

ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGY AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT: PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Adolescence period is a turbulent and difficult stage for the adolescents, their parents and others. It is characterized with numerous developmental processes and challenges. The process of adjustment for the adolescents sometimes bring them into conflict with parents. Parenting adolescents can be tasking, complex and perplexing. This paper examined the physical and psychological development of adolescents and their accompany challenges under physical traits, cognition, emotional sensitivity and social traits. Environmental factors that influence adolescent behaviour were discussed to include peer influence, mass media and societal influence. The parenting implications focused on parenting styles, effects, influences and expected roles in assisting the adolescents to adjust effectively.

Keywords: Physical development, psychology of adolescent; Parenting implications

Introduction

Adolescent psychology is the field of psychology that focus on issues that are unique to adolescents. Adolescence stage is characterized with rapid physical development, psychological and emotional changes as well as challenges. It is a period of self-discovery and self-identity, characterized with conflict, confusion, adventure, peer ties, exploration and mass media influence within and on the adolescent. The importance of their wholesome wellbeing while going through this developmental stage and the role of parents in ensuring effective adjustment cannot be overemphasized. This paper discussed the psychology and physiological development of adolescents and accompanying challenges, under physical traits, cognition, emotional sensitivity and social traits as well as the implications of these development on parenting. It also examined some environmental factors that influence adolescent behaviour. The right approach and roles parents should play for wholistic wellbeing of the child. The essence of this paper is to ensure effective adjustment during this phase of life and to highlight the implication for parents for proper adjustment of the adolescent so as to prevent negative effects of maladjustment prevalent today among adolescents.

According to Lahey 2003, Adolescence is the period from the onset of puberty to the beginning of adulthood. Adolescence is a transition period between childhood and adulthood between ages 12 – 21 years. It is a time when the individual experience diverse changes, challenges and varied influence from peers, the mass media, the parent and the community. All parties making one imprint and influence on the adolescent which could be positive or negative, of course conflicting influence.

One major need of the adolescent at this stage is coping strategies, finding a standard metric to distinguish between right and wrong amidst the various conflicting voices and sometime poor models from parents, peers, mass media and the society. Poor adjustment can result in maladaptive behaviour. It is therefore imperative that parents who are the care providers, first agent of socialization and have been endowed with the responsibility to nurture and train the children have a broad and wholistic understanding of the different physiological, psychological changes and challenges of their children as they grow from childhood into adulthood. Adequate knowledge of the process of adolescent development will enable parents to provide the needed environment and counsel for proper adjustment and smooth transition into adulthood. It will further enable the parents to identify maladaptive behaviour, their causes and devise strategies to avert them for the wellbeing of the child. It is pertinent to mention that family climate and roles positively or negatively impact on the wellness of the child and in their relationship later in life.

Parents need to have adequate understanding of the psychology, physiological and social factors around the adolescent to avert maladjustment. Parents should ensure the children are groomed from infancy to avert maladaptive behaviour as adolescents. “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it” Prov. 22:6. According to studies Onoyase and Ebebuwa-Okoh (2014), Okorodudu and Okorodudu (2003) the foundation and missing link of training the child early through inculcating good morals in life development and reformation has been shaky right from the home background. In their opinion this could be due to parental ignorance of the developmental process of the child neglect, crave for money and material needs. Parents are therefore expected to make conscious effort to train and nurture the child at every stage of life.

Psychology And Physical Developmental Traits Of Adolescents

The developmental traits and characteristics at adolescence are discussed under physical, traits, cognition, social and emotional sensitivity. These characteristics and changes at the adolescence stage influence the behavior of adolescence and make some of them have conflict with their parents, teachers and adults. These developmental traits refer to changes,

problems and challenges that confronts adolescents which must be tackled, solved for proper adjustment and effective transition to the next phase of life.

Physical Traits

The aspects described under physical traits are increase in body size, rapid development, increase appetite and need for personal hygiene, increase in body size. At adolescence stage there is accelerated growth spurt development of secondary sex characteristics such as pubic hair, hair around the testes, virginal and in the armpit, increase in height and weight, broadening of chest, deepening of voice in males and onset of menstruation in females. According to Fayombo (2004) at puberty alteration include increase in body size, changes in shape and composition, rapid development of secondary sex characteristics. Some needs of the adolescent at this stage include balance diet sex education and better fitting clothes. Egbule and Ugorgi (2004).

At adolescence there is increase tendency to eat more. Increase in appetite is observed by Onoyase and Eбенуwa - Okoh (2014) who noted that the increase tendency for adolescence to eat more is to meet up with the body's demand due to the growth spurt and other development taking place within the adolescent. It is however characteristics of some females of this age bracket to be selective of food they eat. In the opinion of Ejedimu, (2007) some female adolescents eat more of pastries, indomie, soft, ice cream which may not meet the nutritional demands for healthy growth. Adolescents need balanced diet in the right proportion for wholistic growth.

Due to the growth spurt and physical activities of adolescent, they sweat more. Alordiah (2011) stated that adolescents require good personal hygiene such as clean bath, well brushed teeth, good hair cut for males and tidy hair style for the females to keep healthy and good looking. She however noted that in a bid to appear different and unique, some adolescents wear wild hair styles and put, on some funny styles of clothes, a form of deviation from conventional style. They put up some of these traits in a bid to feel belong and accepted by peers. The females would require sanitary materials for their menstrual period monthly. Both males and females will need more pants, boxers, singlet and undies, other sanitary items to meet up with development demands.

According to Alordiah, adolescents love to dress like their peers. They do not want to be seen as old fashioned. Some of the styles they prefer may not be acceptable by adults. This is an area of conflict between parents and adolescents. However, it is worthy to remark that as a result of the rapid growth at the adolescence stage, the children need new cloths that size them. The dressing does not have to be old fashioned but decent and preferably in vogue.

Emotional Sensitivity

There is increased emotional awareness and expression at this stage. This results in increased social contacts and interactions with the public. They are more emotionally responsive and they want to feel loved and important. Jide – Ojo (2013) observed that the emotions of adolescents are unpredictable and unstable, they can be excited one minute and become gloomy the next minute. In her opinion it is a period of emotional turbulence and that on the average their emotional state is largely dependent on their world view at that time. According to Fayombo (2004) parents influence is more effective when a positive child parent relationship exist.

This period is also characterized by mood swing and unstable emotional outburst. Some of them manifest impatience, sense of insecurity, some are withdrawn and some overreact to adult correction. There is obvious display of the temperamental make up of the adolescent at this stage. Newsweek (2004) opined that emotional instability make adolescents put up unacceptable behavior such as frowning, hissing, talking back at parents, rudeness, laziness, temper tantrums and sluggishness. Jide Ojo (2013) pointed out that parents need to be patient and correct the adolescent in love. Egbule and Ugorji (2000) also stated that good behavior should be strengthened through reinforcement and commendation while bad attitude should be condemned and punished.

Cognition

The aspect of adolescent development discussed under cognition are increase in cognitive functioning, curiosity and self identity.

Increase Cognitive Functioning

At the adolescence stage there is increase in cognitive functioning manifesting in abstract, logical, inductive and deductive reasoning. The adolescents imagination and initiative level is more matured. They are curious, fantasize and live in a world of their own. According to Alordiah (2011) the impact on parents and adults is that they observe more argumentative rebellious and sometimes disobedient attitudes from the adolescents. They become more conscious of the world around them, their personality become more pronounced. Adolescents actually feel they should be given freedom to make decisions for themselves.

Curiosity

Another crucial cognitive trait that manifest at adolescence is that of curiosity. This stage is characterized with curious mind, an adventurous daring and explorative mind set. In the opinion of Egbule and Ugorji (2000) The adolescent bewildered by all the changes happening within him, namely

physiological and environmental variables has a curious mind to do and dive into new ventures, irrespective of its consequence. Due to hormonal reproductive development young people are often propelled by strong curiosity, drive and the desire to respond to such inner sex urge. Of course extreme sexual curiosity fans the fire of lust and fantasy in adolescents who are naturally anxious to adventure into the unknown. In the opinion of Alordiah (2011) this is why many adolescents struggle with youthful lust and are victims of premarital sex and sexual escapades which they are not matured to handle the consequences of their actions.

Self Identity

The search for self identity is a cognitive challenge that confronts the adolescent. As the adolescent develops from childhood into puberty and their cognitivity advance to critical and abstract thinking, there is search for self identity. They strive to find their feet and ask questions such as; who am I? Where do I come from? What is my purpose? Where do I fit in? where am I going to? What is my bearing? Why should I do what? Am I still a child? Am I now an adult? What are my limit? The adolescent at this stage strive to gain independence from parental control and supervision. According to Jide Ojo (2013) this desire sometimes make them indulge in antisocial behavior deliberately to prove their maturity or as a reaction against strict parental control, this will result in conflict with parents. This is further heightened by the parents conflicting status of the adolescent. This minute parent say ‘You are no more a kid, you are an adult, a big boy’. The next minute they say “you are still a child”. Alordiah (2011) observed that this quest for identity make adolescent put up attitudes to make the adults and parents know how they feel about the situation by refusing to obey instructions, becoming aggressive, withdrawn, open confrontation and create tension in the home.

The entire experience going on within the adolescents makes them not to just act on instructions, impulse or directives. The implication is that adolescents question actions assignments in a bid to find their bearing and self identity. Jide Ojo (2013) observed that in the child’s quest for identity the parents assume that the child knows what is expected from him as norms and may likely react negatively or experience role confusion. The process of expressing self identity may portray the adolescent as stubborn and rebellious, parents need to understand this fact. Onoyase and Ebenuwa (2013) opined that adults and parents need to be tolerant, sensitive and patient with adolescents as they pass through the adolescence phase of life to foster adequate adjustment. Adolescents are very sensitive about being treated as children or treated shabbily. This is because they have the craving to achieve adult status and be so treated. It is of importance for parents to know this.

Social Traits

As the emotional sensitivity become more obvious for the adolescents social contact increase and one of such is quest for intimacy. The search for intimate friendship and relationship is a need of the adolescent. The desire to be loved, appreciated and understood make adolescents seek intimate relationship and friendship with same sex or and the opposite sex. Okorodudu and Okorodudu (2004) opined that this quest in young people if not met by the family, if parents consistently complain, castigate, criticize them, build low self esteem in them, they may be tempted to seek attention and approval from peers or elsewhere. This desired crave for intimacy has led many adolescents to indulge in lustful fantasies and take to wild lifestyle. Some of them join robbery gang, prostitution, cultism, and the likes. This is particularly common among those with low self esteem, who feel lonely, inferior, unwanted and rejected. Okobiah (2010) emphasized the importance for parents to build up positively the self esteem of the children in other to avoid deviant behaviour and negative peer or social media influence..

In the opinion of Okobiah (2010) parents should endeavour to build up positive self esteem in their children. They should avoid destructive criticism and use of abusive words on the children instead parents should befriend their children, be good role models, commend good behaviour and shun bad actions.

Other pressures and challenges the adolescent grapple with include academic difficulties, career issues, inattentiveness, shyness, absentmindedness, admission problems, aggressiveness and social adjustment.

Environmental Factors that Influence Adolescent Behaviour

There are numerous environmental factors that influence the psychology of the adolescent. They include Peer influence, mass and social media influence, and societal influence. It is important for parents, teachers, adults to have adequate knowledge of how these factors influence adolescents. The discussion is focused on the influence of peer group, mass media and the society on the adolescent behaviour.

Peer Group Influence: A peer is a person who belong to the same age group. Peers form a major socialization agent for adolescents. According to Nnachi (2003) peer group influence is a powerful factor in determining the behaviour of adolescents. The behaviour which could be positive or negative is more pronounced at adolescence. This is why parental guidance and close monitoring is paramount for adolescents in their choice of friends. There is serious peer influence in the behaviour as adolescents try to break ties from parents, in a bid to gain personal independence, adolescents tend to strengthen

ties with their peers. According to Okafor and Nnoli (2010) adolescents create their world characterized with slangs, coded language, facial expression, oath of secrecy and body language understood by their peers. A very dangerous dimension of peer influence on each other is that adolescents tend to confide and rely more on counsels and suggestions of peers regarding their parents and other adults as old fashioned.

Fayombo (2004) asserted that the attitude of parents influence their children positively or negatively he stated that parents who create opportunities for their children to discuss with them, make the home to be conducive. Loving, warm and caring attitude of parents tend to reduce the negative influence of peers on children than those who do not create time to interact with their children.

Mass Media Influence

The adolescence period is characterized with adventurous tendency. Most adolescent spend endless hours on the internet (social media). This has to be guided and curtailed. Research has indentified the mass media and social media as a major contributory factor that influence the behaviour of adolescents. Ubom (2000) asserted that mass media such as radio, television, GSM mobile, the print media and other electronic device disseminate both helpful, harmful and dangerous information that influence the behaviour of adolescents. In the opinion of Alordiah (2011) the influence of cell phone and social media is telling much on adolescent behaviour negatively and positively. Okobial (2010) asserted that adolescents copy wrong models from the electronic media because parents fail in their duties to supervise them.

It is pertinent to mention that the adolescents of today spend more of their quality time with the social media. We are confronted with the problem of media pressure on adolescents and unlimited access to the social media in a global world with mobile internet. More research need to be carried out on this issue. There has to be proper sensory of what youths are exposed to watch or listen to through the social media and the internet by relevant censoring bodies. In the opinion of Chapman (2010) modern technology is exposing teenagers to the best and worst of human culture, confusing them. According to Rawlins (1992) addiction to cyberspace prevalent among adolescents cuts short their physical activities and results in unhealthy sedentary life style.

Societal Influence

A lot of happenings and double standard displayed by adults in society confuse the adolescents and put them in a dilemma as to what is morally right and wrong. This confusion is further heightened by hypocritical parents and adults who condemn wrong actions such as examination malpractices, sexual promiscuity, lying, cultism, stealing, corruption, loose morals and the likes

publicly but who themselves indulge in such acts secretly and publicly. This dual lifestyle trouble the adolescents and influence their attitude negatively.

Onoyase and Eбенуwa Okoh (2014) mentioned that negative environmental influence on adolescents includes celebration of bad wealthy models, nudity, indecent dressing and bad music and celebrities publicly. Eweniyi (1998) observed the modern society undue emphasis on sex, it is almost impossible to go about one's daily living without being bombarded by suggestive influence of modern culture. This is because billboards, magazines, adverts on radio, television and the internet use sex to attract potential buyers. Egbule and Ugorji (2000) postulated that much of today's amusement is centered around unwholesome sex attraction, low coarse music suitable for sex orgies fills the air waves, lewd sex literature flood newsstands consumed daily by hundreds of adolescents. The youths get distorted information from such untreated sources. The point is that constant sex bombardment and negative attractions result in unwholesome stimulation to the exclusion of fine wholesome activities. Alordiah (2011) maintained that parents must bear in mind that the environment under which they grew is different from what obtains today.

Implications for Parenting

Parenthood is a divine call to nurture and train the child who is God's gift. It is a lifelong assignment, characterized with different challenges. As the children pass through different phases of life each phase has its peculiar needs of required adjustment. It is important for parents to be knowledgeable about the challenges and changes confronting the adolescents and take appropriate steps to provide the needed counsel, guidance and provision for proper adjustment.

There is need for parents to be close to their adolescents, befriend them, create room for friendly discussion and interaction. Ask them questions and provide correct information for them. This is where appropriate parenting style plays a paramount role in moulding the adolescent to avert maladjustment. Herein lies the implications for parenting.

Parenthood and Parenting Styles

Parenting is the process of taking care of children until they are old enough to take care of themselves. Parenthood is a difficult and cumbersome task that requires diligence and commitment. It is therefore important that parents learn and device good and effective parenting styles, particularly for adolescents. Umoh (2000) opined that parenting style contribute in children behaviour and wellbeing. When parents approach towards discipline, communication and interaction are faulty and inconsistent the adolescent may be influenced negatively. Okorodudu and Okorodudu (2003) asserted that

disorganized attachment patterns of infancy period is a major cause of child's conduct problem in later life.

Parenting Style and their Effects

Good parenting style is a core requirement for parents. Adeloje (2007) categorized parenting styles into three namely; Authoritarian parent, Authoritative and Permissive parent. Each of these style affect the psychology of children and adolescents.

The Authoritarian parenting style is characterized by high parental expectations and strict standards that the child conforms without questioning. Bad behaviour is punished but good behaviour is rewarded. Most children raised by authoritarian parents are passive or rebellious. They exhibit low self esteem and do not learn to think for themselves they lack social skills, lack curiosity and spontaneity. Such children are more likely to yield to peer pressure. Certainly this may not be the best desirable parenting style to adopt for raising well behaved adolescents.

Permissive parenting style is non directive and non punitive. Parents set few rules or limitations for their children. The children are allowed to do what they like and regulate their activities. Permissive parents are more responsible than demanding, they avoid confrontation with their children and protect them from adversity. Children brought up by permissive parents grow up to be passive, rebellious and feel insecure. This may not be the best parenting style for rearing adolescents.

Authoritative Parenting according to Quinn and Quinna (2007) is characterized by parent's high standard and expectations of compliance to their directions and rules. There is open dialogue about the rules and the child's behaviour. Authoritative parents provide children with clear reasonable expectations and explanations on what and why it should be so. Parents monitor the children closely in a warm loving manner, reinforce good behaviour positively and condemn bad behaviour. Adeloje (2007) reported that findings from child behaviour research show that the authoritative parenting style has more benefits over other parenting styles because the children so raised with authoritative parenting style have more self confident, are more emotionally stable and are not easily misled by peers.

Umoh (2000) maintained that young people whose parents support their autonomy while providing clear boundaries as to what is acceptable and expected behaviour are less likely to engage in violent, aggressive deviant, unruly behaviour. Parental knowledge, responsiveness, provision, sensitivity and involvement in the lives of their children as they grow through the developmental stage of adolescence is key to adequate adjustment and wellbeing of the adolescent.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the adolescence phase is a critical formative age that determine the compass of the child. Parents should approach training adolescents with adequate knowledge of adolescent development and psychology, prayer, sensitivity, love, personal attention, effective parenting style and commitment. The right attitude of parents will enable the adolescents scale through that phase triumphantly with minimal errors. This paper discussed the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development traits of adolescents and the accompany challenges. Some environmental factors that influence the behaviour of adolescents namely; peer influence, mass media, social media, and societal factors were discussed. The implication for parents which centered on adequate knowledge of adolescent development and psychology, parenting styles and friendly parent child relationship were discussed.

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