

# The Nature and Manifestations of Adolescent Learners' Behaviour Problems in High Schools: Views from Head Teachers in a Developing Country

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**Abstract:- Adolescence is a stage which entails transition in the physical, emotional, and cognitive human development, happening before the onset of puberty and ending by adulthood. This study established adolescent learner behaviour problems in high schools in a developing country. The main focus of this study was on the nature of behaviour problems and their manifestations in the Kingdom of Eswatini. The study established the perceptions five head teachers from five selected schools within the Manzini region. The study employed a qualitative approach and a case study research design in which face-to-face interviews were used to collect data. The conclusions were drawn. The main conclusions of the study were that high school heads have encountered learners' behaviour problems amongst the adolescents in high schools. The study also concluded that learner behaviour problems amongst adolescents in high schools come in different forms and are in most noticeable to other members of the school community. The study recommended that counselling could be done to rectify behaviour problems, parents could also be engaged, positive discipline, productive punishment, putting in place effective disciplinary measures, introducing life orientation programs, introduction of health clubs and peer educators.**

**Keywords:-** Adolescence, Behaviour, Problems, Manifestations, High Schools

## I. INTRODUCTION

The changes that take place during the adolescents' stage encompass physiological and social changes that are a result of maturation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2019). Physiological changes also bring about hormonal changes that may influence the individual's behaviour somehow. Malim and Birch (2005) claim that physiological approach in psychology attempts to relate behaviour to the workings and genetic make-up of the body. Social changes take place in the change of relationships and social responsibility. There is a tendency for adolescents to develop closer ties with their peers while at the same time drifting apart from their family and parental relations during the adolescent stage (Ragelienė,

2016). The changes experienced by adolescents learners largely contribute to behaviour problems in high schools.

Adolescent learners' thoughts, attitudes and norms are continuously evolving and in certain respect changing negatively or positively (Simons-Morton, 2010). Malim and Birch (2005) also claim that as adolescent begin to see everything in a new light; parents can observe certain behavioural changes in their children during the adolescent stage.

According to Gross (2009), adolescents might be concerned with significant issues such as religion, gender roles, values or ethnicity. As young people move from adolescence into adulthood, physical changes continue to occur, but they are more gradual. Individuals begin the steady weight gain that will characterize adulthood, but these changes are not as discontinuous as they are at the beginning of adolescence (Bonnie, 2015). All these changes make the adolescents confused and this confusion is manifested through their behaviour that could be problematic in some instances.

## II. COMMON BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS AND THEIR MANIFESTATIONS IN SCHOOLS

Behaviour problems in adolescents take various forms. Some are mild while others are severe. Standards of adolescent behaviour, attitudes, norms and values in society have changed over the past decade. These changes are common in most societies. Such changes affect attitudes of young and old people (National Academy of Sciences, 2011). Adolescents think that school rules are unfair and that the discipline at home and at school is harsh. British Council (2017) reveals that, UK schools are allowed to discipline pupils who behave badly in various ways and points out types of bad behaviour seen by a teacher in a London secondary school as playing truant, smoking, swearing, hitting, kissing, running, stealing, not doing homework, cheating in exams, copying from secret notes or another pupil, calling a teacher or another pupil bad names, bullying, not listening or not paying attention in lessons and wearing unsuitable clothes for school. The following forms of

behaviour problems have been observed among adolescents in school:

#### A. Substances Abuse

Using substances in an inappropriate way is one way adolescents have been doing in schools. According to Mwale (2010), the most frequently abused drugs and substances in schools are alcohol, tobacco, marijuana in that order as well as cocaine although not very commonly used. Adolescents engage in drinking and smoking for a number of reasons. While some learners do it to increase pleasant feelings and decrease unpleasant ones, others do it for curiosity and compliance with peer expectations. According to National Institute on Drug abuse (2014:1)

- *People are most likely to begin abusing drugs — including tobacco, alcohol, and illegal and prescription drugs — during adolescence and young adulthood. By the time they are seniors, almost 70 percent of high school students will have tried alcohol, half will have taken an illegal drug, nearly 40 percent will have smoked a cigarette, and more than 20 percent will have used a prescription drug for a nonmedical purpose.*

The partnership for drug free kids (2017) reveals that Adolescents use drugs and substances because they see others using like their peers or their parents, media also contributes in that most of the music adolescents listen to and the movies the adolescents watch portray these drugs and substances cool and good to use. Adolescents also use drugs and substances in abuse of medication, boredom, rebellion and lack of confidence. On the same note, the National Institute on Drug abuse (2014:1) points out that adolescents use drugs and substances for the desire for new experiences, an attempt to deal with problems or perform better in school, and simple peer pressure.

There are a number of factors that influence adolescents to try drugs, and these are the availability of drugs within the neighborhood, community, and school and whether the adolescent's friends are using them. The family environment is also another influence, violence, physical or emotional abuse, mental illness, or drug use in the household will increase the likelihood of an adolescent to use drugs. Though taking drugs could be an adolescent's inherited genetic vulnerability, personality traits like poor impulse control or a high need for excitement, mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety (Ali, Mouton, Jabeen, Ofoemezie, Bailey, Shahid, & Zeng, 2011).

#### B. Bullying

Bullying is a deliberate act of coercing other people to comply with unfair demands through threats, fear or infliction of pain. Lyness (2013) reveal that, "Bullying is when a person is picked on over and over again by an individual or group with more power, either in terms of physical strength or social standing." According to Banks

(2010), bullying is comprised of direct behaviours such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, and stealing that are initiated by one or more students against a victim. Bullying can also be indirect. Indirect bullying takes place when an intention to socially isolate a student is pursued. Tsitsika, Andrie, Dimitropoulou, Tzavela, Janikian, and Tsolia (2014) point out that bullying amongst adolescents in the school is a universal problem, which continues to be a serious threat to physical and emotional health of the young.

Lyness (2014) points out that bullies attack their targets physically, which can mean anything from shoving or tripping to punching or hitting, or even sexual assault. Other adolescents use psychological control or verbal insults to put themselves in charge. For example, people in popular groups or cliques often bully people they categorize as different by excluding them or gossiping about them, in the process exercising psychological bullying. They may also taunt or tease their targets and this is called verbal bullying.

Banks (2012) reveals that approximately 15 percent of students are either bullied regularly or are initiators of bullying behaviour. Bullying is a common form of behaviour problem in schools. Bullying tactics also extend to the eating of a victim's packed lunch, assigning the victim to do work on behalf of the initiator such as carrying the bully's bag and threatening the victim not to report the bullying to teachers or parents. This study determined the problem behaviour manifestations amongst high school learners.

#### C. Delinquency

The term delinquency refers to adolescents' acts of breaking the law or engaging in illegal behavior deliberately (Parks, 2013). Woolard, (2011) reveals that, delinquency behaviour is a normal part of adolescence, yet the consequences of risky behavior and juvenile justice involvement can be severe. Arnett (2006) contends that there is a marked increase in semi criminality at the age of twelve to fourteen, not in crimes of one, but of all kinds. Delinquency behaviours entail violence, hostility, fighting and gang activities.

According to Henneberger, Tolan, Hipwell, and Keenan, (2014) delinquency behaviors emanate from peers and family relationships Peers' delinquency is related to individual delinquency in a number of studies Parenting styles and disciplinary practices and qualities of family relationships, have been linked to risk for delinquency. Sullivan (2006) reveals that, there is a relationship between various types of emotional and behavioral problems and delinquency.

#### D. Truancy

Truancy refers to an act of staying from school or leaving school either earlier than official dismissal time without permission from school authorities. According to Ramberg, Låftman, Fransson, and Modin (2018) truancy is a

challenge associated with a series of negative consequences at the individual and societal level, both in the short and the long term. Muula, Rudatsikira, Babaniyi, and Siziya, (2012) conducted a study in Swaziland and concluded that the prevalence of truancy was 27.4 percent and 17.9 percent in male and female adolescents respectively. Explaining how truancy manifests, Raising Children Network (2019) states that,

➤ *Your child might miss a day of school every now and then – that's pretty normal. But if it happens a lot, it might be truancy or 'school refusal'. In this situation, it can be hard for your child to feel like he belongs and keep up with schoolwork. So it's important for you to help your child get back to school.*

Muula, Rudatsikira, Babaniyi, and Siziya, (2012) contend that the unsupervised time that adolescents have when they are truant allows them to initiate and maintain unhealthy behaviours. The study clearly points out that those truant adolescents have been reported to engage in risky sexual practices, illicit drug use, alcohol dinking and cigarette smoking. Truancy happens in adolescence mainly when the learners avoid school. This normally takes place around the same time as major changes in adolescents' lives. These changes might include changing classes and schools, or starting secondary school. Truancy is also fueled by friendship problems, anxious about family circumstances and disconnected from school or anxious about leaving the house. Once a child feels this way, truancy becomes more likely (Raising Children Network, 2019). This study will establish the nature of problem behaviours in the Kingdom of Eswatini, a developing country in Southern Africa.

#### *E. Sexual Relationships*

Sexuality is an act of expressing of interest, orientation, and preference and it is a normal part of adolescence. Adolescent sexuality involves various factors, such as developing friendly partnerships, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and culture (Tulloch & Kaufman, 2013). Love relationships between adolescents of the opposite sex are a common occurrence in schools. Act for Youth (2019) points out that, during the adolescence stage, having a girlfriend or boyfriend can boost one's confidence especially when relationships are characterised by intimacy and good communication. With little controls, these relationships may culminate in exploratory sexual intercourse occurrences on school premises.

Gross (2009) states that while dating during adolescence is common and can be part of healthy development, serious and exclusive dating relationships can lead to a problem behaviour of having sex earlier than the expected time. According to Manning, Longmore, Copp, and Giordano (2014) sexual associations during adolescence led to self-reports of depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem among young adults.

### **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was guided by the storm and stress theory proposed by Hall in 1904. Hall's 1904 proposed theory viewed the adolescence stage as a period of storm and stress. Hall (1904) postulated a theory on adolescent development with much influence from Darwin's theory of evolution. Gross (2009) states that Hall (2904) argued that each person's psychological developments recapitulates both biological and cultural evolution of the human race.

According to Marlin and Birch (2005), hall (1904) described adolescence as a period of "storm and stress" as well as of great physical, mental and emotional change. Gross (2009), further adds that emotional reactions are more intense and volatile during adolescence compared with other periods of life.

Even though Hall's description of adolescence as a period of "storm and stress" has been regarded as rather being too exaggerative, recent studies have confirmed part of these claims. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson's (1984) study cited in Gross (2009) involving seventy five adolescent learners in Chicago revealed that the learners experienced extreme mood swings, from extreme happiness to deep sadness and vice versa in less than an hour under well-defined experimental conditions. According to the study stated above, adults usually require several hours to reach the same peaks and thoughts. Hall (1904) cited in Arnett (2006) argues that the curve of despondency starts at eleven, rises steadily and rapidly till fifteen, then falls gradually till twenty three. Petersen et al (1993) confirmed this claim in their report which states that there is a mid-adolescence peak in depressed mood, rising in early adolescence and then falling after the mid-teens (Arnett, 2006).

In highlight of the confirmation of Hall's (1904) claims by recent psychological studies highlighted above, it would be safe to argue that adolescents experience emotional mood swings as a result of puberty as earlier on discussed. Studies confirming Hall's (1904) claims were conducted on people ranging from eleven to twenty three years of age.

In this study, secondary schools adolescents ranged from twelve to twenty years of age, considering that the researchers' population was rural based. In rural areas it is common for children to delay going to school and to drop out before completing secondary school and later pursue studies when conditions allow. This therefore contributes to the presence of a notable number of twenty and above year olds in the rural secondary schools system. The adolescent learners in the Kingdom of Eswatini also experience depression and emotional mood swings that could contribute to certain behaviour problems.

#### IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Adolescent learners in the Kingdom of Eswatini High schools exhibit certain behaviour problems during their adolescent stage. The problems they display in their early years of development impact on them negatively even in their adult years. In some instances the negative impact is realised in their academic performance (National Academy of Sciences, 2011).

#### V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are to:

- Establish the nature of problem behaviours that exist amongst high school learners in Eswatini.
- Determine the high school learners' problem behaviour manifestations.

#### VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Researchers are guided by a certain paradigm. Creswell (2006) reveals that a research paradigm is a belief about the way in which data about phenomenon should be gathered, analysed and used. There are two major philosophies that have been identified in the western tradition of science. They are the positivism sometimes called scientific and interpretivist also known as anti-positivism.

#### VII. RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

This study followed a qualitative approach and a case study research design. Almeida, Faria, and Queirós (2017), state that qualitative research is a systematic process of inquiry into the meanings which people employ to make a sense of their experiences. It aims to describe and interpret what things mean to people.

##### A. Population

The overall population of the study considered of 5 head teachers from five selected schools within the Manzini region. Form one to five teachers were considered appropriate for this study because they have been teaching adolescent learners. Their views were sought by the study in order to identify the nature of behavioural problems. School head teachers of the selected schools also took part in this study in order to provide views about adolescent behaviour from an administrative point of view.

##### B. Sampling

According to Strydom (2013) sampling is a systemic process of identifying a small portion of the total set of persons which together comprises of the subject of a research study. In this study, sampling was conducted in order to identify a sub-set of the entire population which could be conveniently studied and have conclusions drawn about this study.

##### C. Research Instruments

The face-to-face interview schedule was used in this study. The purpose of using the face-to-face interview was to gain information from the respondents' natural settings. Face-to-face interviews also assisted the researcher to make the respondents comfortable and give the information desired. A semi-structured interview schedule was used in this study. It contained open ended questions. The interview targeted the 5 head teachers since they seem to have enough time to explain related issues in depth on a face to face basis. The interview is appropriate to gather in depth information and also allow the researcher to fully explain the purpose of the study and further clarify questions if the respondents fail to grasp the demands of the question clearly.

##### D. Data presentation

Data collected from interviews with head teachers was presented under themes, nature of behaviour problems and Problem behaviour manifestations.

##### E. Nature of Behaviour Problems

All the five interviewed head teachers agreed that adolescence is characterized by behaviour problems. They based this from the experience they got as head teachers and teachers. One head teacher pointed out that,

- *Learners in my school have a problem of alcohol and substance abuse, mainly males. This could be because the area the school is situated in grows dagga, though the weed is illegal but that is what the families use as their source of income.*

On the same note, one school head mentioned alcohol as a source of learners behaviour problems,

- *"There is a bar that sells alcohol about 600m away from the school, the boys ask their peers who dropped out of school to buy beer for them at the bar and they drink together."*

Another head teacher revealed that some problems they encounter in their school are in line with sexual relationships. The head teacher mentioned that,

- *In our school we have had a number of cases were learners have fallen pregnant, some of the pregnancies are within the learners and some are a learner and adults from the same village. This has really been a problem that has seen some learners having to drop out of school.*

On a similar note one head teacher revealed that,

- *The school has seen a number of girls dropping out of school due to love relationships especially with men who are not employed in the community, the girl leaves home en-route to school but never reaches school until they drop out due to absenteeism or pregnancy.*

Another head of school mentioned problems like truancy, absenteeism and addiction to social networks. While another one mentioned that,

- *There are cases of theft and a lot of lying that have been reported. There are those boys who smoke dagga, so they steal money from other learners so that they may go and buy dagga. When they are asked they never admit.*

#### F. Manifestations of Behaviour Problems in School

The head teachers gave almost similar behaviour problems manifestations, though they phrased them differently. One of the head teachers pointed out that,

- *The learners smoke a lot of cigarette and marijuana. These are seen when the learners come to school with lips that are darker than usual and sleepy eyes as well as failure to walk properly.*

On the same note one school head revealed that behaviour problems manifest when, “Learners come to school drunk and can hardly do most of the assigned school activities.” Another head teacher mentioned that some of the behaviour problems manifest when,

- *Learners would come to school not having done their homework and some would lie to say they forgot their books at home while others would say the books are lost, just lying to get away with not having done school work.*

On the same note one head teacher revealed that, “Learners with behaviour problem come to school smelling drugs, that could be bear cigarette or dagga.” One other head teacher mentioned that “.....they drink like a fish and are obsessed with sex.” On the other hand, one said “...they bank lessons, absent themselves at school without tangible reasons”. It is interesting to note that the reasons given by the head teachers were almost similar to those given by the teachers. The literature review above also confirms the same.

### VIII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Alcohol and substance abuse, sexual relationships, truancy, absenteeism, addiction to social networks, theft, lying and teenage pregnancy are the common behaviour problems manifested by adolescent learners at school. Findings of the study concur with the views of authorities cited in the literature review. Muula, Rudatsikira, Babaniyi, and Siziya, (2012), Mwale (2010) and Parks (2013) contend that adolescents engage in truancy and sexual relationships and substance abuse. Mwale (2010) states that adolescents engage in drinking and smoking in order to increase pleasant feelings and also out of curiosity and complaints with peer expectations.

### IX. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that the adolescence stage entails transition in the physical, emotional, and cognitive human development and this happens from puberty ending with adulthood. The adolescent learners in the Kingdom of Eswatini experience depression and emotional mood swings that could contribute to certain behaviour problems during their adolescent stage. The study concludes that high school learners in their adolescence stage exhibit problem behaviours. It is a conclusion in this study that problem behaviours amongst adolescents in high schools come in different forms and manifest in different forms.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended counselling, engaging parents, positive discipline, productive punishment, putting in place effective disciplinary measures, introducing life orientation programs and introduction of health clubs (peer educators). Existing literature supports the above mentioned strategies. Mwale (2010) contends that teachers may organize for social training skills targeting offenders. Parks (2013) contend that one way of instilling discipline on adolescents is to decide on consistent and well defined but reasonable standards of behaviour and then ardently sticking to them.

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