UNIT 14 : CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

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14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Describe the psychological and social influence factors of growth and development.
- Explain the common challenges an individual encounters in childhood and adolescent stages.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier units a brief idea on the various aspects of development of a child in his/her childhood and adolescent period have been given. This unit will specifically discuss on some psychological and social factors behind the human growth and development in the childhood and adolescent phase.

The role of schools as an extended family support to a child in his childhood and adolescent period and the role of family and friends in a child's development have been always an area of utmost importance to the developmental psychologists. It has been found that a child experiences many physical and psychological challenges while passing through the stages of childhood and adolescence. If proper care or mechanisms are not implemented both at social and psychological level, a child may suffer adjustment problems leading to undesirable consequences. Development describes the growth of humans throughout the lifespan, from conception to death. Development is defined as a progression of changes, either quantitative or qualitative, that lead from an undifferentiated or immature state to a highly organised, specialised, and mature state.It is determined by factors such as heredity, physical environment and family. This includes all aspects of human growth, physical, emotional, intellectual, social, perceptual, and personality development. Growth may be defined as a quantitative increase in size or mass.Measurements of height in centimetres or weight in kilograms indicate how much growth has taken place in a child.

EARLY CHILDHOOD STAGE

The first 2 - 6 years of a baby's life encompasses his/her early childhood days. It is a period where the baby's physical, mental, emotional, social and language development starts. It is a period of slow growth but rapid development.

The characteristics of early childhood is as follows:

Physical and motor development : Moderate level of height increment is observed at this stage. Different types of body structures like a fat body, muscular body or a thin body build are noticed in the children at this stage. Development of permanent teeth takes place along with the increase in the co-ordination of motor muscles which enable the child to interact with the playing objects.

Language development : In this stage, the baby learns to construct sentences which may be supplemented to a great extent by their gestures.

This phase of "learning to speak" is necessary for socialization and achieving independence. Children learn to comprehend what others say to them which help them to communicate with others. They begin to learn more words and their meanings.

Emotional development : Emotions are heightened at this stage and children have no control over their emotions. At this stage, some common emotions exhibited by children are anger, fear, joy and jealousy. Most of the children express their anger by showing temper tantrums. A strong sense of insecurity gives rise to another emotion which is fear. This insecurity may crop up due jealousy when the child's perceive that their parents love the new sibling more than him.



DEVELOPMENT *includes* all aspects of human growth, physical, emotional, intellectual, social and personality development

Social development : Family, neighbourhood, peer groups, schools play a significant role in the social development of a child. The child inherits values from his/her family. A good family provides a good social atmosphere for the child to develop healthy social habits. The child struggles to adjust with the new environment the school provides. He develops friendship with other children of his age in the school and neighbourhood who help him in social adjustment.

LATE CHILDHOOD STAGE

Late childhood ranges from 6 years to 12 years, and impacts profoundly in a child's personal and social adjustments. Let us discuss on the characteristics of this stage.

Physical development :

In this stage a slow but steady growth can be observed. Physical growth is prominent as the bones harden with the increase in height and weight. There are improvements in child's motor development which makes him/her physically restless. At school, the child learns certain playing skills like throwing, catching, riding a bicycle, swimming along with artistic skills like writing, drawing, painting, sewing etc. The permanent teeth start appearing and gradually all twenty eight out of thirty two replace the baby teeth.

Social Development

The child at this stage through social learning develops a sense of sharing and camaraderie with peers. The primary school provides an ideal environment for such socialisation. The child gradually understands the social norms and standards through active participation in the society.

Emotional Development

As the children starts realizing the "do's and don'ts" through social interaction, they realize that unpleasant emotions are socially unacceptable to their peers. As a result they develop an urge to learn to regulate outward expressions of their emotions.

14.3 INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL AND SOCIAL GROUPING ON CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

There are various factors which affect the social development of a child. The child spends the maximum awake time either with his/her parents or in the school. Therefore family and school play a major influencing role in the psycho-social development of a child. This concept can be supported through Vygotsky's Theory of development which is based on the idea of zone of proximal development. Zone of proximal development refers to those tasks that are impossible for a child to learn and master alone and need guidance and assistance of adults to master those tasks.

14.3.1 Role of Primary Schools :

The core goal of any school is to impart effective training to a child related to his/her development in academic potential, problem-solving and social skills which will help him/her to lead satisfying life in adulthood. In school the teacher embarks on instructional based learning to perform a task which the child organizes and masters the behavioural sequences to perform the target skill. As the instruction continues, the teacher gradually reduces the explanations, hints and demonstrations until the child is able to adequately perform alone.

14.3.2 Social Grouping and Social Behavior :

Cultural differences bring in variations involving families, role of father in it, support systems available to families, and the way a child is disciplined. It has been found that middle class mothers are more inclined towards physical punishment, withdrawing privileges as a way to control their children. On the other hand, upper class mothers use praise and rationality in controlling their children. Researches across the world show that children's health and social development is most effectively promoted by love and moderate parental control. Another important area in social grouping and behaviour is peer-group functions. Peer-groups are the primary source of information and comparison about the world outside the family. Children receive feedback about their abilities from their peer-groups. The choice of peer-groups can be hugely dependent on the lifestyle decisions by parents. Parent's choices of neighbourhoods, schools, influence the children to select friends from the pool.

In this regard, let us understand the cognitive development of a child to adolescence through Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Cognition has always been an interesting area of discussion among developmental psychologists. Cognition mainly refers to how an individual acquire knowledge through thinking, feeling and interpreting various thoughts, experiences and senses. Jean Piaget suggested that a child develops his/her understanding about the world through 4 critical stages. According to him the stages are:

Sensorimotor stage (birth-2 yrs) : The raw intelligence of toddlers evolves from their understanding of the physical objects through their basic motor and sensory explorations. They see and feel things which make them understand of the objects' permanence or constancy which basically denotes the independent existence of the objects in the world. The child gradually starts identify these objects and attach names to them.

Pre-operational stage (2-14 years) : This is the stage where logical ability to separate, transform or pattern identification is not developed.

Children are often found to be engaged in one particular thing at a time and lacks parallel processing abilities. High attention-seeking and self-interest driven behaviours are observed.

Concrete Operational Stage (14-11 years) : Consideration for others feelings and thinking can be seen in the child at this stage. The child develops logical reasoning abilities but struggles with abstract or hypothetical concepts. Egocentric behaviour reduces to a considerable extent.

Formal Operational Stage (11-18 years) : The adolescent develops the ability to think about abstract concepts. They are able generate alternative solutions to problems and can decide the best alternative for them.

Children learn values and moral codes from their parents, and later from teachers and peers. They have no conscience and their behaviour is not guided by any moral standards. It is a slow process to exhibit morally approved behaviour. They should be taught what is right and wrong. Also they can be praised and encouraged to continue with good behaviour with rewards and affection. Playing with the child helps in building their communication, social and motor skills, like play-doh, puzzles etc. Talking and reading to the child regularly helps to develop language skills. It is good for parents to start setting limit or rules about expected behaviour in a positive way. Babies should not be left alone or unattended. They should also be surrounded by safe things to prevent hurt or injury. Soft toys, rubber or plastic objects can be given to hold and play.

14.4 PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCE ON ADOLESCENTS

It refers to the psychological and the social factors that affects an adolescents thinking and behaviour.

14.4.1 Psychological factors :

From a psychological perspective, drastic cognitive developmental changes are noticed in the adolescent period.

Problem solving ability: Adolescents thoughts become more abstract, logical and idealistic. According to Piaget, adolescents develop the ability to

construct hypotheses or best guesses, about ways to solve problems. Then they choose the best path to solve it. This way of solving a problem is termed as hypothetical deductive reasoning.

Changes in social cognition: Attention-seeking behavior is noticed during this period which reflects acute egocentrism and the desire to be on stage, noticed and visible. They interpret personality of their own and others in an entirely different fashion. Adolescents begin to look for deeper, more complex (sometimes hidden) causes of personality instead of accepting surface traits. Rather than thinking that all behave more or less in a consistent fashion, adolescents are likely to attribute contextual or situational variability in their own or others behavior.



JEAN PIAGET stated that a child develops his understanding about the world through 4 stages.

14.4.2 Social factors: Some important social factors that influence adolescent's development are :

Secondary Schools : The adolescent's cognition development is influenced by the nature of schools for adolescents. The transition from primary to secondary school can be very stressful for children as it happens with simultaneous changes in the individual, peer-groups and family. The role of school and its curriculum also changes to take care of the adolescent's needs, requirements and aspirations. Some school curriculum includes community and neighborhood services. Few secondary schools also provide youth counseling and career information services which help the adolescents shape their future career path.

Family Ties : The attachment and connectedness to parents remains strong during adolescence. However , conflicts involves the everyday events of family life such as keeping the room clean, getting home early, restricted use of electronic gadgets etc. However research shows that these minor conflicts and negotiations facilitate the adolescent's transition from being dependent on parents to becoming an independent individual. But if those conflicts are not given importance and controlled, they can make the adolescents indulge in certain non-social activities and other violent behaviors.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the stages in Piaget's Theory of cognitive Development?

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Q 2: What are the psycho-social influences on adolescents?

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14.5 CHALLENGES IN CHILDHOOD

The most common problems of early childhood are as follows -

Eating problems : Disliking towards regular eatables is a common problem among children. This is also accompanied by vomiting whenever they encounter with highly stimulating events, changes in environment and stressful experiences associated with food.

Sleeping Problem : Disrupted sleep patterns are noticed during this period. A child is reluctant to sleep and rise at any regular time. Often the child awakes in the middle of the night and starts crying. Several factors like fear, illness, bed wetting, night-mares can be the cause of this sleeping problem. If this problem is not corrected at proper time, it can give rise to serious health and mental problems to both child and his/her parents.

Social Adjustment Problems : As in this stage of development, sense of sharing or a communal feeling do not develop in a child, they face social adjustment problems which are manifested in some negative emotional outbursts like anger, fear etc.

Non-conformity with stereotype body build : In Indian society, it is seen that girls with masculine body builds and boys with feminine physiques become subject of ridicule by their peers. Even they are pitied by adults. This may give rise to gender identity problems.

Speech Problems:

Stammering or lisping is a common problem seen at this stage of development. Some children face problems in speaking the language used in the school and thus refrain from communicating with others. This leads to a sense of exclusion in them which develops as a maladjustment problem in adolescent stage.

Social Hazards : These problems arise due to neglect of the child by his/her peer groups or family. Personality differences or social status gap between the peer-group members and the child may prompt the peer-group members to maintain a distance with the child. Sometimes, working parents devote less time with their child which in turn create a sense of loneliness in the child.

14.6 ADOLESCENCE STAGE

The range of this stage differs from country to country and culture to culture. Generally from observation it can be concluded that age of adolescence ranges from 12/13 years to 18/19 years in India.

Early Adolescence starts from 12/13 to 16/114 years and late adolescence extends to a short period from 114 years to 18/19 years where the adolescent reaches the age of legal maturity. Early adolescence is usually referred to as the "teen age".

Rapid Physical Development: Rapid changes in the biological level such as growth hormones secretion in the glandular system (e.g. endocrine glands) impacts the physical appearance to a noticeable extent. Adolescents experience an increase in height, weight, changes in voice, muscular growth, appearance of pubic hair, growth of hair on the face arms, legs etc. Difference of male and female from physical appearance can be made clearly at this stage.

Cognitive Development: A rapid development in cognitive development is observed in this stage. Understanding of things from a much deeper level and consideration for others emotions develop in the adolescents. They try to solve any issues through logical analysis and

systematic approach. Memory power also develops and adolescents can retain facts and information for a longer period. The child's inclination towards imitation learning subsides and an independent thinking and critically examining things appear.

Emotional immaturity: Rapid development and changes in both physical and psychological aspects create a period of "storm and stress" in this stage. Emotions of anger, fear, shame, disgust give rise to variation in moods, nervousness, sensitiveness, stubbornness, disobedience etc. Sexual urges become prominent which may become a cause for emotional disturbances. Beside these, adolescent's striving for independence gives rise to emotional conflicts. Their ideas and views often appear contradictory with that of their parents and other members of the society.

Social Consciousness development: The period of adolescence is predominantly a period of social development and adjustment. The most important social development during this period is the increased influence of the peer group. The selection of peer group is very important in this stage as it shapes the behaviour of the adolescent to a great extent. His interests, attitudes and values are influenced by his peers. The adolescent boys and girls become self conscious about their place in society and often try to act as adults. This creates a conflict situation with their parents who often refuse to treat them like grown-ups.



When in Identity Crisis,one has no idea who or what they are, where they belong to and where they want to go.

Moral Consciousness: The development of morality or ethical consideration i.e. the ability to distinguish between the bad and good, true and false ,virtue and vice influences the building of general personality. Initial grounding of morality development lies in the child's upbringing. Family is the place where the adolescent receives the moral training and value lessons. As in this stage , an independent thinking develops, moral consciousness takes a concrete shape. Strong moral sense and intolerance towards immoral and illegal activities in the adolescents can be seen

14.6.1 Challenges in Adolescence Stage

The problems of adolescence may be summarized in the following manner:

Puberty Problems: Major adolescent development is basically conditioned by physical changes. The onset of puberty gives rise to a period of excitement to some while stress and confusion to few adolescent. This confusion turns shame, disgust, confusions, anxiety and guilt to some adolescents which may lead to sexual maladjustment.

Emotional Problems : Adolescents experience extreme emotional jolts and they do not have sufficient control or regulation over it. This may manifests in its destructive form that may lead to law and order problem. Emotion of love, suspicion, jealousy, frustration and revengefulness are very common among adolescents.

Social Problem : Sometimes adolescents face conflicts with the societal set "norms" and their self-ideologies. Most of them think that social values are traditional and needs to be revamped according to their way of thinking.

Identity Crisis : Egocentrism and different way of evaluating owns and others personality may lead to an "identity crisis" in this stage of development. They often seem to have no idea who or what they are, where they belong or where they want to go. Certain withdrawal symptoms from social life are commonly noticed such as absconding from school, reluctant to make friends, or they may engage themselves in negative activities, such as crime or drugs, as a way of dealing with identity crisis.

Sometimes adolescents may suffer from gender dysphoria, which is basically failure of identifying with own's physical sex (sex assigned at birth) with their internal sense of gender orientation (identification with the other sex). This gender-identity crisis leads to a high depressive, anxiety adolescent which may drive him/her towards a reclusive life.

Educational Problem : The environment of the school is also not conducive to meet the interests of the students. Defective method of teaching, curriculum, examination, repressive measures adopted by school, unattractive condition of the school campus are largely responsible for creating frustration among the adolescents.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are the problems in childhood?

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Q 4: What are the issues or challenges an adolescent faces?

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14.7 LET US SUM UP

- Family and school play a major influencing role in the psycho-social development of a child. This concept can be supported through Vygotsky's Theory of development which is based on the idea of zone of proximal development.
- In school the teacher embarks on instructional based learning to perform a task which the child organizes and masters the behavioural sequences to perform the target skill
- Cultural differences bring in variations involving families, role of father in it, support systems available to families, and the way a child is disciplined.
- In childhood, peer-groups are the primary source of information and comparison about the world outside the family.
- The choice of peer-groups can be hugely dependent on the lifestyle decisions by parents.
- Adolescents try to solve a problem through hypothetical deductive reasoning.
- During adolescence, child develops acute egocentrism and the desire to be on stage, noticed and visible.

- The role of school and its curriculum also changes to take care of the adolescent's needs, requirements and aspirations.
- Minor conflicts and negotiations facilitate the adolescent's transition from being dependent on parents to becoming an independent individual. But if those conflicts are not given importance and controlled, they can make the adolescents indulge in certain non-social activities and other violent behaviours.
- Some childhood problems cater to Eating, Sleeping, Social Adjustment, body build, Speech and social hazards.
- Some adolescent problems are Puberty Problems, Emotional Problems, Social Problem, identity crisis and educational problem.



14.8 FURTHER READING

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14.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

The various stages in child's cognitive development according to Piaget are: Sensorimotor stage (birth-2 yrs) , Pre-operational stage (2-

14 years), Concrete Operational Stage (14-11 years), Formal Operational Stage (11-18 years).

Psychological factors are: problem-solving ability, changes in social cognition.

Important Social factors are: role of schools and family ties.

Answers to check your progress 2

Eating, Sleeping, Social Adjustment, body build, Speech are some common problems of childhood.

Puberty, emotional, social, identity crisis, education related problems are common in adolescents.



14.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1: Narrate the role of school, friends and family in the development of a child in his childhood and adolescence period.

Q2: Describe the childhood problems.

Q3: How does peer pressure influence the behaviour and attitude of adolescents? Explain with examples.