
Adolescents and Social Problems

Asbah Razali

Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Corresponding Author: Asbah Razali, E-mail: asbahrazali@um.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is very difficult to comprehend. The transition from childhood to adolescence leads to internal conflicts among teenagers. This internal conflict and crisis leads to negative impacts, especially when adolescents are unable to address them in a proper manner. These crisis and conflict-prone adolescents require proper guidance from their parents at a very young age, so they are able to adjust to their social surroundings as they reach that confusing period. The adolescent mind pictures themselves as unique individuals well-prepared to project their identity to society, through self-adjustment or forwarding their viewpoints for acceptance. Therefore, identifying both risk and protective factors for adolescents should be a priority because their face demands from society to explain their identity, role, and meaning of their existence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescents number 40% of the national population of 18 million. They are the future leaders of this country. However, this group also has their fair share of social problems. Some blame their parents for their neglect in raising their children at home, as teachers are also blamed for failure to discipline their wards at school. Adolescence is very difficult to comprehend. The transition from childhood to adolescence leads to internal conflicts among teenagers. This internal conflict and crisis leads to negative impacts, especially when adolescents are unable to address them in a proper manner. These crisis and conflict-prone adolescents require proper guidance from their parents at a very young age, so they are able to adjust to their social surroundings as they reach that confusing period. The adolescent mind pictures themselves as unique individuals well-prepared to project their identity to society, through self-adjustment or forwarding their viewpoints for acceptance. During this time, they recognize traits peculiar to themselves such as their hobbies and interests, their views of the future, their strengths, and their desire to control their own destiny. Thus, many adolescents channel these desires through juvenile delinquency. Therefore, identifying both risk and protective factors for adolescents should be a priority, as failure to overcome this problem can lead to more complications in their identity formation. It is this identity formation, influenced by environment, that plays both positive and negative significant roles. If adolescents, during this transition period, received insufficient attention and affection from their parents and families, they are more inclined towards their peers for identity formation, and are then involved in social problems. Furthermore, adolescents face demands from society to explain their identity, role, and meaning of their existence. These demands ignore their deepest desires, which might be different from others, and this leads to problems, and actions that diverge from societal values.

2. THEORIES ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

2.1 Primary Socialisation Theory (PST)

This section is dedicated to the significant literature resources that contributed to the research. The author should survey scholarly articles, books and other sources relevant to the area of research, providing a description, summary, and critical evaluation of each work. The Primary Socialization Theory (PST) was developed by Oetting and Donnermeyer (1998) to explain the development of deviant behavior among adolescents, formed by inter-individual relationship within a social context. This theory emphasizes on the learning process from close-knit groups as a contributor to problematic behaviors, such as family, friends, and school. These three groups are socialization agents in directly and indirectly shaping the formation of problematic behaviors. Based on the PST, the closer the teenager is to the socialization agent, the higher his exposure to the level of influence in shaping deviant behaviors. Adolescent exposure to behaviors, problematic or otherwise, depends on the behavioral patterns exposed by any socialization agent. According to Oetting and Donnermeyer (1998), behavior is actively learned, and the strength of bonding between adolescents and the socialization agents determine the extent of the effectiveness of the exposed behavioral

norms. The stronger the bonding between the adolescent and the socialization agent, the more inclined they are to imbibe and internalize the behavioral norms imparted by these agents, and vice versa.

2.2 Theory of Psychosocial Development

Eric Ericson (1963) introduced the Psychosocial Development Theory, which explains that human development is more focused on development of identity, especially at the adolescent stage. Ericson explains this development of identity through the eight stages of development. Each stage contains conflicts and challenges that a developing teenager must face successfully, so they are more prepared to face conflicts in the later stages. The focus on the identity development stage of adolescents based on the stage of development, can contribute to adolescent involvement in social problems, through identity conflict versus role confusion. This stage is important to the adolescent, as they undergo drastic psychological and physical changes. Adolescents are able to build a positive and confident identity, if they are able to solve the preceding conflict, through building trust with the self and in others, be autonomous, and initiative. However, if the adolescent fails to overcome preceding conflicts, they face confusion of their identities and objectives. This confusion then drives many teenagers to social problems, seen as an initiative to rediscover their self-identity.

2.3 Maslow's Theory of Development

Maslow explains the theory of human development is based on necessities intrinsic in the adolescent. Maslow explains that human needs are stacked hierarchically. A need at a higher stage cannot be addressed before the needs at a lower stage is fully addressed. The most important need is physiological. Following this need is the need for security, belonging and need, esteem, and self-actualization, the peak of human necessity. These necessities are important, as they explain the stability of life. If teenagers are unable to fulfill these needs, they suffer from physiological and psychological imbalances. Failure to fulfill these needs at a lower level leads to the failure to achieve self-actualization (Mathes, 1981).

2.4 Theory of Social Identity

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2.5. Theory of Frustration-Aggression

The following theory on the negative behavioral development of adolescents in the Theory of Frustration-Aggression by Sigmund Freud (1985). The Theory of Frustration-Aggression states that social problems is a natural reaction to human frustration. According to Sigmund Freud (1985) in his theory of psychoanalysis, each human naturally seeks pleasure and avoids pain. The inability to achieve these two needs leads to human aggression. Each individual has the natural inclination to become aggressive when frustrated.

3.SOCIAL PROBLEMS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

3.1 Drug Abuse

The largest social problem facing society today is drug abuse among adolescents. Among the types of drugs that adolescents partook in include marijuana, heroin, cocaine, and ecstasy. A study in the United States shows that around 1 in 10 youths aged 17-18 years were reported to use drugs. In Australia, in 2019, around 19% of adolescents aged 17 years were reported to use drugs recreationally. In some studies conducted in European countries, there was a discernible increase in the number of drug-using adolescents from the 1990s to 2017. These groups are of the expectation that drug use can provide relief from stress, encourage acceptance from peers, and increase that feeling of being 'high.' Worryingly, the government then has to bear the burden to overcome this evident epidemic among their teenage population.

3.2 Baby Dumping

Reports on baby dumping cases often headline newspapers. We are often faced with news of babies found dead in toilets, in drains, and in public areas such as mosques and schools. More horrifyingly, some babies were even burned to avoid discovery. Throughout 2018, the Department of Social welfare Malaysia received more than 100 out-of-wedlock children, dumped and abandoned in public areas. This is very worrying, as baby dumping are often done by teenagers. This problem occurs as adolescents, unable to keep their sexual desires in check, get involved in unprotected sexual activities. Fearful of the consequences of their actions, they carry out abortions and baby dumping to hide their shame.

3.3 Promiscuity

During the adolescent stage, they have a high level of curiosity, and are prone to try anything new. It is this inclination that drives them to act, without concern for the positive and negative consequences of their actions. This factor is closely linked to the transition from childhood to adolescence, with its accompanying changes in behavior, choice of friends, and increase in sexual urges. Promiscuity leads to free sex, and today, there is an undeniable link between promiscuous sex and adolescents. This trend happens as sex naturally follows romantic relations between teenagers. Compared to the usual relations as friends among adolescents, romantic relationships have different traits, such as a more intimate physical engagement, followed to a deep feeling of love and affection, which then leads to sexual relations. This promiscuity, leading to free sex, has negative relations in the lives of teenagers.

3.4 Teenage Runaways

Teenage runaways refer to adolescents that leave home without the express permission or knowledge of their parents. According to Santrock, (2008) teenagers leave their homes when they feel unhappy and uncomfortable at home. The teenage runaways are divided into four categories, which are (1) floaters, or adolescents that leave home and return within 24 hours, (2) runaways, adolescents that leave home due to unstable home environment or fear that their personal secrets such as behavioral problems are exposed, (3) splitters, adolescents that leave home from a sense of disappointment, such as academic achievements, and (4) hard read freaks, adolescents between 17 and 20 years that left home for the desire for freedom. The crisis in the family institution is one of the main contributing factor to teenage runaways.

3.5 Gengsterisme

Cases of teenagers burning down teacher's rooms, puncturing and scratching their teachers' vehicles, vandalism, extorting students, just prove that adolescents that also involved in gengsterisme. Teenagers flout societal norms and values, as well as school discipline, and are categorized as problematic teens. This shows that gengsterisme, with its opposition to rules and the law, cannot be accepted by society at large. Among the more recent cases of gengsterisme include a group of Form 4 teenagers expelled from school for their involvement in a fight that led to another student being injured. This shows gengsterisme is at a highly worrying level, and threatens the safety of teenagers and teachers at school.

3.6 Rape and Incest

Rape and incest are two very serious sexual crimes. These crimes, phrased as "haruan makan anak," happens in every level of society. Incest means sexual activity carried out between individuals of close familial relations. This relation is illegal under the law, and heavily frowned upon in society, especially between adolescents and their parents, siblings, aunts or uncles, grandparents, and so on. These cases are increasingly worrying, especially as it happens to teenagers. The statistics compiled by the Ministry of Women, Family, and Social Welfare show an annual increase in the number of incest cases in Malaysia. The highest number, from January to August 2018, is reported in Johor, with 59 cases from an overall of 212 cases. However, the majority of victims do not file reports as they feel ashamed, fearful of threats from the perpetrators, and they are unaware to whom they can turn.

3.7 Bullying

Bullying covers activities such as extortion, insults, mocking, physical harm, verbal abuse, and so on, carried out by an individual to their victims. This forces the weaker parties to yield to the strong. Bullying directly and indirectly has a negative impact on the development and growth of the bullied teenagers, as well as the bullies. In addition, bullying impacts the teenage students emotionally. Studies on bullying found that one out of ten school students are involved in bullying, either as bullies or victims of bullying. Therefore, this symptom must be dealt with the utmost seriousness by all parties, due to its effect on its victims. Bullying leaves a deep mark on the psychological and physical development of bullies and their victims (Aldridge, Mcchesney, & Afari, 2017).

3.8 Street Thugs/ Mat Rempit

Street thugs, locally known as Mat Rempit, is not a new phenomenon here, their presence being synonymous with the roads. The word rempit is derived from 'ramp-it,' whereby a racer presses the throttle pedal on the road (circuit), and the word became synonymous to this group. Before, motorcycling was a hobby and recreational activity for some individuals. However, this activity degenerated into a deviant subculture, widespread among adolescents involved in illegal racing and street thuggery. Society views teenagers involved in rempit activities as scary, ill-educated, and crime-prone street thugs. Rozmi Ismail (2005) in her research found that this societal stigma, in turn, seems to legitimize the existence of these street thugs, which then imprinted them as a social group in society.

4. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS

4.1 Peer Pressure

At the adolescent stage, peers and friends play a very important role in their life. This close relationship means they share the same interests, opinions, and problems, compared to their parents. Adolescent, through peers, also pick up on social skills that contribute to their self-identity. Peers can have positive influences, but also negatively influence teenagers. In general, these friends consist of peers of a similar age, all sharing similar problems. Peer relationships are usually retained to feel acceptance, appreciation, respect, and recognition within the peer group.

4.2 Mass Media

The mass media also plays a significant role in depicting violent actions, speech, and behavior, as portrayed in both electronic and print media. These actions are by impressionable adolescents, who view action heroes as their role models. The depiction of violent action on the television also influences violent behavior among teenagers. Adolescents see violence as a status symbol or an effective method of conflict resolution. They view the depicted violence as acceptable societal behavior. This then contributes to teenagers acting violently to resolve conflicts or establish power.

4.3 Family Institution

Within the family institution, parents are not only responsible for raising children, but also shaping their future. This matter is supported by Sokol-Katz, Dunham and Zimmerman, (1997) who states that adolescents adjust to environmental factors such as family, social environment, and culture, in their behavioral process. Discipline must be emphasized, but too much discipline from authoritarian parents can lead to children forming violent behaviors outside the home. This is because children feel too constrained, thus they act violently and expose themselves to violence.

4.4 Lack of Religious Education

Lack of religious education is also a main factor contributing to social problems. Lack of religious education leads to a weak belief system. A stronger religious education and faith leads one to a more solid endurance, and one is able to resist temptation and negative actions. An Islamic-based lifestyle should be instilled in teenagers, to prepare them against social problems and acts that contravene the faith. The teenager's realization of their responsibility to Allah SWT will lead to a strengthening of their faith and deter them from wrong acts.

4.5 Negative Attitude Of Society

Societal attitude, prone to judgment, is also a contributing factor to the increasing social problems among adolescents. An indifferent society, inclined to point the finger and refusing to help teenagers, meant the latter would feel useless. In the matter of baby dumping, for instance, society shames the pregnant unwed teenage mother, without understanding the real situation. They might be rape victims, and accept the fact that they bear the child of their attacker. But, fearing the negative perception of society, they decide to abort or dump their newborns to avoid societal scorn. This negative societal attitude leads to an increase in social problems. Adolescents have nowhere to turn to solve their problems, and fall back to their old habits.

5. CONCLUSION

However, there are also other pull factors for adolescent participation in social problems. Therefore, parental control and affection on their children must be prioritized. Parents need to understand that teenagers are trying to form their own identity. Encouragement, affirmation, and reinforcement are important parental tools so they may follow the process of adolescent development to adulthood, and become useful members of society, a service to creed, community, and country. Adolescents are future national assets, and continuous intervention to strengthen the family institution, as well as self-improvement and teen personality programmers must be improved upon from time to time,

which must include the involvement of various parties, such as the government, non-governmental organizations, and society.

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