



ADJUSTMENT ISSUES AMONG ADOLESCENT SCHOOL STUDENTS: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF AGE AND GENDER

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Abstract

Adolescence, a developmental phase which marks the transition from childhood to adulthood is generally accepted as a period of great turbulence. This period is marked by changes in all aspects of an adolescent's life, physical, emotional and cognitive. Thus this phase of life requires a lot of adjustment. This study investigated differences in adjustment as a result of age and sex among secondary school students. The study conducted on 180 school students (90 male and 90 female) used the adjustment inventory for school students (AISS) developed by A.K.P. Sinha and R.P. Singh. Findings indicated a significant main effect of age on total adjustment as well as emotional, social and educational adjustment. However there are no significant gender differences in adjustment. Results lend support to the idea that there are issues related to adjustment in adolescence and the nature of the issues varies as a function of age as well as gender.

Key words: Age, Gender, Emotional, Social, Educational, Adjustment.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is typically characterized as a period of turbulence. The stress and storm of adolescence is triggered by the rapid physical and mental changes occurring during this period. During this period adolescents are typically in secondary or higher secondary school. Adjustment is a matter of concern and is important at all stages of development but this becomes especially critical at the stage of adolescence. During this period, the individual is neither a child nor an adult. It would not be wrong to say that adolescents are physically fast hurtling towards adulthood, but mentally and emotionally there is still the immaturity characteristic of children. So adolescents keep vacillating between being children and being adults. Being a phase of rapid growth and development during which physical, sexual and emotional changes occur, adjustment problems are at their peak during this period. Most adolescents experience adjustment difficulties in emotional, social and/or educational aspects of their lives. These problems are worsened by the changes taking place in the society especially the information explosion created by the growth of communication technologies coupled with a breaking up of traditional family systems in countries like India.

According to Good (1959) adjustment is the process of finding and adopting modes of behavior suitable to the environment or the changes in the environment. Most adolescents face problems related to their physical appearance, health and physical development, marks scored, relationship with members of their families, their teachers, and peer of both sexes and home adjustment. Maladjustment is associated negative outcomes like absenteeism, truancy, low achievement and other unworthy habits of children (Subramanyam, 1986). The genetic make-up, time and rate of maturity are different for boys and girls especially during adolescence. Further, societal norms and perceptions are also different for boys and girls. These differences result in significant differences in levels of adjustment of boys and girls (Jain and Jandu, 1998; Hampel and Petermann, 2006; Kuruvilla, 2006; Mythili et.al., 2004; Raju and Rahmatulla, 2007; Shalu and Audichya, 2006).

The present study investigated differences in the adjustment level of school going adolescents as a function of two variables namely age and gender. Adolescents belonging to three age groups were covered by the study namely thirteen, fourteen and fifteen years. The level of adjustment was measured by an adjustment inventory. Apart from the total adjustment, three areas of adjustment were also measured namely emotional adjustment, social adjustment and educational adjustment.

METHOD

Hypotheses

The main hypotheses of this study were

Level of adjustment would increase as the age of the adolescent increases.

Male subjects would be better adjusted than female subjects.

Sample: The subjects in this study were 180 students (90 males, 90 females) between 13 years to 15 years of age studying in classes VIII, IX and X under the state board. In each age group, 60 students (30 males, 30 females) were studied.

Research Design

The two independent variables in the study were age of the subject and sex of the subject. A 2x3 factorial design was employed having 6 cells with 30 subjects in each cell.



Tools and Procedure

The study used the Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS) developed by A.K.P. Sinha and R.P. Singh. The inventory consists of 60 items measuring emotional adjustment (20 items), social adjustment (20 items), and educational adjustment (20 items). Each item has to be answered in either Yes or No. Higher scores indicate poor adjustment. The inventory had split-half reliability of 0.95 for emotional adjustment, 0.93 for social adjustment and 0.96 for educational adjustment and a total reliability of 0.95.

The experimenter met the subjects during class hours and explained the purpose of the study. Copies of the inventory were distributed and clear instructions were given. The subjects then answered the question with the experimenter clarifying meanings of terms as and when required. On an average the administration took 20-25 minutes. A short de-briefing session was conducted after each administration.

Data Analysis

Total and mean scores were calculated for all the groups for all the variables mentioned above. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed for total adjustment as well as emotional, social and educational adjustment. Since the age variables had more than two levels post hoc tests were also computed. The findings that emerged from these computations are presented and discussed with reference to the hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1

The level of adjustment increases as the age of the adolescent increases.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant main effect of age on total adjustment. $F(2, 174) = 6.574, p < 0.002$. Higher scores indicate lower adjustment hence, mean scores revealed that level of adjustment was lowest at age fifteen ($M=19.75$), followed by age thirteen ($M=18.25$) and age fourteen ($M=15.78$). Post hoc tests indicate that the total adjustment scores of the subject in the age group of thirteen were significantly different from those in age group fourteen ($p < 0.081$) and the total adjustment scores of subjects in age group fourteen were significantly different from those in age group fifteen ($p < 0.001$).

There was a significant main effect of age on emotional adjustment, $F(2, 174) = 2.631, p < 0.097$. Higher scores indicate lower adjustment hence, mean scores showed that emotional adjustment was lowest at age fifteen ($M=6.40$), followed by age thirteen ($M=5.39$) and then age fourteen ($M=5.22$). Post hoc tests indicated that only the difference between age groups fourteen and fifteen was significant ($p < 0.096$), and other differences were not significant.

There was a significant main effect of age on social adjustment ($2, 174$) = 19.272, $p < 0.035$. Higher scores indicate lower level of adjustment hence, social adjustment was lowest at age thirteen ($M=7.68$), followed by age fifteen ($M=7.13$) and then age fourteen ($M=6.55$). Post hoc tests indicated that only the difference between age groups thirteen and fourteen was significant ($p < 0.029$) and all other differences were not significant.

The most significant main effect of age was on educational adjustment $F(2, 174) = 71.031, p < 0.000$. Higher scores indicate lower adjustment hence educational adjustment was lowest at age fifteen ($M=6.22$), followed by age thirteen ($M=4.71$) and then age fourteen ($M=4.10$). Post hoc tests showed that age thirteen was significantly different from age group fifteen ($p < 0.007$), similarly age group fourteen was significantly different from age group fifteen ($p < 0.000$).

These findings do not support the hypothesis, however they present an interesting picture. As is obvious age fourteen seems to be the age when the subject is most well adjusted. Age thirteen is the age which marks the beginning of adolescence for most adolescents. This is the age when the subject enters high school that is Class VIII. This would mean a number of changes in the life of the adolescents. At this age adolescents are trying to cope with a number of changes in almost all spheres of life and this poses an adjustment challenge. By age fourteen the adolescents has probably come to terms with most of the changes and settled into high school hence feels better adjusted. However at age fifteen the adolescent is in Class X. Now adolescents stand at the end of school life. In the modern competitive world the adolescent is bound to face a lot of stress. This is most obvious in the area of educational adjustment. In the area of education the age of fifteen can be considered very crucial because most adolescents are in Class X. The first time in their lives they move out of the protected precincts of their school to appear for the board exams. Society makes them believe that these exams are an important milestone in their career. The marks they score will determine their future course of study which in turn will determine career choices. At this age pressure from parents and teachers increases. Adolescents who do not score too well will gradually lose self-confidence posing adjustment problems. Though the adjustment level at all age groups are average, the scores at age



thirteen and fifteen are slightly higher indicating slightly poorer adjustment than subjects in the age group of fourteen. Thus though the hypothesis was not supported by the findings they do indicate that age is an important variable determining adjustment.

Hypothesis 2

Male subjects would be better adjusted than female subjects.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) did not show a significant main effect for sex on total adjustment. However mean scores did reveal that level of adjustment of female subjects (M=18.23) was slightly lower than that of male subjects (M=17.62). In the area of emotional adjustment too the difference was not significant though the same trend was noticed. The mean for emotional adjustment of males was 5.83 while that of females was 5.88. In the area of social adjustment a significant main effect of sex was noticed $F(1,174)=5.699p<0.018$. The mean score of social adjustment of males (M=6.70) was lower than that of females (M=7.54) indicating better adjustment of male subjects. Educational adjustment however revealed that the adjustment score of females (M=4.81) was lower than that of males (M=5.21) indicating better adjustment of female subjects. This difference was however not significant.

These results do provide a partial support for our hypothesis. Most of Indian Society is patriarchal and the male child even today enjoys a better standing in society than the female child. This difference in the approach of society to both the sexes becomes more pronounced when they enter adolescence. Puberty brings with it a greater freedom for the male child and greater restrictions on the female child. Bodily changes are more visible in the case of girls than boy's. Society also places greater emphasis on the physical appearance of girls rather than of boys. A combination of these various factors may result in girls being lower in terms of social adjustment. Since they are likely to be less adjusted to their changes they may have some problems in relating to others in society. They may not appreciate and understand the change in society's approach to them. Hence the difference in adjustment level of male and female subjects

A trend noticed recently is the better performance of girls as compared to boys in schools and colleges. Results of all board exams show higher pass percentage among girl students as compared to boys. One of the reasons for this could be the higher level of educational adjustment among girls as indicated by this study. Success in school depends on focused and regular study, girls may compensate for the restrictions placed on them by putting all their efforts into academics, and hence they show better success and higher educational adjustment. Another reason for these results could be the difference in the age of puberty of girls and boys. Pubertal changes begin earlier in girls than in boys so girls may be more mature at age fifteen than boys, this may explain why they are better adjusted in the area of education because they have become more focused to the future. They recognize that success in school is a must for future career success and hence concentrate more on academics. However the response of society towards them may contribute to lower all around adjustment.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus the study highlights the differences that exist in various aspects of psychosocial adjustment. This study also highlights the need for support from parents, teachers as well as counselors in coping with the challenges of adolescence.

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