UNIT 7 : CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Influence Of School And Social Grouping On Childhood Development

7.3.1 Role Of Primary Schools

7.3.2 Social Grouping And Social Behaviour

7.4 Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

7.5 Psychosocial Factors Affecting Adolescence

7.4.1 Psychological Factors

7.4.2 Social Factors

7.6 Challenges In Childhood

7.7 Challenges In Adolescence

7.8 Let Us Sum Up

7.9 Further Reading

7.10 Answers To Check Your Progress

7.11 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will enable you to:

- Enhance your understanding of the psychological and social influence factors of growth and development.
- Learn about the common challenges an individual encounters in childhood and adolescent stages.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier units you learnt about the various aspects of the development of a child in his/her childhood and adolescence. This unit will discuss some specific psychological and social factors behind human growth and development in childhood and adolescence.

The role of the school as an extended family support to a child in his

or her childhood and adolescent period, and the role of family and friends in a child's development have been areas of utmost significance to 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 put in place at both social and psychological levels, a child may suffer adjustment problems resulting in undesirable consequences.

7.3 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 waking time either with his/her parents or in the school. Therefore family and school play a major role in influencing the psycho-social development of a child. This notion is supported through Vygotsky's Theory of Development which is based on the idea of zone of proximal development (ZPD). The 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.



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7.3.1 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 a satisfactory life in adulthood. In school teachers need to use instruction based learning to encourage the child to perform a task, so that the child learns to organize and master the behavioural sequences to practise the target skill. As the instruction continues, the teacher gradually reduces the explanations, hints and demonstrations until the child is adequately able to perform the task on his/her own.

7.3.2 Social grouping and social behaviour:

Cultural differences bring in variations involving families, such as the role of the father, 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. Research 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 feedback about the world outside the family. Children receive feedback about their abilities from their peer-groups. The choice of a peer-group can depend to a large extent on the lifestyle decisions by parents. Parent's choices of neighbourhoods and schools, influence the children to select friends from the available pool.

7.4 PIAGET'S THEORY OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Cognition has always been an interesting area of discussion among developmental psychologists. Cognition refers to the ability of an individual to 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 four critical stages, which are:

Sensorimotor stage (birth-2 yrs): The raw intelligence of toddlers evolves from their understanding of 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 object in the world. The child gradually starts to identify these objects and attach names to them.

Pre-operational stage (2-7 years): This is the stage where logical ability to separate, transform or identify patterns is not developed. Children are often found to be engaged in one particular thing at a time and lacking parallel processing abilities. High attention-seeking and self-interest driven behaviours are observed at this stage.

Concrete operational Stage (7-11 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): In this stage, adolescents develop the ability to think about abstract concepts. They are able to generate alternative solutions to problems and can decide the best alternative for themselves.

7.5 PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING ADOLESCENTS

7.5.1 Psychological factors:

From a psychological perspective, rapid changes in cognitive development are noticed in the adolescence period.

1) Problem solving ability: At adolescence, a human being's 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 hypothetical deductive reasoning.

2) Changes in social cognition: Attention-seeking behaviour is noticed during this period which reflects acute egocentrism and the desire to be on stage, noticed or visible. Adolescents interpret their own and others' personality 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' behaviour.

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7.5.2 Social factors:

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

1) Secondary Schools: The adolescent's cognitive development is

influenced by the nature of their schooling. 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 the school and its curriculum also changes to take care of the adolescent's needs, requirements and aspirations. Some school curricula include community and neighborhood services. A few secondary schools also provide youth counseling and career information services which help the adolescents shape their future career path.

2) Family Ties: The attachment and connectedness to parents remains strong during adolescence. However, conflicts occur during the everyday events of family life such as keeping the room clean, getting home early, restricted use of electronic gadgets etc. Research shows that these minor conflicts and negotiations facilitate the adolescent's transition from dependence on parents to becoming independent. But if these conflicts are not given due attention and if they are not controlled, they can make the adolescents indulge in certain unsocial activities and other violent behaviours.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS -1

1. What are the stages in Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development?
2. What are the psycho-social influences on adolescents?

7.6 CHALLENGES IN CHILDHOOD

The most common problems of early childhood are as follows -

Eating problems: Dislike towards regular food is a common problem among children. This is also accompanied by vomiting whenever they encounter 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 and nightmares can be the cause of this sleeping problem. If this problem is not addressed at the proper time, it can give rise to serious health and mental problems for both the child and his/her parents.

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

Non-conformity with stereotypical body build: In Indian society, it is seen that girls with masculine body build and boys with feminine mannerisms become the subject of ridicule of their peers. They are sometimes also pitied and ridiculed 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 the 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 from the child. Sometimes, working parents devote less time to their child which in turn creates a sense of loneliness in the child.

7.7 CHALLENGES IN ADOLESCENCE

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

Puberty Problems: Adolescent development is basically conditioned by physical changes. The onset of puberty gives rise to a sense of excitement to some while it may cause stress and confusion in other adolescents. This confusion may turn into shame, disgust, anxiety and guilt in 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 manifest itself in destructive forms that may lead to law and order problems. Emotions like love, suspicion, jealousy, frustration and revengefulness are very common among adolescents.

Social Problems: Sometimes adolescents face conflicts between the set 'norms' of society and their self-ideologies. Most of them think that social values are traditional and need to be revamped to their way of thinking.

Identity Crisis: Egocentrism and different ways of evaluating one's own and others' personality may lead to an 'identity crisis' in this stage of development. They often seem to have no idea of 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, reluctance to make friends, engaging 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 aligning one's physical sex (sex assigned at birth) with the internal sense of gender orientation (identification with the other sex). This gender-identity crisis usually results in making an adolescent highly depressive or anxious, which may drive him/her towards a reclusive life.

Educational Problems: The environment of the school may also not be conducive to the interests of the students. A defective method of teaching, an unsuitable curriculum, a tight examination system, repressive measures adopted by the school, the unappealing condition of the school campus are aspects largely responsible for creating frustration among adolescents.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS -2

1. What are the problems of childhood?
2. What are the issues or challenges an adolescent faces?



7.8 LET US SUM UP

- Family and school play a major influence 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 uses an instruction based learning to enable the child to perform a task which allow the child to organize and master the behavioural sequences to practise the target skill.
- Cultural differences bring in variations involving families, the role of the father, support systems available to families, and the way a child is disciplined.
- In childhood, peer-groups are the primary source of information and feedback about the world outside the family.
- The choice of peer-groups can be hugely dependent on the lifestyle decisions of parents.
- Adolescents try to solve a problem through hypothetical deductive reasoning.
- During adolescence, a child develops acute egocentrism and the desire to be on stage, noticed and visible.

- The role of the school and the curriculum also changes to take care of the adolescent's needs, requirements and aspirations.
- Minor conflicts and negotiations facilitate the adolescent's transition from dependence on parents to becoming independent. But if these conflicts are not addressed and controlled, they can make the adolescents indulge in certain unsocial activities and other violent behaviours.
- Some childhood problems relate to eating, sleeping, social adjustment, body build, speech and social hazards.
- Some problems of adolescence include puberty problems, emotional problems, social problems, identity crisis and educational problems.



7.9 FURTHER READING

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- Santrock, J. W. (2009). Life-span development. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress 1

1. The various stages in child's cognitive development according to Piaget are: Sensorimotor stage (birth-2 yrs), Pre-operational stage (2-7 years), Concrete Operational Stage (7-11 years), Formal Operational Stage (11-18 years).
2. Some psychological factors faced by adolescents are: problem-solving ability and changes in social cognition.
   The important social factors affecting adolescence are: role of schools and family ties.

Answers to Check Your Progress 2

1. Eating, sleeping, social adjustment, body build, speech are some common problems of childhood.
2. Puberty, emotional, social, identity crisis and education related problems are common in adolescents.



7.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Narrate the role of the school, friends and family in the development of a child in childhood and adolescence period.
2. Describe the problems of the childhood and adolescence stages.
3. What is the meaning of social hazards ?
4. Describe the Psychosocial factors affecting adolescents.
5. Explain Piaget's Four stages of cognitive development of a child.

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