

# A PSYCHO-SOCIO PERSPECTIVE ON ADOLESCENCE

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## **Introduction**

A careful study of man will reveal that he is a very inquisitive being. Among the things he sets out to understand is his own self. From the armchair rationalization of the Ancient Greek philosophers, namely, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, through modern and Christian thinkers and anthropologists down to contemporary psychologists and sociologists, one conclusion can be drawn about man. That conclusion is, “man is an enigma”<sup>1</sup>. This view of man was not arrived at through an escape route; rather it was after a longitudinal study of man as a possible possibility and /or an impossible possibility. Depending on one's experience of man as a unique being. He can be conceived of as a being that is great or small, creative or

destructive, rational or irrational, loving or cruel; at times, he may be obedient, and at other times stubborn. From the foregoing, man himself has no option but to conclude that he is one of the wonders of the world.

Although man considers himself an enigma, he had not given up his self-assigned task of attempting to understand himself. This is why he came up with a discipline like psychology the science of human behaviour. Psychology or rather psychologists had taken up the challenge and they are tooling the path of developmental psychology. The rationale behind this is that it is assumed that through studying human conduct, clues might be found that will ultimately help to unveil the mysteries that envelop man.

One of the earliest attempts made by developmental psychologists to make their impact felt in the educational sub-sector was to classify human beings into stages of development. These are infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Each of these stages could also be subdivided into early, middle and late sub-stages. When that is done we will end up with twelve sub-stages of human development. These are: neonacy, babyhood, late infancy; early childhood, middle childhood and late childhood; early adolescence, middle adolescence and late adolescence; and finally early adulthood, middle adulthood and old age.

### **Psychological Perspective**

Although we are mainly concerned with the third major stage (adolescence) here, which include its three sub-divisions of early, middle and late adolescence, what constitutes adolescence had been a controversial issue even among

psychologists who invented the concept in the first place. The reason is that adolescence as a human developmental stage is not well understood.<sup>2</sup> It is associated with disruption of psychological functioning, which leads to turmoil. Adolescent turmoil has only been publicized and theorized by psychologists and psychiatrists, romanticized in literature and dramatized by the press.<sup>3</sup> The controversy even got to a point that Brown and Weiner affirmed that the concept adolescence, unlike childhood, has no psychological meaning.<sup>4</sup>

However, depending on the side of the divide one belongs to, he can either accept or reject the view that adolescence is psychologically meaningless. But physiologically, there is no gainsaying the fact that sexual dimorphism, which is a product of secondary sex characteristics becomes very visible at pubescence. This explains why in some African societies there are initiation ceremonies through which boys are turned into men and girls are turned into woman. In such societies pubescence is a waiting stage just before young persons are initiated into adulthood. While in the Western world where such initiation ceremonies do not exist could be justified in naming a stage of development spanning from eleven years to nineteen years as adolescence.

Those who believe that adolescence and adolescents deserve psychological consideration include Akinboye<sup>5</sup> and Adomeh<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, they ascribed certain characteristics to adolescents. These include: youthfulness, cognitive development, nubility, physiological changes and social interaction. Others are emotional organization, a yearning for freedom, sexual drive, inquisitiveness and adjustment. A brief explanation of each of these characteristics will portray better

the point being made here.

**Youthfulness:** At adolescence, youngsters who are between the ages of eleven and nineteen years, display a lot of youthful energy. At this stage, they consider themselves as capable of doing so many things. The result is that they experiment with so many things.

**Cognitive development:** The human person attains his/her highest level of brain formation at adolescence. The process involved in this formation is uniquely important for both the behaviourists and the physicians. Okoye for instance, notes that age is one of the factors that affect intelligence and intellectual functioning. From the early years of life, an individual continually grows in his intellectual ability. Such growth “reaches its peak stage towards the age of twenty.” Thereafter, a small but gradual decline sets in.<sup>7</sup>

**Nubility:** The reproductive organs of the adolescents are highly developed like that of the adults. This development distinguishes the adolescent from the infant and the child. And there is no gainsaying the fact that adolescents possess much libidinal energy, a situation that makes them always want to reach out to members of the complementary sex. Their frequent entrance and sudden exit from relationships are regulated by libidinal energy.

**Physiological changes:** The rapidity of physiological growth at this stage of human development cannot go unnoticed by the adolescents themselves and members of their communities. Such physiological growths often prompt them to ascribe adult functions to themselves even though they lack the means of accomplishing such functions.

**Social interaction:** The way adolescents interact is highly advanced since they go out of themselves and relate to others.

Because of their life experience, adolescents are capable of organizing and harmonizing their emotional feelings. This quality is beyond the reach of the child.

**Freedom:** At adolescence, the individual who had been heavily dependent on his parents at infancy and childhood perceives himself as an independent adult. But the parents do not perceive the adolescent as an independent young adult, since the adolescent is still dependent on them for several needs. The consequence is conflict subsisting between both parties.

**Sexual drive:** The attainment of puberty makes the adolescents to be more aware of their sexual abilities, an awareness which propels them to want to express their sexual abilities. For this reason, they always want to reach out to others, especially members of the complementary sexes. Yet responsible parents would want to exercise some measure of control, a situation, which leads again to some conflict between them.

**Inquisitiveness:** Adolescents are very curious. In their curiosity, they always ask questions. And the impatient adult will always see them as rude and stubborn, especially if the adults are unable to answer their questions satisfactorily.

**Adjustment:** One of the greatest problems of adolescents is that of adjustment in their attempt to tolerate and cope with their environment. For the adolescents, leaving childhood stage is a movement into adulthood. Consequently, he would want to behave like one. The disparities between childhood conduct and that of adulthood, creates a lacuna, which the adolescent must learn to live with. This becomes the foundation of the adjustment problem of the adolescent.

However 'unpsychological' the aforementioned characteristics may seem, they have great psychological

implications for the youngster. The reason is that each one of them is problematic for the youngster as he attempts to accomplish what Havighurst<sup>8</sup> refers to as adolescent developmental tasks. These developmental tasks include building wholesome attitudes towards himself or herself and others, learning appropriate masculine or feminine social roles, developing concepts necessary for everyday living, as well as developing a clear conscience, a sense of morality and a scale of values. All these require a psychological adjustment on the part of the adolescent and a psychological understanding and tolerance from significant others.

### **Sociological Perspective**

From the sociological point of view, sociologists in recent times are beginning to make sociology relevant in the study of man. Although sociology as a discipline is a polymorphous latecomer in the field of social sciences, its emergence was as a result of the need to view various aspects of life from the social perspective. This explains why it was easy to subdivide it into many specialized fields within a few years of its recognition as an academic discipline. Some of the fields of sociology that had been identified include criminology, art, literature, demography, mass communication, economics, history, industry, politics, medicine and mathematics. Others are culture, development, family, knowledge, music, occupation, urban, rural, religion and education.<sup>9</sup> No doubt the aforementioned specialized fields cover almost every aspect of human endeavour. Thus sociology as an interpretative science is expected to come to the rescue of man as he attempts to understand himself.

Since a discourse on the sociological perspective on

adolescence would ultimately lead us to the consideration of the interpretative nature of sociology, it is pertinent therefore to clarify the concept *Sociology* and how it construes adolescence.

If we go back to the very beginning as Peretomode did in 1995, we will discover that sociology as a concept is an amalgamation of a Latin word *socius*, meaning society, and a Greek word, *logos*, meaning study.<sup>10</sup> The aim or the objective of sociology, therefore, is to study society. And since human beings (including adolescents) constitute a society, it is ultimately human conduct within an organized society that sociology is concerned with. In doing so, the discipline tries to focus on human behaviour and how men and women relate with one another on a regular basis. In other words, this interpretative science of society deals with the conduct or behaviour of group(s) of persons within a given organization. This certainly differentiates sociology from psychology that concerns itself with individual behaviour. Thus, the emergence of sociology in the late nineteenth century was necessary if the conduct of members of a given society could be studied and understood collectively.

When Auguste Comte, the French philosopher, coined the term *sociologie*, his intention was to have a separate discipline that would study human behaviour collectively. Comte was of the view that it would be possible to employ the principle of social sciences to study human associations.<sup>11</sup> Since man as a social being lives in either small and simple group or large and complex organization, using a scientific method to study his conduct would highlight the facts about society.

Sociologically, human families are seen as the smallest units of the society. These various units of the families that

constitute the larger society are made up of human beings of whom adolescents constitute a significant number. After a longitudinal study of adolescence as a stage of human development, psychologists are now of the view that all “kinds of things happen during adolescence.”<sup>12</sup> One of the most obvious of such things is adolescent social development. At childhood, the individual is said to be egocentric. The teenager who must necessarily go out of himself to interact with others incorporates this notion of egocentrism into his thinking pattern. Since he is capable of formal-operational thinking, he imagines that what he is thinking is what other persons around are also thinking about. If therefore, he thinks of himself as a hero, others must necessarily see him as such. This is why he tries as much as possible to accommodate others in his thinking pattern. How successful he becomes in achieving this feat is a different matter altogether.

### Conclusion

The adolescent of our time is a possible possibility. Our understanding of his mode of thinking and actions depends on how much we appreciate him and his unique effort to adjust to his environment both psychologically and sociologically. And the earlier both the psychologist and the sociologist begin to view the adolescent from the psycho-socio perspective, the better for us all.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> B. Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, (Bangalore India: Theological Publications India, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> L. T. Brown, & E. A. Weiner, *Introduction to Psychology*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1979), p. 364.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. p. 372.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. p. 322.

<sup>5</sup> J. O. Akinboye, *Guidance and Counselling Strategies for Handling Adolescents and Youth Problems*, (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1987), pp.75-84.

<sup>6</sup>, I. O. C. Adomeh, *Differential Effectiveness of Two Counselling Methods of Fostering Emotional Adjustment among Adolescents*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Benin, Benin City, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> N. N. Okoye, *The Psychology of Effective Learning*, (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 1981), P.23.

<sup>8</sup> R. Havighurst, *Developmental Task and Education*, (New York: Logmans, Green, 1952)

<sup>9</sup> G.E. Omozeghian, *Introduction to Sociology of Education*, (Asaba: ALCEL Concerns, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> V. F. Peretomode, "The Sociology of Education: An Overview" in V. F. Peretomode (ed.) *Sociology of Education*, (Lagos: Obaroh & Ogbinaka Publishers Ltd, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Omozeghian, *Introduction to Sociology of Education*, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Brown & Weiner, *Introduction to Psychology*, p. 365.