

Adolescence is also a time of significant social and emotional development. Adolescents begin to form their own identities and establish their independence from their parents. They begin to form close relationships with peers, which can be a source of support and guidance during this challenging time. They also begin to explore their own beliefs, values, and attitudes, which can lead to a greater sense of self-awareness.

MENTAL HEALTH: - Mental health refers to a person's overall psychological well-being. It encompasses a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and affects how they think, feel, and act. Individuals need to maintain good mental health to lead fulfilling and productive lives. Good mental health allows people to:

- realize their full potential
- cope with the normal stresses of life
- work productively
- contribute to their community

Mental health is not just the absence of mental illness. It is important to understand that just like physical health, mental health can fluctuate and everyone has different experiences. A person can have good mental health and still experience mental health issues.

There have been many research studies conducted on adolescent mental health in recent years. These studies have focused on a wide range of topics, including the prevalence and risk factors for mental health disorders among adolescents, the effectiveness of different treatment approaches, and the impact of social and environmental factors on mental health. Studies have found that mental health disorders are common among adolescents, with rates of depression and anxiety being particularly high. Risk factors for mental health disorders among adolescents include a history of abuse or trauma, poor family functioning, and exposure to violence or stress.

Research has also examined the impact of social and environmental factors on adolescent mental health. Studies have found that poverty, discrimination, and exposure to violence can all harm mental health outcomes among adolescents. Studies have shown that these factors can contribute to increased risk for mental health disorders among adolescents from marginalized communities. On the other hand, a positive relationship with parents, teachers, and mentors can promote healthy adolescent development.

One area of research that has gained a lot of attention in recent years is the impact of technology and social media on adolescent mental health. Studies have found that excessive use of social media and technology can contribute to increased feelings of depression and anxiety among adolescents. (Article "Coming of Age: Adolescent Health" by WHO)

There have been numerous research studies conducted on adolescent mental health in recent years. Some key findings include:

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- The prevalence of mental health disorders among adolescents has been increasing, with estimates suggesting that up to 20% of youth may be affected by a mental health disorder.
- Adolescents who experience mental health disorders are at a higher risk for poor academic performance, substance abuse, and other negative outcomes.
- Factors that can contribute to adolescent mental health disorders include genetics, trauma and adverse childhood experiences, and social and environmental factors.
- Interventions that are effective in promoting adolescent mental health include therapy, medication, school-based programs, and parent and family involvement.
- There are disparities in access to mental health care for adolescents, with minority and low-income youth being less likely to receive the help they need. (OpenAI (2021))

Maughan et al (2013) reviewed extensive research to conclude that before puberty unipolar depression was low, but rises from the early teens, and girls suffer more from it. Adverse later outcomes are associated with depression among adolescents including suicidality, problems in social functioning, and poor physical and mental health.

Are child and adolescent mental health problems increasing in the 21st century? A systematic review was conducted by (Bor, Dean, Najman & Hayatbakhsh, 2014). It was a comprehensive literature study of participants aged 18 years and under, where the time frame for change was at least 10 years. Data were statistically compared to the 21st century to the 20th century. Studies examined internalizing symptoms and why recent generations of adolescent girls may be at greater risk of internalizing problems. It is well established that there are gender differences in rates of depression and anxiety disorders, with women more likely to experience these disorders than men (Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008).

West and Sweeting (2003) suggest that the accumulation of worries about success in education and personal issues such as weight and appearance combine to create increasing pressures on adolescent girls. Girls may be more negatively influenced by school performance pressure, with one study reporting that two-thirds of girls experienced significant school pressure compared to only one-third of boys (Wiklund et al., 2012).

Hankin et al. (2008) suggest that girls are more socio-emotionally attentive than boys, where negative cognitive style and rumination can interact to predispose girls to depression.

Additionally, there is an increasing interest in understanding and addressing the impact of structural violence, such as poverty, racism, and discrimination, on adolescent mental health. Studies have shown that these factors can contribute to increased risk for mental health disorders among adolescents from marginalized communities.

Mental health issues in adolescence can have a wide range of negative consequences, both in the short term and long term. Some potential consequences include:

1. Academic problems: Mental health issues can negatively impact a student's ability to concentrate, learn, and perform well in school.
2. Social problems: Mental health issues can lead to difficulty in forming and maintaining relationships with peers, leading to social isolation.
3. Behavioral problems: Adolescents with mental health issues may display a range of problem behaviors, such as aggression, impulsivity, or substance abuse.
4. Physical health problems: Mental health issues can lead to physical health problems, such as headaches, stomachaches, and sleep disturbances.

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5. Increased risk of suicide: Adolescents with mental health issues are at an increased risk of suicide.
6. Increased risk of substance abuse: Adolescents with mental health issues are at an increased risk of substance abuse.
7. Increased risk of dropping out of school or lack of academic success
8. Increased risk of developing other mental health issues in adulthood.
9. Interference in daily life activities and difficulties in performing daily tasks.
10. Increased risk of mental health issues in adulthood such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD.

It's important to note that early intervention and treatment can help prevent these negative consequences and promote positive outcomes for adolescents with mental health issues.

There are several ways to improve mental health in adolescents, including:

1. Encouraging healthy coping mechanisms: Adolescents should be taught healthy ways to cope with stress, such as exercise, journaling, and talking to a trusted adult.
2. Building a support network: Adolescents should be encouraged to build a support network of friends, family, and professionals who can provide emotional support and guidance.
3. Promoting healthy communication: Adolescents should be taught how to communicate effectively and healthily express their feelings.
4. Encouraging a healthy lifestyle: A healthy diet, regular exercise, and adequate sleep can all help improve mental health.
5. Addressing mental health concerns early: It's important to address mental health concerns early before they become more serious. Adolescents should be encouraged to seek help if they are experiencing mental health problems.
6. Increase access to mental health services and resources for adolescents, such as counseling, therapy, and support groups.
7. Helping them to develop a sense of purpose and meaning through volunteering, extracurricular activities, or interests.
8. Provide them with accurate information about mental health and mental illnesses, to help dispel myths and reduce the stigma around seeking help.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT): A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials published in the journal "Psychotherapy" found that CBT was effective in treating a range of mental health problems in adolescents, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Weisz & Kazdin, 2022).

Weare & Nind, (2011) found that mindfulness-based interventions can help improve symptoms of anxiety and depression in adolescents. Harnett et al., (2016) found in the research that school-based intervention that included mindfulness, CBT, and emotional regulation strategies was effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety in adolescents. Physical activity can have a positive impact on mental health in adolescents, particularly concerning symptoms of depression and anxiety (Lonsdale et al., 2009).

It is important to remember that every adolescent is unique and may respond differently to different interventions. It is important to consult with professionals and specialists in mental health to find the best approach for each individual.

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Many positive virtues can be taught to adolescents to help them navigate the challenges of this stage of life and develop into well-rounded, responsible adults. Some examples include:

1. Empathy: Encourage adolescents to understand and appreciate the perspectives of others, and to respond with compassion and understanding.
2. Resilience: Teach adolescents how to bounce back from adversity and view challenges as opportunities for growth.
3. Responsibility: Encourage adolescents to take ownership of their actions and to understand the consequences of their choices.
4. Self-control: Teach adolescents to be in control of their impulses and emotions, and to make thoughtful decisions.
5. Honesty: Encourage adolescents to be truthful, and trustworthy and respect the truth.
6. Self-awareness: Help adolescents understand their thoughts, feelings, and behavior, and how they impact others.
7. Gratitude: Teach adolescents to appreciate what they have, and to be thankful for the good things in their lives.
8. Kindness: Encourage adolescents to be kind, caring, and considerate towards others.
9. Perseverance: Teach adolescents to be persistent and not give up easily, to have a growth mindset.
10. Fairness: Encourage adolescents to be fair, just, and impartial in their actions and decisions.
11. Self-care: Prioritizing and taking care of one's physical and mental health
12. Goal setting and Planning: The ability to set and achieve personal and professional goals
13. Creativity: Encouraging out-of-the-box thinking

Berking and Whitley's research in 2014 suggests that individuals who have self-compassion tend to have better mental health outcomes. This is because self-compassion allows individuals to regulate their emotions healthily. Self-compassion helps people to be kind and understanding towards themselves when they make mistakes or experience difficult emotions, rather than being self-critical. The research suggests that self-compassion may be an important factor in promoting emotional regulation and overall well-being.

The educational performance components related to self-regulation components had a better educational performance by managing their emotions and emotional influences were successful in future planning as well as in self-efficacy (Sahranavard, Miri & Salehiniya, 2017). Self-regulation, cognition, meta-cognition, and self-efficacy had a positive and significant relationship with each other and affect academic stress directly, while a negative relationship with academic stress (Arabzadeh et al, 2012).

Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) included intentional activities specifically addressed to cultivating positive feelings, cognition, and behaviors. PPIs included exercises e.g., counting your blessings, practicing kindness, expressing gratitude, using personal strengths, etc., which were demonstrated empirically to increase positive emotions, satisfaction with life, or other positive states. (Sin and Lyubomirsky, 2009).

It's important to note that these virtues should be modeled and taught by parents, teachers, and other role models in the adolescent's life and that different virtues may be more appropriate for different adolescents depending on their individual needs and strengths.

CONCLUSION

Adolescence is a critical period of development during which many physical, emotional, and cognitive changes occur. During this time, adolescents may be at an increased risk for developing mental health issues due to the stress of navigating the challenges of this stage of life. Some of the most common mental health issues that can develop during adolescence include anxiety disorders, depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), eating disorders, substance use disorders, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and schizophrenia.

To promote positive mental health, it is important to encourage healthy coping mechanisms, promote social connections, provide emotional support, maintain open communication, and provide access to professional help. Additionally, teaching positive virtues such as resilience, empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, integrity, responsibility, gratitude, kindness, and self-care, can help adolescents develop into well-rounded and responsible adults. Early intervention and treatment can help to mitigate mental health issues and improve the chances of a positive outcome.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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