

Adjustment Challenges in Adolescence: Implications for Guidance and Counselling in Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is the critical phase of growth in human life when teenager undergoes change in physical, cognitive, emotional and psychological attributes. There are several problems faced by the teenager during their adjustment phase in life which may hinder their academic performance and growth. Problems faced by adolescents include search of identity, pressure from peer group, study related stress, emotional problems, family conflicts, socialization problems etc. Various problems of these problems of maladjustment among the adolescents may cause for problem behaviour, anxiety, melancholy, learning problem and poor academic performance. In secondary schools of a country, guidance and counselling services are provided to the teenager to help them to overcome their problems by applying suitable strategies and to develop their decision-making abilities. In this article an attempt has been made to unfold and discuss various problems faced by the teenager during their adjustment phase which will be helpful to the counselling trainers and researchers of guidance services to design programs for counselling the adolescent in secondary schools...

Keywords Adolescence, Adjustment Challenges, Guidance, Counselling, Secondary Schools, Mental Health...

INTRODUCTION:

The adolescence is the stage of life of considerable changes of a biological, psychological, sociological and emotional character. It begins at the age of 10 and lasts up to 19 years of life. In this stage there are the early, middle and late adolescence and in every stage, there are the specific features and also the different demands of roles, of responsibilities, of relations and of the academic requirements. The adolescent who is able to make effective an adjustment to the developmental tasks is able to grow up in an optimal way, while the maladjusted adolescent has problems of an emotional, academic and behavioural character.

Adjustment is the individual's efforts to solve the conflicts between himself or herself and the environment. The individual who is well adjusted is emotionally stable, has good relations with others, good academic performance and good psychological status. However, modern teenagers are facing a lot of difficulties in their lives, such as the intense academic competition, rapid changes in technology, the excessive use of social media, changes in family structure and relationships and psychological problems. Recent studies have found that the adolescents' school adjustment is affected by several factors including social support, adolescents' resilience, their positive effect and their teacher-student relations.

Adjustment in Adolescence

The process of adjustment in adolescence is an ongoing process where teenagers adjust to the many changes that they experience during their teenage years. This process of adjustment helps adolescents protect their mental health and to form good relationships with others while handling school and academic expectations and overcoming other challenges to their development. When teenagers fail to adjust to the many changes of adolescence, they can experience negative emotions and behaviours, including feelings of anxiety and or depression, and academic failure as well as other problems. The various factors that affect a teenager's adjustment include personal factors, the home environment, peer relations and the school environment.

Adjustment is a continuous process where individuals make efforts and changes and adapt his/her behaviour to meet his/her personal needs as well as demands of his/her environment. There are different aspects or dimensions of adolescent's adjustment. For the sake of convenience, the personal change, adolescents' attempt to accept the physical as well as psychological changes taking place within themselves, is called as their personal adjustment.

Personal Adjustment: Acceptance of physical and psychological changes.

Emotional Adjustment: Regulation of emotions and stress.

Social Adjustment: Development of healthy interpersonal relationships.

Vocational Adjustment: Preparation for future educational and career goals.

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When an adolescent successfully completes his or her developmental tasks, he or she becomes a well-adjusted young person. A well-adjusted adolescent usually has good psychological status, good relationship with others, is doing well academically, and is emotionally stable. However, many

teenagers today are having a lot of problems adjusting to school because of academic competition, parental pressure, technological advancement, social media, changes in family environment and many other psychological problems faced by them.

Major Adjustment Challenges in Adolescence

Adolescence, a transitional phase of development, is characterized by rapid changes and metamorphoses at physical, cognitive, emotional and social levels of human behaviour. Thus, during adolescence individuals of young age face a variety of challenges which determine their mental health, academic performance, interpersonal relations, school adaptation, social behaviour and other aspects of their healthy growth and development.

Identity Crisis and Self-Concept Development:

The identity crisis of adolescence is a typical and a very challenging developmental task for the adolescents of this age. This identity crisis results in the struggles of the adolescent to accept his/her self-concept. According to Erikson (1968), adolescence involves Identity vs. Role Confusion. The process of identity development involves exploration of different values, belief systems, possible future careers, and roles of life in general. The process of achieving identity is critical for development of higher self-esteem and confidence. Many studies have reported that the adolescents' search for identity is affected by family, peers, school and even by the digital media that they use (Meeus, 2024).

Academic Pressure and School Adjustment:

The term of academic adjustment implies for adolescents to deal with school requirements, school life and tasks in the classroom, in addition to tests and school changes. However, in today's world of high competition in school and also from parents at home for better academic performance, there is a lot of stress placed on the adolescent. This stress is linked with anxiety and/or depression and other emotions and also results in a number of negative physical and psychological effects including emotional exhaustion, and decreased levels of life satisfaction and also poor sleep (Zurba, 2023). Transitions in school can also have problems of school maladjustment as students deal with a number of tasks and subjects in school, as well as trying to fit into a new group of students/peers in order to have successful school life. It is also important for students to have positive relationships with teachers in order to be motivated in school in order to have successful academic adjustment

Emotional and Mental Health Challenges:

These years of human development are characterized by intense changes in physical, neurological and psychosocial development. Hence, adolescents are sensitive and vulnerable to mental health problems. School-agers have difficulty managing their emotions leading to mood swings, irritability, anxiety and even clinical depression. According to the theory of emotions put forth by Gross (2015), the lack of an appropriate strategy for emotion regulation leads to increased levels of psychological distress. According to the World Health Organization (2024), about one in seven adolescents globally suffer from mental health problems. These problems are amongst the main causes of illness and disability for this age group. However, adolescents are reluctant to seek help due to negative stigma, lack of awareness and poor mental health services that are not accessible in schools (McPhail et al., 2024).

Peer Pressure and Social Relationships:

During the teenage years, the influence of peers becomes extremely important to many young people as they attempt to find their place in the world and receive validation of their identity by being accepted by their peers. Many positive peer relationships promote social skills, empathy, and a healthy self-concept or mental wellness. In contrast, being pressured by peers to engage in activities that are considered to be negative can cause young people to engage in behaviour that could be considered to be harmful to themselves and/or others. For example, some teenagers are pressured by their peers to consume alcohol and/or drugs, to engage in delinquent behaviour, to bully others, to be disinterested in school, to truant from school, etc. Bandura's Social Learning Theory states that people learn new behaviours by modelling others, such as their peers (Bandura, 1977). In addition, there are many instances of social comparison that occur during the teenage years as adolescents attempt to determine their place in the world (Rubin et al., 2023).

Family-Related Adjustment Problems:

The family is often considered to be the biggest socializer for a teenager. His or her emotional and behavioural adjustment can thus be very much affected by the family environment. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed in the Ecological Systems Theory, the adolescent development is characterized by constant interactions with the environments of family, school, and neighbourhood. Conflicts in the family, an authoritarian attitude of parents, irregular disciplinary actions, poverty, divorce of parents and lack of communication with children can result in the adolescent developing emotional problems, abnormal behaviour and school maladjustment. However, a supportive family with emotional support

from parents, a secure relationship and communication with children can foster a resilient adolescent with high self-esteem and adaptability.

Technology and Social Media Influence:

In contemporary society technology has become an influential force on the development of teenagers, often forming much of the backdrop against which many of the negative points outlined above are formed. Although it can provide means of connection, socialization, learning

and development for individuals, in an excessive amount, it can negatively affect adolescents leading to a range of problems that cause distress and which affect their mental health and well-being. In this respect, they can lead to symptoms of anxiety and also bring on bouts of depression in many cases of teenager usage (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). These risks are heightened during the adolescent years. The teenager is in a process of development of his or her brain as well as their emotions and are not as yet equipped to be able to manage online activities (WHO, 2024). Excessive use of screens can affect a person's attention to relationships and various other activities; therefore, it is highly important that schools are to be providing programs of guidance that incorporate some form of digital literacy as well as counselling.

Factors Contributing Adjustment Problem

The adolescent adjustment problems are interrelated and are determined by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, family-related, school-related and a number of socio-cultural factors. The rapid changes in physical and mental development during adolescence often result in adolescent's emotional instability and in the lack of control over their behaviour and decisions (Steinberg, 2022). Various factors within the family environment negatively affect an adolescent's well-being, for example: parents' conflicts; inadequate parenting; low socio-economic status of family; and the lack of support from family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Steinberg, 2022). School and academic environment also play a significant role in the problems of adolescent's emotional and academic maladjustment. There are many factors that cause problems in adolescent's school and academic adjustment, for example: academic pressure; school and academic related anxiety; teachers' high expectations; problems of adjustment to a new school etc. (Zurba, 2023). The problems of adolescent's social maladjustment are caused by: rejection by peers; bullying by peers; and the pressure of peers to behave in a particular way. These problems negatively affect an adolescent's self-esteem and his/her psychological well-being (Rubin et al., 2023). New technologies that are developed every day also have a number of negative factors that determine an adolescent's well-being. These factors include: so, called cyberbullying; comparison of life of others on social media with one's own life; excessive time spent with screens of electronic devices; and the problems of sleep etc. (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). All

these factors determine an adolescent's adjustment problems and, according to the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the problems of an adolescent are determined by the interactions between an adolescent and different environments, and it is necessary to cooperate not only with family members but also with school, counsellors and with the community at large in order to solve the problems of an adolescent.

Concept of Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and Counselling are lifelong processes. Guidance is a process of discovery that helps people to maximize their potential by understanding their strengths and weaknesses, interests and capabilities to make optimal decisions concerning education, vocation and general

growth and development. Counselling on the other hand is an interactive process where the counsellor helps the client to discover and to deal with problems of an emotional, behavioural or psychological nature through self-discovery and decision-making. The school setting is one of the environments where such processes take place and in the case of the High School, it helps the adolescent to grow academically, socially, emotionally and in terms of vocation (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024; Gibson & Mitchell, 2020).

Need of Guidance and Counselling in Adolescence

The critical developmental stage of adolescence is characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes that are generally challenging for many young people. These changes are associated with a host of challenges young people face at various stages of their lives including trying to come to terms with their identity, dealing with academic pressures, finding and maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships with their peers, managing their emotions in a healthy way and making vocational choices. It is no wonder that many adolescents experience serious psychological problems, such as mental health disorders and die as a result of suicide. Thus, it is not surprising that Guidance and Counselling in schools can help adolescents to promote their own mental health and well-being through fostering self-awareness, building their coping skills or resilience, facilitating their making of positive choices and enhancing their interpersonal relationships. In addition, Guidance and Counselling can also play a critical role in helping adolescents to deal with a host of emotional and behaviour problems early before these can become serious. School-based counselling also helps students to deal with academic issues and develop academic adjustment. Overall, Guidance and Counselling in schools can promote adolescents' overall development positively

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The challenges that individuals face in adolescence and how these affect the individual's psychological wellbeing and school performance have been a long-standing concern for many. In general, the research has found that individuals who are experiencing poor adjustment are more likely to experience a range of negative emotions including anxiety and feelings of depression as well as engage in problem behaviours. In addition, the research has identified a number of protective factors that are associated with positive school adjustment. These include a supportive family, positive relationships with peers, high levels of resilience and a positive school climate that is supportive. Conversely, a lack of social support has been found to increase the risk of maladjustment (Zolkoski et al., 2024).

The secondary school is an ideal setting to support the mental health of young people in order to promote their overall well-being. A growing body of empirical research has increasingly demonstrated that school-based counselling interventions can have a positive impact on adolescents' emotional regulation and coping skills in order to foster greater resilience and promote positive outcomes in terms of their academic engagement. Research studies have highlighted the early identification

and support of adolescents who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health, and how school counselling can enhance adolescents' help-seeking behaviours in order to promote positive outcomes for their academic, social and emotional well-being. For example, a growing body of research has increasingly highlighted the early intervention role of the school counsellor, whilst other studies have reported on the challenges faced by schools, primarily in Asian countries, in relation to implementing effective school counselling programs as a result of a lack of suitable counselling infrastructure, a lack of school counselling training and mental health stigma. Furthermore, there is an increasingly expanded role for school counsellors delivering a variety of interventions, including classroom-based interventions, that aim to support students' social-emotional development in order to promote greater academic achievement and better overall outcomes.

Implications for Guidance and Counselling Practice in Secondary Schools:

Challenges in the process of adjustment that adolescents experience require an approach to guidance and counselling that is to be developed in secondary schools. Such an approach can help in fostering adolescents' emotional, academic, behavioural, and social growth. Counselling in secondary schools aims at promoting adolescents' emotional well-being, academic success, interpersonal competencies, and career development (American School Counsellor Association [ASCA], 2023; World Health Organization [WHO], 2024)

Comprehensive School Counselling Programs:

Schools need to provide a number of services to support the academic, personal-social, emotional and career development of all students. The model of practice for school counsellors that is currently used in many countries is the American School Counsellor Association National Model for School Counselling which advocates a data-driven, preventive, developmental and comprehensive school counselling program that aims to support all students in reaching their full potential. Such counselling programs are an integral part of the total educational program and are offered on a developmental counselling model which helps students to develop and enhance their ability to deal with life's demands, to increase students' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, to help students to develop their interpersonal skills and to help students to be successful academically. Many studies have provided evidence that school counselling programs that are implemented in a comprehensive manner can bring about positive results for students including higher academic achievement, school participation, emotional well-being and behaviour. On the other hand, when students are not involved in school counselling, they are at risk of poor school performance and a range of negative behaviour. For this reason, school counselling should not be offered as an add-on to the regular curriculum but as an integral part of the total school environment where all staff members are involved in supporting students' counselling needs.

Mental Health Promotion and Early Intervention:

Many of the adolescent's face challenges of anxiety, depression, stress and behavioural problems. School is the best place for promoting mental health and for early intervention of any psychopathology. According to the World Health Organization (2024), one in seven adolescents suffer from a mental health disorder. School counsellors should provide mental health screening, and school-based psychological interventions. They can deliver programs of psychoeducation, of stress management and mental health promotion programs with the intention of reducing stigma of mental health problems and of promoting help-seeking behaviour. The interventions of the public health model of prevention are of three types: universal, selective and indicated. Recent systematic reviews have provided good quality of evidence which supports school-based psychological interventions for promoting emotional well-being, enhancing of resilience, for improving of coping skills and for promoting of social competence. Interventions also have been found to decrease of symptoms of anxiety and of depression (McPhail et al., 2024; Zbukvic et al., 2024)

Emotional Regulation and Life Skills Training:

As previously mentioned, the ability of adolescents to manage their emotions effectively is crucial in their overall psychological health and academic performance. For this reason, Guidance Programs need to incorporate interventions aimed at fostering life skills, which are key for adolescents in dealing with emotions, coping with stress and managing change in their social environment. The process of emotion regulation as defined by Gross's (Gross, 2015) Process Model of Emotion Regulation implies that effective emotion regulation is associated with optimal psychological functioning. Life Skills are a key component of the World Health Organization's (2017) Life Skills Education framework, which considers them as protective factors for adolescent mental health and to reduce involvement in health risk behaviours. Studies have shown that interventions focused on improving adolescents' ability to regulate their emotions have positive outcomes in terms of their psychological resilience and their emotional and academic engagement (Pedrini et al., 2022).

Career Guidance and Educational Planning:

During the secondary school years, a large number of decisions are made regarding educational programs as well as possible future careers. At the heart of these decisions is the student's search for a vocation or career that will provide them with a sense of purpose and direction. Super's (1990) Life-Span, Life-Space Theory proposed that individuals at various stages of development are engaged in different stages of career development. In adolescence, the focus is on exploration in which the individual assesses themselves and searches for information regarding various careers in order to form a clear idea of a vocational identity. School counsellors can assist students in planning for their futures by administering a variety of aptitude tests as well as interest and personality measures. Also, providing access to a variety of career information as well as conducting individual and group counselling sessions can help students make adequate educational plans. The process of

career counselling helps individuals to make decisions regarding their future and to cope with any career-related uncertainty. It also assists in removing career indecision, anxiety, and uncertainty and in enhancing self-efficacy, motivation, and adaptability for work. In summary, incorporating career education into the secondary school curriculum can aid students in achieving successful transitions to post-secondary education and the work force as well as in developing lifelong career skills.

Peer Counselling and Support Systems:

Students benefit from their relationships with their peers, as these can have a significant impact on how they feel and how they develop socially and emotionally. Many adolescent students are influenced by their peers, adopting behaviours, attitudes, and ways of coping from the people around

them. In schools with well-structured peer counselling programs, students are supported by their peers in ways that promote healthy interpersonal relationships and coping methods. Often, the trained peer counsellor is the first person that the adolescent student approaches with their concerns. The role of the peer counsellor is to help the student to identify the nature of the problems that they are experiencing and to refer them to a professional counsellor if necessary. Research has found that peer-support programs can increase students' sense of belonging, and their resilience, social competence, and psychological well-being, while reducing feelings of loneliness and emotional distress (King, Laverendrye, Gervais, & Picon, 2024).

Family–School Collaboration:

Many factors in an adolescent's life affects his or her adjustment to school, and it is helpful if schools and families are working together. The environment that an adolescent grows up in is not only the home, but also includes the neighbourhoods and communities where they live. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) describes how these environments affect an adolescent's life, especially the two environments where they spend most of their time: home and school. The school counsellor can assist in collaborating with parents in individual or group counselling sessions, in parenting workshops and in family education programs. School counsellors can also assist in creating systems that promote communication between the two environments. The result of positive family–school collaboration is increased parental involvement and improved parenting practices, and as a result adolescents feel safe and grow and learn in school. These environments can also help in identifying early behavioural or emotional problems and in implementing interventions in both environments.

Creating a Positive School Climate:

A positive school climate is created and sustained by schools and classrooms that are safe for all students, promote respect among all students, and are fostered by school environments that are supportive, inclusion and that allow for student participation and voice. According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020) individuals have an innate tendency to be motivated to act in ways that are satisfying when three basic psychological

needs are satisfied. The needs of autonomy, of competence and of relatedness are necessary for individuals to have optimal psychological functioning. Schools and classrooms that create environments that are supportive of student voice and participation, foster learning environments that support students' need to know and to feel competent, and are environments that promote a sense of belonging create positive school climates. Students who attend schools with positive school climates are more likely to experience school

connectedness, have higher levels of motivation for school, have greater sense of resilience and better mental health outcomes than their counterparts in schools with negative school climates. Guidance counsellors, in collaboration with school administrators and teachers work to establish school wide practices and policies that promote school climate in order to support students to achieve their full potential in schools and post school settings.

CONCLUSION

Adolescence is characterized by a host of developmental challenges as young people grapple to form an identity, to complete school work, to come to terms with emotional/mental health challenges, peer relationships, family relationships, and many of the ways in which technology impacts upon their lives. There are many complex personal and environmental factors which can impact on an adolescent's psychological wellbeing, social competence, and academic success. It is crucial to identify at the earliest possible stage, and to intervene in a timely manner, in order to support adolescents and their families. In this sense, creating and maintaining supportive family environments, a positive school environment, effective school-based guidance and counselling programs, and a variety of strategies to foster life-skills are some of the key ways in which adolescents can be supported in order to develop the best possible means of dealing with the challenges of growing up and adapting to the world around them in order to achieve healthy psychological development and successful psychological and social adjustment.

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