

Exploring The Mechanism of Adolescent Mental Health

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Abstract. The mental health of adolescents is a topic that has always existed and deserves attention. Nowadays, many adolescents report that they experience mental problems and mental illnesses. Their symptoms may continue to affect their physical and mental health in adulthood. Mental health problems may derive from various factors. Family problems, parents' mental illnesses, poverty, and perceived violence at school can all contribute to psychological problems in adolescents. At the same time, some factors positively impact adolescents' mental health, like school connectedness and social support. When adolescents have psychological difficulties, the community and the people around them should help them according to their situation and intervene to improve their mental health. Preventions for children not yet in adolescence would also be helpful. Once the public pays more attention and realizes the importance of adolescent mental health, this problem can be alleviated and solved.

Keywords: Adolescence, Mental health, Protective factors, Risk factors.

1. Introduction

As humans living in constantly changing societies and environments, our mental health status can be easily shaped by things around us. Since adolescents are in a unique period of human development, they are vulnerable to physical, emotional, and social changes. These changes can positively affect their mental health status and may lead to decreased well-being, happiness, and even mental disorders. Once mental health problems develop during adolescence, people likely carry them into adulthood, which may result in worse consequences.

Mental health problems and mental disorders are prevalent in adolescents and give rise to numerous inconveniences. 10% to 20% of adolescents struggle with mental health [1]. 20% to 30% of teenagers express significant depression symptoms, according to Dwight and his coworkers in their book. Depressed children are found to have deficient social skills and interpersonal conflicts, not to mention stress [2]. This can cause significant pain and inconvenience in their lives, so it is necessary to avoid mental health problems in adolescents as much as possible.

Moreover, adolescents make an indispensable contribution to the world and are a critical factor in its future development, so their mental health problems should be addressed. If the problem is mitigated or solved, adolescents, communities, and the world will all benefit. However, although some parts of the world already started focusing on preserving adolescents' mental health, this effort is not enough. The problem of adolescent mental health has not been solved on a large scale, and humans have not yet proposed a plausible solution. Hence, it is necessary to continue the discussion and attention. People worldwide should understand the mechanism behind adolescent mental health to realize the reasons and importance of preserving it and preventing mental health disorders among adolescents.

As a result, this paper's main objective is to offer a whole picture of the mechanism of adolescent mental health by reviewing the risk factors, protective factors, impacts, and ways to improve adolescent mental health. In addition, this paper will discuss the practical enlightenment we can acquire from pieces of literature mentioned in previous parts, involving implications and possible future actions. This may guide researchers, governments, organizations, and citizens to perceive better and preserve adolescent mental health.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Connotation

2.1.1 Definition

The World Health Organization identifies adolescence as the interval between a child and an adult or between the ages of 10 and 19. This is a distinct period when adolescents undergo rapid physical, cognitive, and psychosocial growth. Despite the consensus that the period of adolescence is beneficial and healthy, many deaths and disorders appear in this stage. Therefore, adolescents need proper and appropriate education and guidance corresponding to their unique needs and rights [3].

Mental health is a crucial component of human well-being and health that supports personal, community, and socioeconomic development. Everyone experiences a state of mental health, and being mentally healthy is very important. However, despite what many people think, being mentally healthy does not only mean being free of mental health issues. Mental health's new definition proposed by researchers defines it as being related to emotional and psychological well-being, happiness, and overall satisfaction. By achieving mental health, we reach a state of internal equilibrium [4].

2.2. Factors Affecting Adolescent Mental Health

2.2.1 Risk Factors

Firstly, parental and familial factors are risk factors for adolescent mental health problems. Because parents and families play an essential role in the growth of adolescents, lack of family support or familial separation of children increases the risk of mental health problems in adolescence. According to research, if parents are divorced or separated in childhood, mental disorders like anxiety disorders are likely to appear [5]. Also, a lack of attachment in children to their parents results in mental health difficulties in adolescence. This is because children and adolescents often depend primarily on their parents. When children or adolescents fail to feel secure or protected from their parents, they may withdraw themselves from the environment, which leads to insecurity and, thus, depression. Other dysfunctional family patterns, such as intense abuse or neglect, also would lead to depressive disorders.

Another parental risk factor is adolescents' parents' mental illnesses. Children of parents with mental disorders or problems are likelier than children of mentally healthy parents to experience emotional or behavioral disorders. Parental mental illness is also directly related to adolescents' internalizing and externalizing problems. These findings may be explained by a lack of parental monitoring and support due to parents' unhealthy mental state. Adolescents with mentally ill parents are often willing to spend less time at home and avoid monitoring their parents more frequently. Parents' mental illness might also lead to decreased family cohesion, openly shared opinions, and increased family conflict. In this case, it is clear that parents' mental illness negatively affects the overall family environment, parent-child interactions, and adolescent mental health [6].

Extended from the previous point is the effect of poverty on adolescent mental health. Poverty and economic distress influence adolescent mental health through its effect on parent-adolescent relationships. Due to poverty, parents may encounter unemployment problems and unstable work, which may induce conflicts within the family. Furthermore, parents in poverty spend less time caring for and monitoring their children, so parent-adolescent relationships are often disrupted and broken. It also implies that impoverished parents cannot give enough support and encouragement to their children. This continuously less supportive relationship possibly causes depression and suicidal behaviors in adolescents [7].

Furthermore, experience or perception of violence in school induces adolescents' mental health problems. Exposure to violence in school leads adolescents to experience high levels of depression and anxiety. In addition, adolescents who are not gang members reported anxiety, lack of motivation, poor self-esteem, and other cognitive deficiencies when involved in discussions about gangsterism.

Even though some students do not participate in gangs, they still feel fear and unease. Besides, some adolescents being forced to join gangs or other social groups may feel pressure [8]. They may feel repressed and be afraid of violent behaviors at school.

2.2.2 Protective Factors

School connectedness, described as the degree to which students experience interpersonal acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support in the school and educational context, is a protective factor regarding adolescent mental health. According to research, school membership and connectedness are inversely related to emotional distress, violence, suicide, and drug use. Students who possess higher levels of school connectedness are also more optimistic and less depressive, in which school connectedness correlates negatively with self-report symptoms of anxiety, depression, and deficits in overall functioning [9]. If students feel to be accepted in the school environment, they tend to have fewer psychological difficulties.

Second, social support is crucial for maintaining the health of the minds of individuals in adolescence. Social support is a mediator when investigating the connection between violence exposure and adolescents' mental health. In other words, teenagers who receive enough social support and are exposed to violence are less likely to develop mental health issues and illnesses. For example, family support helps to reduce the adverse effects of depression and traumatic stress.

2.3. The Influence of Adolescents' Mental Health on Themselves

Adolescent mental health and academic performance relate closely together. According to the study, high depression scores reduce adolescents' likelihood of getting high grades in language and math classes. In contrast, high psychological well-being scores increase adolescents' likelihood of getting high grades. It was also found that low depression and high psychological well-being are consistently linked to better educational behaviors, which refer to skipping fewer classes, missing fewer days, and having a lower frequency of incomplete homework. The behaviors, in turn, are also associated with higher grades in courses [10]. Thus, adolescent's psychological problems act as a barrier, making students feel stressed and unhappy, which affects their academic performance and prevents them from completing their work at their best level.

In the long term, adolescents who experience mental health problems or disorders also have reduced quality of life in adulthood. Generally, mental health is negatively affected by psychological problems in adolescence. In particular, personality disorders result in dysfunctional social interactions, poor psychological health, and adversity in the background of their environment in adulthood. Surprisingly, mental health illnesses also affect physical health. About one-quarter of patients diagnosed with mental disorders report physical illnesses, contributing to poor quality of life [11].

2.4. Ways to Improve Mental Health of Adolescents

To improve adolescent mental health and protect them from suffering, we should not be limited to stereotypical measures such as psychological consulting and drug therapy. Instead, it is also essential to make a careful diagnosis and pay close attention to the adolescent psychological problems when found. This can be a more comprehensive, more thorough solution to the psychological problems of adolescents.

According to adolescents' different needs and psychological problems, people around adolescents need to help with treatment and guidance actively. In this process, the help of family members, teachers, classmates, and others may be necessary. If severe, experts can intervene to provide professional knowledge and solutions. Another crucial aspect is for people to assess the severity of adolescents' problems and the help needed in the community. Then, providing suitable help will show significant effects. For example, training children to deal with and prevent behavioral problems benefits behavioral disorders. A program aiming to prevent drug use in communities has also reduced drug use in adolescents aged 15-19. For emotional disorders, physical activity prevention in school has been shown to help with anxiety and self-esteem, as well as short-term help with depression. In

response to intellectual disorders, people can enhance the nutritional intake of adolescents, including improving nutrition and immunity, reducing exposure to environmental toxins, and cultivating psychological prevention of accidents and injuries.

Another aspect is prevention before children enter adolescence. This was proved to be effective. Some early prevention measures include getting children into a good preschool, nutrition interventions, and increased sensitivity and responsiveness to caregivers. This can help children cope better with poverty, institutionalization, low birth weight, and other problems. Teachers' intervention can also be helpful for children between the ages of 3 and 8. For example, school-based teacher training interventions and a social-emotional curriculum help children improve on problematic behaviors and reduce competition among children. As a result, people should not wait until adolescents encounter psychological problems to start working on it, but if possible, they should perform actions before that.

In general, when adolescents experience mental difficulties, diagnosing the problem, finding help from relevant people, and choosing an appropriate intervention plan is essential. Training teachers, parents, etc., and establishing a systematic intervention system can also help greatly. Another thing to note is that because adolescents are more sensitive during this period of growth, people need to pay attention to their reactions and emotions.

3. Real-life Enlightenments

By understanding the risk and protective factors, the influence, and the ways to improve adolescent mental health, we have a clearer picture of the current social situation of adolescent mental health and are inspired to improve it. We must realize that the intervention methods and means are insufficient to cope with adolescent mental health problems successfully. Some people nowadays tend to hold stereotypical ideas about adolescent mental health, including mental illness not having such a significant effect, going to a counselor to solve all mental disorders and many others.

We must break these stereotypes and develop more robust and targeted methods. On one hand, getting more people to realize and focus on improving adolescent mental health is needed. For instance, organizations and governments can make posters to put on the street sides or make public service advertisements to put on television programs. School and community popularization can help raise public awareness. On the other hand, reachable resources should be effectively used. For example, schools can contact a psychological expert and build a psychological consulting center. Adolescents who encounter mental problems can use telephone services and online articles to find help. Additionally, training the public and using experts to provide appropriate solutions to adolescent mental health problems. On a larger scale, country-wide and even worldwide organizations should help establish a system for intervention and prevention of adolescent mental health.

To sum up, the main problem we are facing now is that people still underestimate the long-term effects of mental disorders experienced in adolescence and cannot develop appropriate solutions for them. Therefore, we should all consider this problem and work towards practical solutions. This issue can be successfully addressed only if every part of the community works together toward improving adolescent mental health.

4. Conclusion

The most obvious conclusion we can draw from the preceding content is that adolescents' problems regarding their mental state are common and severe. Many adolescents have depression, restlessness, nervousness, or other psychological difficulties. There is a lot of research out there that shows this. Mental illness can also negatively affect young people's lives as they enter adulthood, reducing their standard of living, overall happiness, and even physical health. Therefore, young people should pay more attention to their mental state and try not to encounter mental health problems, and others should also monitor their health. Then, from different studies, we can infer that the causes

of some adolescent psychological problems, such as family problems, parents' mental illness, poverty, and perceived violence at school, can increase stress and psychological problems in adolescents. Of course, some factors, such as school connectedness and social assistance, help improve adolescents' mental condition and can enhance mental health. We can distill these factors from other people's research. Next, there is a significant conclusion about improving adolescents' mental health.

But, the current efforts of organizations and communities worldwide are insufficient to solve the problem effectively. We must pay more attention to adolescent mental health issues and find ways to target different diseases. Also, early interventions, such as training sessions and courses, are essential. This allows children to solve problems themselves and become calm in the face of stress. Different parts of society, such as schools, governments, public welfare organizations, etc., can also contribute to their actions, such as public service advertisements and posters. In short, although the mechanism of adolescent mental health is more complex, through our careful study and understanding, we can finally explore and investigate it clearly and thoroughly.

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