



## REVIEW PAPER

# Adolescence: a psychological perspective

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Received: 06-05-2025

Revised: 25-05-2025

Editorial approval: 30-05-2025

Checked for plagiarism: yes

Peer-reviewed article: yes

Editor who approved: Prof. P Mahanta

### ABSTRACT

Adolescence is characterised by a crucial stage of development and profound psychological changes as children transition from childhood to adulthood. Significant visible cognitive changes occur at this time, promoting improved reasoning, abstract thought, and the ability to reflect on them. Adolescence is characterised by increased emotional intensity, mood swings, and the growth of self-awareness and empathy. Socially, most of them deal with the questions of "Who am I?" and "Who do I want to be?" as they negotiate changing relationships, peer pressure, and the critical development of personal and social identity. The unavoidable dynamic interaction of these psychological areas as teenagers looking to pursue independence, investigate their values, and find their place in the world is captured in this abstract.

**Keywords:** Adolescence; teenagers; characteristics; cognitive development; psychology.

**Cite this article:** : Hazarika S, Hazarika K. Adolescence: a psychological perspective. *Int J Health Res Medico Leg Prae.* 2025 Jan-June;11(1)41-47. Doi:

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid changes in physical, cognitive, and psychological domains characterise adolescence, a crucial period between childhood and maturity. Encircled with a time of stress, this is also a time of opportunity and vulnerability. The neurological foundations of teenage behaviour are the focus of current research, highlighting the asynchronous development of brain regions related to reward processing and cognitive control. Most teenagers have an increased natural tendency for taking risks, and their developing ability to make decisions is demonstrated by this act. Another important field of research is being considered: how the digital age affects teenage development by exposing them to social media,

online interactions, and digital technology, affecting identity formation, mental health, social relationships, and information disorders. General social circumstances, such as family, classmates, school, and culture, influence teenage trajectories in addition to individual development.<sup>1</sup>

For decades, psychologists have been deeply fascinated by the behaviours of adolescence, a multifarious developmental stage that marks a great leap between infancy and maturity. In a constantly changing world, our research aims to offer a nuanced understanding of adolescence to guide successful interventions and encourage positive youth development. Using current research and well-established theories, we explore the

major psychological viewpoints illuminating adolescents' difficulties. Through several valued and significant recent publications, we try to analyse the cognitive, social, emotional, and identity-related changes that define this era while also taking care to highlight the impact of biological and sociocultural factors.

### **COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT: THE EMERGENCE OF ABSTRACT THOUGHT**

No doubt adolescence is characterised from a cognitive perspective by notable improvements in thinking skills. According to Piaget, adolescents usually reach the formal operational stage at twelve. The ability to think abstractly, reason hypothetically, and weigh several options is mostly characteristic of this stage. Most teenagers can now handle abstract ideas, go through "what if" scenarios, and solve problems methodically. In this stage, their academic endeavours, moral reasoning, and decision-making are all affected by this increased cognitive diversity.<sup>2,3</sup>

Adolescence also develops the emergence of improvements in metacognition, or the capacity to reflect on one's thought processes. Teens can better check their comprehension, use learning tools, and reflect on their values and views as they become more conscious of their cognitive processes. This ability to reflect is essential for self-awareness, solving their probable identity crisis, and proper development. It's vital to remember that although formal operational thinking develops, different people and situations may use it differently. The degree to which teenagers fully use their capacity for abstract reasoning might also vary depending on factors like education, sociocultural experiences, familial attitudes, and individual characteristics.

### **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: NAVIGATING PEER RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL IDENTITY**

Erikson mentioned that each person must face a life period with a unique challenge or crisis. This is what is considered a psychosocial development. He described that successful development involves dealing with and positively resolving the goals and

demands of each of these crises. Significant social changes occur during adolescence, which is evidenced by changes predominantly due to peer interactions, the challenge of resolving their identity, and role confusion. They try continuously to experiment with their identities, examining social status or positions and trying to fit in with their peer groups.<sup>4</sup> These groups mostly define guiding social skills, set norms, and provide opportunities for social learning, affirmation, and a sense of community. At the same time, most of the early part of adolescence is when conformity to peer pressure peaks; teenagers strive to grow more independently and reject peer pressure as they age. The present trend of social media's emergence has made teenage social development even more complex and critical by creating new avenues for positive and negative connections and identity expression. It is possible, however, also to exacerbate problems like social comparison, cyberbullying, and unrealistic social expectations.

### **EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLLERCOASTER OF FEELINGS AND SELF-REGULATION**

The natural hormonal shifts and cognitive development contribute to adolescence's great emotional intensity and variety. The frequent mood swings and increased sensitivity are caused by hormonal changes that occur during puberty. Most cognitively mature adolescents are better able to recognise and categorise their feelings, consider the opinions of others, and create coping mechanisms. The second stage of Erikson's theory again emphasises the importance of providing each child with opportunities to exercise their autonomy, encouraging their independence, and supporting their efforts to develop a positive sense of self-control each day.<sup>4,5</sup> This includes the child's developing sense of independence and ability to perform actions independently, for example, dressing themselves, feeding themselves, or using the bathroom independently. However, because adolescents may still have issues with impulsivity and emotional regulation,

this growth may still provide difficulties, particularly in emotionally charged settings.<sup>2,3</sup> In this stage, parents play a crucial role in supporting their child's autonomy by providing a safe and conducive environment, encouraging them to explore their limits and supporting them with positive feedback when they succeed.

During adolescence, social perspective-taking and empathy development also advance. Teens gain the ability to comprehend and react to others' emotions, which is essential for establishing and preserving wholesome relationships. Individual variations in social experiences and emotional intelligence may impact how this development unfolds.

### **IDENTITY FORMATION: FORGING A SENSE OF SELF**

It is said that perhaps adolescents' most distinctive psychological job is to search for their own identity. Building on Erikson's work, Marcia, JE (1966) suggested four identity statuses based on the aspects of commitment and exploration:<sup>5</sup>

1. A lack of dedication and investigation typifies identity diffusion. Most of the people in this situation could feel aimless and indifferent.
2. Identity foreclosure: This period refers to committing without much research, frequently in response to parental or other pressures.
3. Identity moratorium: This is a period of vigorous investigation in which no definitive commitments have yet been made. Here, people of this rank frequently experiment with various roles and ideologies of their own.
4. Identity achievement: This is defined by considering a range of possibilities and being firmly committed to a sense of self, values, and objectives.

While identity creation is frequently dynamic, it may entail switching between various identity states over time. Various factors, including peer pressure, cultural

background, personal experiences, and family ties, shape a teen's sense of self.

### **BIOLOGICAL INFLUENCES: THE ROLE OF PUBERTY AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT**

Adolescence is always characterised by significant biological changes, primarily driven by hormonal shifts and puberty in everyone. The so-called puberty is characterised and triggered by a surge in hormones, mainly testosterone and oestrogen, in males and females, respectively, initiating a series of physical and physiological transformations. These hormonal shifts result in the development of secondary sexual characteristics such as breast development in girls and facial hair growth in boys. This period leads to considerable physical maturation, changes in body structure, and sexual and brain development. These changes result in growth spurts, the development of secondary sex characteristics and the maturation of various bodily systems and their mindset. So, these hormonal and physical changes are among the biological changes that have a major and visible impact on adolescent development. These alterations have psychological and social repercussions that mostly impact peer relationships, self-esteem, mood swings, conduct, and social interactions. The hormonal changes also influence brain development and can affect mood and behaviour. This is a time of ongoing brain development, with the prefrontal cortex undergoing significant maturation and playing a role in self-regulation and impulsive behaviour.<sup>6</sup> The efficiency and specialisation of brain regions are significantly changed by natural brain development by synaptic pruning and myelination, which leads to the proper development of adolescents' long-term thinking and self-regulation skills.

### **SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT: SHAPING ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCE**

These sensitive periods provide a theoretical framework for relating experiences during a particular period to long-term developmental outcomes. Although often discussed in infancy and early childhood, an influential review by Blakemore and Mills

(2014) integrated findings from psychology and neuroscience to suggest that adolescence is a sensitive period for sociocultural processing.<sup>7,8</sup>

The sociocultural setting greatly influences adolescents' experiences and developmental paths, shaping societal norms, beliefs, and expectations.<sup>3</sup> Peer connections, identity formation processes, developmental milestone timing, etc., are all impacted by this milieu. Though different cultural customs and expectations may accompany the transition to maturity, adolescent development and well-being are also greatly impacted by socioeconomic conditions, educational opportunities and exposure to social pressures. Here, we would like to emphasise the evidence for the lasting effects of adolescent experiences on the development of their sociocultural skills and knowledge and social experiences occurring in adolescence as learning and development more broadly needed.

### CHALLENGES AND RISKS DURING ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a growing process towards adulthood for any individual. It presents numerous challenges and risks, considering physical, emotional, and behavioural issues. These can include risky behaviours like substance abuse, risky sexual activity, and risky driving, as well as mental health challenges like depression and anxiety. The other challenges include social and peer pressure, cyberbullying and the impact of media and technology. Depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions may lead to suicidal ideation and attempts. These mental health problems can be exacerbated by violence, poverty, and other social issues. Other behavioural issues, like risky behaviours, unprotected sex, substance abuse, risky driving, etc., are more of a concern for the new generation and sociocultural changes of the new generation.<sup>9</sup>

Although adolescence is a time of great potential and progress, it also brings with it special hazards and obstacles, in part because of the prefrontal cortex's continued development and increased peer pressure and social

obligations in the days of the present scenario. Adolescent well-being can also be greatly influenced by problems with body image, self-esteem, and social comparison, especially when it comes to social media exposure. Present-day bullying can negatively impact social adjustment and mental health, both online and offline.

### FAMILY DYNAMICS: THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF PARENT-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS

This is when family dynamics significantly impact an individual's mental and emotional well-being during development. These special dynamics, including communication, support, and conflict resolution, are pivotal in shaping the adolescent's sense of self, relationships, and overall development. Positive family dynamics, such as open communication and parental support, can foster a sense of belonging, build resilience, and promote the healthy development of the individual. On the other hand, negative family dynamics, like conflict or neglect, can lead to mental health issues, behavioural problems, and other challenges.

Parent-child interactions must be renegotiated properly with the profound changes that adolescents experience in the family system. The following theory offers a framework for such development and comprehending these dynamics, which was first developed with an emphasis on early childhood. At the same time, higher self-esteem, improved social skills, and improved academic performance are all linked to secure attachment, which is also defined by mutual respect, trust, and open communication. Securely attached adolescents are at ease asking for help from their parents as they experiment with independence.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, adolescence is when insecure attachment styles can appear in various ways at any time. An anxious, preoccupied attachment could lead to clinginess and a fear of abandonment, whereas avoidant attachment could result in emotional distance and an unwillingness to seek parental



assistance. Adolescent emotional regulation and relationship formation issues can be exacerbated by disorganised attachment, which frequently results from uneven or traumatic early experiences. The main features of negligent parenting are a lack of affection and interest in the adolescent's life.

The most detrimental effects on teenage development are linked to the style. The way parents choose parenting philosophies is also very important. According to Diana Baumrind's research, there are four main types of parenting.<sup>11</sup>

- **Authoritative parenting:** The traits of an authoritative parent are open communication, warmth, and well-defined rules. Positive teenage outcomes are typically linked to this approach.
- **Authoritarian parenting:** Places a strong emphasis on following rules and regulations without much opportunity for debate. Adolescents with this style may have worse social skills and worse self-esteem.
- **Permissive parenting** is characterised by a great degree of warmth but unclear expectations and boundaries. Teenagers who grow up in liberal environments may find it difficult to exercise self-control and responsibility.<sup>12</sup> How parental style and adolescent temperament interact can also affect how well family relationships work. For example, an authoritarian parent may not always get along with a very autonomous teen. In contrast, an authoritative parent may stabilise a more nervous, insecure and timid teen.

Additionally, sibling relationships change during adolescence, frequently becoming less intense but still serving as significant sources of conflict and support. Meanwhile, adolescents' sense of self within the family system and the development of their social skills might be influenced by the family dynamics of these connections.<sup>13</sup>

## MORAL DEVELOPMENT: NAVIGATING RIGHT AND WRONG

Adolescence is a crucial period for proper moral development, marked by significant shifts in how young people can understand and apply moral principles in day-to-day life. This stage involves moving from focusing on external authority and rules to a more effective internalised and reasonable approach towards morality build-up. They develop the ability to think abstractly, question societal norms, and form their moral code, influencing their decision-making and interactions with others most of the time. The moral development in adolescence is about how teens grow. This is the time that initiates understanding right and wrong and applying these beliefs daily. This is when their brain grows and starts to think in more advanced ways, which helps them understand the deeper aspects of life and morality. Moral development during adolescence helps teens connect with society and supports their overall health and well-being. Being involved in faith-based activities and having a sense of spirituality can lead to better social connections, higher self-esteem, and lower rates of substance use.

Kohlberg developed the moral development theory. It provides a framework for comprehending the evolution of teenagers' moral dilemmas and reasoning. Three degrees of moral thinking, each with two stages, were proposed by Kohlberg:<sup>14</sup>

- **Preconventional Level:** Personal interest and avoiding punishment are the foundations for moral reasoning at this level.

**Stage 1: Penalties and Compliance Orientation:** Preventing punishment guides decision-making.

**Stage 2, Instrumental Relativist Orientation:** Choices are made according to what will mutually benefit oneself or others.

- **Conventional Level:** Social norms and upholding social order are the foundation

for moral thinking at this level. During adolescence, this level is frequently prominent.

Stage 3: Nice Girl, Good Boy Orientation: Getting other people's approval is the basis for making decisions.

Stage 4: Law and Order Orientation: Observing the law and social norms is the foundation for decisions.

- Postconventional Level: Abstract concepts and universal ethical ideals are the foundation for moral thinking at this level. Adults do not always attain this level.

Stage 5: Orientation to the Social Contract: People understand that laws are social contracts that can be altered if they are unfair.

Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principle Orientation: Moral judgements, even when they go against the law, are founded on internalised values of fairness, equality, and human rights.

The transition to traditional levels of moral reasoning occurs during such an adolescent period, a crucial and critical time for their proper development. During this time, individuals become more conscious of societal expectations and consider how crucial it is to abide by the law to preserve social harmony. As teenagers struggle mentally with questions of justice, fairness, and other viewpoints, social interactions and peer connections become crucial for their growth. Despite its popularity, Kohlberg's theory has drawn strong criticism for emphasising male moral thinking. However, as teenagers' cognitive and social growth encourages them to participate in more sophisticated and principled moral reasoning, it continues to adopt a useful paradigm for comprehending how moral reasoning develops during adolescence.

Adolescent moral development is a dynamic process led by increasing cognitive abilities, evolving social relationships, and a growing sense of personal identity, all of which contribute to forming a more mature and nuanced moral compass.

We can better analyse and comprehend the psychological complexity of this pivotal time by employing Kohlberg's phases to analyse adolescent moral development and further investigate family relations through attachment theory. These other viewpoints emphasise the importance of intimate relationships and growing communities in determining adolescent experience.

### A HOLISTIC VIEW OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

At the heart of adolescence, moral and values development in adolescence lies a few things, mostly understanding oneself and others, managing one's behaviour and emotions, developing a sense of identity, including a moral identity, and learning to care about others. It's also about building social intelligence – understanding and identifying relationships. Here, parents can shape their teens' moral compass through clear guidelines, empowerment, unconditional love, and being good role models themselves. By providing a nurturing environment and helping teens understand the consequences of their actions, parents guide them toward becoming responsible and ethical adults. While adolescence calls for an available multidimensional strategy shaping, each one considers sociocultural, biological, emotional, social, and cognitive viewpoints. The fundamental frameworks available for comprehending developmental tasks and transforming them into adulthood are provided by psychological theories such as those of Piaget and Erikson.<sup>4,2</sup>

### CONCLUSION

This paper emphasises the dynamics of the development of character in teenagers and the intricate interactions between various elements. Psychologists can help young people's healthy development and well-being by identifying drawbacks and creating circumstances that encourage them to form healthy connections and grow positive personalities by having a thorough awareness of the psychological landscape of adolescence.

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