

The Adolescent Mind

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Abstract: This paper presents a research based enquiry into a teenager's mind.

Duration of Field-Work: Two months

Keywords: adolescent mind.

1. Introduction

Being a psychology aspirant and enthusiast I have always been very curious to explore the subject deeply and beyond the regular textbook. In Class XI, I learnt about human development under which I learnt about different domains of human development, such as, cognitive development, physical development and socio-emotional development.

The human stage of development which I related to was, adolescence which is a transition period between childhood and adulthood.

Being an adolescent, I could relate to the concept and understood all the characteristics, changes and challenges of this stage.

Later in class XII, I studied a bit more about psychological disorders, such as, anxiety disorders, somatic disorder and depression. Apart from my Psychology Textbook I found time to study a bit more about these disorders from case studies, references and web resources.

Having gained insightful knowledge about disorders and human development stages, I decided to do an intensive case study about a person preferably an adolescent.

2. Details of My Study

Subject: Ishaan Mehra

Background Information:

- Male
- 17 years' old
- Belongs to upper stratum of society

Father owns a business; Mother is a self-employed professional.

- Good score in Class X
- Sudden downward trend in academic achievements.
- Behavioural changes observed synchronous with academic downturn.

Tools Used for Data Collection:

- Interview Method – Subject's Mother, Subject, Subject's friend.
- Observation – at home, in the play field.
- Psychometric testing – Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, Global Adjustment Scale.

3. OBSERVATIONS

- The subject has a constant feeling of being exhausted despite being physically fit and healthy.
- The entire day appears to be packed with academic pursuits. School Time is supplemented with inputs from personal tutors.
- There is no designated 'Me Time'.
- Any time spent away from books is loaded with 'guilt'.
- There are almost no family outings.
- As put by the subject, the parents rarely seem to talk to each other. All 'conversation' is in the 'argument mode' and often leads to use of inappropriate language.
- The subject is terrified that his parents' divorce is a possibility.
- The subject feels 'suffocated' by the parents' high expectations about his scholastic achievements.
- The subject reported that the parents are united in their excessively harsh criticism of his performance.
- The subjects' pleas for a reduced burden of tuitions have been always been met with negative remarks questioning his ability to navigate 'on his own'.
- The subject spoke of a one-way communication with his parents with the talking done mostly by the parents.
- The subject expressed helplessness and extreme frustration at having no say and control in his life.
- The subject stays alone most of the time because both the parents are preoccupied with their respective careers.
- The subject expressed a desire to do well at school but reported a self-realization about having a much reduced attention span and a general lack of 'interest' in academics.
- The subject complained that most of his classmates and playmates have moved away due to his being, what he himself states as, a 'freak'.
- The subject has confessed that he does feel a 'sort of anger' whenever his parents criticize his performance in school.
- The subject has decided to take his parents' criticism without arguing or 'talking back'.
- The subject is aware that his quiet demeanour has led his parents to assume that he is being his usual quiet and reserved self.
- The subject indicated on several occasions that his parents have no clue about his 'resentment'.

- A close friend reported that the subject is very good at sketching, drawing etc. and that he has “great artistic skills”.
- The subject was hesitant about talking about his talents and confided that he had often been scolded by his parents for wasting his time in useless activities.

4. Conclusion

During the research work I was able to match the subject’s behavioural characteristics with what the textbooks had to offer.

In one of my interactions with the subject, it was revealed that he had been enrolled for a career counselling session by his parents but the counsellor suggested therapy for his ‘problems’. His parents had reacted in the expected manner and ruled out the very existence of a problem rather than arranging for the recommended intervention by an expert.

Being the only son, his parents are over-protective and over-possessive. I feel that the subject’s mother’s difficult pregnancy and life threatening child-birth were a major contributory factor in the parents’ attitude towards the subject.

However, I could sense that his parents’ over-protectiveness brings no joy to the subject. In fact, on one occasion he confided that he feels frustrated and embarrassed in front of others due to his parents’ display of affection.

The mother’s approach was of complete denial. She was confident that her son was under no pressure regarding his studies. In the same breath, however, she accepted, with an evident degree of pride, that all nonscholastic activities had been “temporarily suspended for his own good”.

I am lucky that I have the theoretical perspectives presented by different psychologists. The various theories that I studied in my Psychology Course helped me gain a ‘three-dimensional’ understanding of the subject and his behaviour.

Erik Erikson in his theory of psychosocial stages did explain the importance of warm parental relationship (Trust vs Mistrust Stage) which further leads to trust and if not received will lead to mistrust and insecurity.

Failure of a warm and kind relationship leads to a belief that the world is inconsistent and unpredictable.

In others stages, autonomy versus shame; industry versus inferiority; and initiative versus guilt, and also Erikson emphasizes that a child needs parental support and should be allowed to make choices and gain control in, at least the most basic, decisions at home. Only then the child is able to develop a sense of autonomy. A sense of inadequacy, shame, guilt and self-doubt gets embedded in the personality of a child who suffers from parental neglect and is not involved in decision making processes at home.

Children need to be encouraged and their actions and achievements have to be commended by parents / elders in order to nourish their consciousness of self-worth.

Erikson’s fifth stage of development, when the teenager is facing the identity vs role conflict, has been described as the most challenging and turbulent time of an individual’s life.

Developing one’s personal identity is very significant. Those who receive positive reinforcement, and encouragement through the process of self-exploration emerge from this stage

with a strong sense of self and feelings of independence and control. Teenagers who are not allowed to explore and test out different identities, on the other hand, might be left with what Erikson refers to as role confusion. Such young adults are usually unsure of who they are and where they fit.

Carl Roger’s theory has also played an important role in my study. Rogers’ view that for people to ‘grow’, they need an environment of openness and self-disclosure. They need acceptance and empathy.

As his theory assumed that people are constantly engaged in the process of actualising their true self.

Rogers’ suggests that each person has a concept of ideal self (basically what the person like to be). When there is correspondence between real and true self of a person then he generally is happy but if there is discrepancy between the real and ideal self then it leads to unhappiness and dissatisfaction

Rogers’ also recognised the role of our social environment and influences on our self-concept.

In the case of my subject, the social conditions were negative. Also, there was a discrepancy in his ideal and true self which led to poor self-concept and self-esteem, unhappiness and dissatisfaction

After my intensive research, I understood and concluded that the parenting style also has a direct bearing on the healthy development of the child.

Adolescence is a period of stress and storm. The many physical, sexual, cognitive, social, and emotional changes that happen during this stage can bring anxiety for both teen and parents.

A teenager’s adolescent years will be less stressful when parents and child have an open and transparent relationship.

The freedom that is available to a child that allows her/him to talk openly about issues/problems is one of the main aspects of this potentially explosive stage.

Developing this relationship and open communication takes time, persistence and understanding on either side, more of course, on the part of the more ‘mature’ parents.

Parents’ investment of time and energy in the child’s early years can prevent small problems of childhood from becoming larger problems of adolescence.

I have also read about types of parenting styles, concept given by developmental psychologists, Diana Baumrind and Maccoby and Martin.

The four types of Parenting Styles are:

1. Authoritative Style
2. Authoritarian Style
3. Permissive Style
4. Neglectful Style

I concluded, after reading, that best parenting style which should be adopted is the Authoritative Style of parenting which is characterized by reasonable demands and high responsiveness.

This approach avoids punishment and threats and instead relies on strategies such as positive reinforcement. Research, too, suggests that this parenting style is the most effective one.

Teens adopt mannerisms and general behavioural traits by watching their parents. Our actions speak louder than our

words. Therefore, parents need to show their teen how to cope up with stress in positive ways and to be resilient.

Be a good role model and your teen is likely to follow your lead.

References

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