

Salient Factors Influencing the Healthy Development of Adolescents

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Abstract: This paper investigates the factors influencing the healthy development of Malaysian adolescents. In Malaysia, juvenile offenses and crimes, such as rape, school dropout, robbery, dishonesty, and theft, have rapidly increased in recent years. This study investigated whether early guidance, sex education, parental support, religious values, and counseling contribute to the healthy development of adolescents. Sixty academicians participated in this study. Survey method was used to determine the factors influencing the healthy development of adolescents. Religious values, sex education, and family support were found as the salient factors influencing the healthy development of adolescents.

Key words: Religious values, sex education, family support and healthy adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

In Western countries, several studies have probed into the relationship between adolescent development and anti-social behavior. The increasing rate of crime and misconduct among adolescents draws the attention of both parents and educators. These days, parents are busy with daily living so their contact hours with their children diminish, thus increasing the likelihood of their children having behavioral problems. The Social Statistics Bulletin in Malaysia (2012) reports that juvenile offense has been increasing tremendously, with 4,801 cases reported in 2011. Anti-social behavior among adolescents poses negative effects on the future generation. Therefore, this study is very timely in that it investigates the factors influencing the healthy development of Malaysian adolescents.

Adolescence is the period of physical and psychological development and is the transition from childhood to adulthood (Blakemore, Burnett, & Dahl, 2010). It solidifies the youth's gender identification as they are neither in childhood nor in adulthood. Adolescence begins between the ages 10 years and 13 years, and ends in the late teens. During such period, adolescents undergo physical growth, experience emotional and spiritual changes, and develop self-efficacy and emotional maturity. According to Letchumanan (2010), adolescents are easily influenced to desire material gains, creating a rift in family bond and spiritual ties. Habits and behaviors assimilated during adolescence pose lifelong influence in their lives. Therefore, this study focuses on the implications of sex education, parental support, and religious values on the healthy development of adolescents.

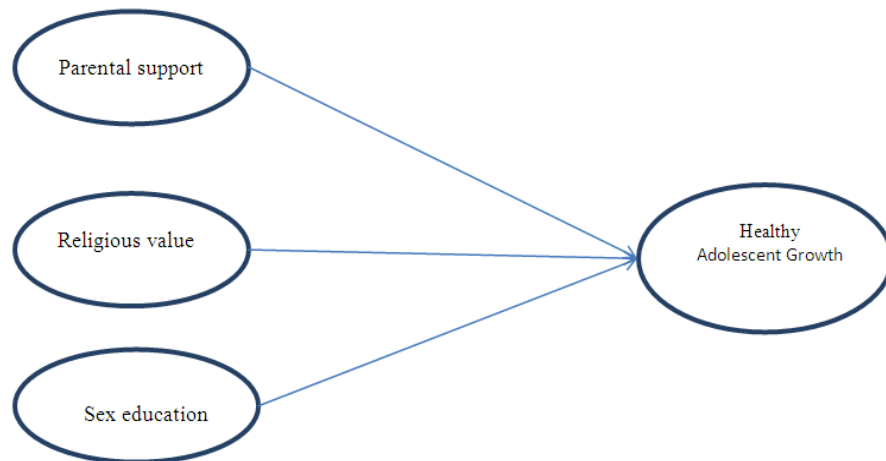


Fig. 1: Frame Work of the Study.

2. Conceptual Frame Work of the Study:

Figure 1 shows the Frame work of the study. The constructs of the frame were discussed below.

2.1 Parental Support:

Parents are usually preoccupied by daily life concerns. Thus, their contact hours with their children are diminished, thus causing behavioral problems in their children. Positive reinforcement of parents to their children below nine years old is considered to promote prosocial behavior (Pardini, Fite, & Burke, 2007). The family has remarkable influences on the development of adolescent behaviors (Rouholamini, 2002). Elias and Noordin (2011) affirmed that adolescents with poor family relationships are highly associated to delinquent behaviors and disciplinary issues because of poor role modeling. Many studies have confirmed that family environment plays a great role in the development of adolescent behavior, such as protective and risky behavior (Di-Clemente *et al.*, 2001; Elias *et al.*, 2009a). Moreover, good communication between parents and adolescent children is likely to decrease delinquency (Hosseini *et al.*, 2010), improve academic performances (Elias *et al.*, 2009b), and relieve emotional stress (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). The adolescents' satisfactory relationship with their parents also reduces the risk of the former's engagement in antisocial activities, such as smoking, sex, alcohol, and prohibited drugs (Nelson *et al.*, 1999). Stattin and Kerr (2000) posited that adolescents with a good relationship with their parents are open about their activities. Therefore, parental support plays an important role in adolescent development.

2.2 Religious Values:

Recent studies show the positive influence of religious values on developing adolescents' attitudes toward social responsibility, emotional management, and prosocial behavior (Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006; King & Roeser, 2009; Scarlett & Alberts, 2010; Warren, Lerner, & Phelps, 2011). Ting, (2011) cited that 80% of the juveniles had poor religious values and knowledge. Children positively perceive the messages from religious institutions. Herrenkohl, Tajima, Whitney, and Huang (2005) revealed religion as an important domain that lessens negative behavior during adolescence.

2.3 Sex Education:

School is a potential medium to reach adolescents and to convey sex and health information. With schools as a channel of information dissemination, cases of early pregnancy can be prevented (Laris & Rolleri, 2007; Campbell, 2003). Sex education also decreases crime rate among adolescents and helps them understand the developmental stages they undergo during their adolescence. Shrestha *et al.*'s (2013) research on sex education among adolescents suggests that adolescents' attitudes toward safe sex and HIV prevention significantly improved. The study also reveals that effective information provides knowledge, creates positive attitude, and decreases the number of early pregnancy.

3. Research Methods:

To investigate the factors that positively influence the healthy development of adolescents, the study adopted the quantitative method and sampled 60 academicians. Among the 60 respondents, 65% were males and 35% were females.

3.1 Data Analysis:

Section A of the questionnaire is composed of the respondents' preference as the main factor that influences the healthy development of adolescents. With regard to preferences, 51.7% of the respondents considered parental support as the most important factor that influence the healthy development of adolescents (Table 1).

Table 1: Main factors influencing the healthy development of adolescents.

	Frequency	Percentage
Sex education	10	16.7
Religious values	19	31.7
Parental support	31	51.7
Total	60	100.0

In Section B, the following questions were asked to determine the factors that positively influence the healthy development of adolescents.

Sex Education:

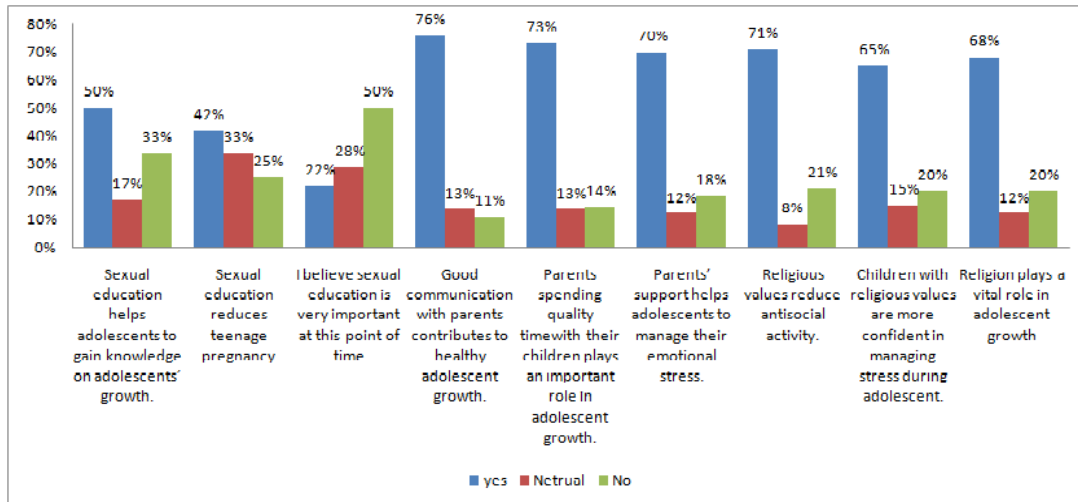
1. Sex education helps adolescents gain knowledge about their growth and development.
2. Sex education reduces teenage pregnancy.
3. Sex education is very important during this period.

Parental Support:

1. Good communication with parents contributes to the healthy development of adolescents.
2. Parents spending quality time with their children plays an important role in adolescent development.
3. Parental support helps adolescents manage emotional stress.

Religious Values:

1. Religious values reduce anti-social activities.
2. Children with religious values are more confident in managing stress during their adolescence than those with no religious values.
3. Religion plays a vital role in the development of adolescents.



3.2 Discussion:

Parental support was considered by 70% of the respondents to have a major role in the healthy development of adolescents, as supported by previous studies (Hosseinliet *al.*, 2010; Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Nelson *et al.*, 1999). Parents do not devote quality time and attention to the development of their children possibly because of the family's economic needs and the society's demands. More than 65% of the respondents considered religious values more important than anything else. Accordingly, religious values instill confidence, reduce anti-social behavior, and help in managing stress during adolescence (Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Bensonse, 2006; King & Roeser, 2009; Scarlett & Alberts, 2010; Warren, Lerner, & Phelps, 2011). In the current study, 50% of the respondents declared that sex education helps adolescents gain knowledge about their growth and development. Sex education was indicated by 42% of the respondents as a factor that helps reduce teenage pregnancy. Moreover, 22% of the respondents considered sex education as very important during adolescence. Nonetheless, the respondents seemed to be skeptical about sex education, which is contradictory to studies conducted in Western countries (Shrestha *et al.*, 2013; Kirby, Laris & Rolleri, 2007; Campbell, 2003). Therefore, the current study considers people in this region as not fully prepared to discuss sex education possibly because of their culture.

3.3 Future Research:

This paper is a pilot study that requires further investigation. Future research may involve a larger number of people and utilize statistical analysis on the obtained data. As most of the respondents opposed sex education, it is an aspect that needs more study.

4. Conclusion:

The study shows that parental support, religious values, and sex education play a vital role in the healthy development of adolescents. Further study should explore other factors that may influence the healthy development of adolescents to reduce their anti-social behavior.

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