

The role of peer relationships in adolescents' psychological well-being

Yawen Liu*

Qihua Academy, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

Abstract. As a crucial period of development, adolescence builds the foundation of how a person would become. Peer relationship is considered to be a vital part of adolescents' interpersonal relationships, which naturally contributes to shaping a psychological well-being for them. This review primarily pays attention to the role played by peer relationship. Peer relationship serves as a shaping factor of adolescents' behaviors as adolescents tend to mirror how their peers behave. Meanwhile, peer relationship can work with adult support, such as teacher relationships and parental relationships, and thus benefit adolescents' psychological well-being in a further way. Moreover, gender difference should not be neglected when discussing the role played by peer relationship in the psychological well-being of adolescents. In respect of the influence of stressful life events, girls' peer relationship quality is more affected than boys' is. Concerns about this review may be that not enough studies on the field of adolescents' psychological well-being are reviewed and different results may thus not be considered. For future research, the role of peer relationship in other age groups' psychological well-being (middle-aged and elderly) can be studied.

1 Introduction

Adolescence is a critical time for growth. Adolescents must go through constant changes in their physical and mental well-being [1]. Attempting to pursue both parental autonomy and acceptance into social groups, adolescents want to be perceived as capable adults with sound judgment. However, they also want to stay a part of a significant social group [2]. It is an indispensable period in which people recognize identities, seek for their own paths and build foundations of their whole life. Since adolescence is a time of identity exploration when peer contacts increase and parental conformity decreases, adolescence is the period of life when people are most powerfully impacted by their friends and classmates [3]. Thus, peer relationship, meaning the relationship of people of the same age, plays an important role in adolescents' lives. Psychological well-being refers to the psychological aspect of a person's well-being. Without psychological well-being, people may suffer from emotional breakdowns and thus not being able to manage their life well.

Previous research has focused on the relationship between adolescents' and peers' behaviors and factors that influence the relationship. In a study conducted by Prinstein, it has found that adolescents' exposure to self-harming peers may contribute to their own self-harming and suicidal thoughts. Clinicians may want to check the closest acquaintances of a suicidal adolescent for suicidal tendencies as well. The results of the study's examination of various peer behaviors and risk outcomes point to a variety of ways that peers may affect

teenagers' health-risk behavior. While achieving these objectives, this study also offered solid preliminary backing for a modified assessment of several peer behavior patterns. The subscales of this measure were found to have a consistent factor structure and satisfactory to good internal consistency. The major studies for this measure also offer some evidence for how much particular behaviors affect adolescents. The good news is that adolescents were more likely to admit to being friends with those who behaved kindly. The bad news is that teenagers also reported that a sizable fraction of their peers engaged in drug usage and other deviant activities [4]. Another study focuses on the influence of parental involvement on the psychological well-being of adolescents. In the study led by Cripps and Zyromski, different parental styles are discussed respectively [5]. Positive or negative parental involvement views among adolescents have an effect on their psychological wellbeing, notably on how connected they feel to their peers and how they feel about themselves. Children's growth is also significantly influenced by parenting style. Middle school students that experience authoritative/democratic parenting (i.e., parents setting and enforcing rules, limitations, and expectations that are developmentally appropriate while being warm and engaged) compare well to those raised by other parenting styles, such as authoritarian/autocratic parenting style (i.e., parents expecting their children to follow the rules and put up the required level of effort and labor in all they undertake) and permissive/indifferent parenting style (i.e., parents perceived as being careless and indifferent and not

*Corresponding author: dlopez80342@student.napavalley.edu

participating in the lives of their adolescent children) in terms of their developmental outcomes, more favorable teenage self-evaluations, levels of adolescent self-esteem and adjustment, and levels of intrinsic drive for learning. The research is reviewed in the studies on adolescents' perceptions of parental participation, the parenting style associated with greater psychological well-being, and the effects of various parenting philosophies on teenage psychological health [5].

Only a few studies have looked into the role of peer relationships in adolescents' psychological well-being thus far, despite previous studies discussing the impact of peers' health-risk behaviors on adolescents as well as the impact of parental involvement on adolescents' psychological well-being. In light of five peer influence domains—peers' deviant behavior, peer support for aggressive behavior, peer pressure, peers' prosocial behavior, and support for prosocial behavior—and their connections to adolescents' problem and prosocial behaviors, this review aims to gain a better understanding of the impact of the quality of peer relationships on adolescents' psychological well-being.

2 Peer relationship, family support, and psychological well-being

2.1 The role of peer relationship

Peer influence and relationship can influence adolescents' behaviors in a large extent. Adolescents are more likely to behave in ways their peers do. Five areas of peer influence, as well as their connections to teenage issues and prosocial actions, were examined using several measures in a previous study [6]. The research team used a number of approaches on participants to assess their prosocial behavior, support for prosocial behavior, peer pressure, and support for violent behavior. For peer construct measures, the friend behaviour scale, friend responses to conflict, and friend peer pressure for fighting were all separately assessed. The frequency of problem behaviors, nonviolent intents, psychical aggressiveness, and prosocial conduct were looked at in relation to. The research team discovered that social pressure to fight and friends' delinquent conduct were both directly associated to aggressiveness, drug use, and delinquent behaviors. Prosocial conduct was especially associated to prosocial behavior among friends. The correlation between conduct and support for violence among friends and support for nonviolence among friends was less pronounced [6]. These results indicate that when peers behave in a positive way, adolescents tend to also behave positively; when peers behave in a negative way, adolescents tend to also behave negatively. Obviously, the impact of peer relationship on adolescents cannot be underestimated.

Moreover, when considering the impact of peer relationship on psychological well-being of adolescents, regulatory emotional self-efficacy (RESE) plays the role as a mediator. RESE is a term used to describe a person's level of confidence and perceived capacity for controlling emotions (including positive and negative

emotions). It was regarded as the core of emotions. In the research by Xu et al., negative peer interactions and non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) were explored, and the mediation role of regulatory emotional self-efficacy (RESE) was discovered [7].

In the study, 578 Chinese adolescents were asked to fill in several questionnaires. It was found that negative peer relationships had a positive correlation with NSSI, whereas RESE had a negative correlation with both variables. The connection between the NSSI and the negative peer relationships was mediated by RESE. Both the first phase of the mediation effect of RESE (forecasting the effect of negative peer relationships on RESE) and the second phase (forecasting the effect of RESE on NSSI) were affected by gender. In particular, females were more affected by negative peer relationships than boys were by RESE, and girls were more affected by RESE than boys were by NSSI [7]. Consequently, the mediating effect of RESE is confirmed through the study. However, gender difference is a neglected factor contributing to such effect. Thus, when considering adolescents of different genders, extra attention should be paid on girls' negative peer relationships and boys' RESE compared to girls' RESE and boys' negative peer relationships, for example.

Although peer relationship plays an indispensable role in adolescents' psychological well-being, it's unrealistic to neglect the coeffect of both peer and parental relationships. In the study by Jackie et al., the impact of risk on young people's patterns of peer relationships was examined in terms of two groups of teenagers who experienced various degrees of difficulty [8]. In one group, the participants were selected for their participation in two or more social services as they were thus vulnerable to poor psychosocial outcomes. In the other group, oppositely, participants were selected due to their non-involvement in multiple services. It was found that high degrees of adversity prevented connection with antisocial peers for a subgroup of young people to lower behavioral risks. However, without sufficient adult support to make up for the loss of peer connections in both government assistance programs and youngsters' social networks, this technique did not lower behavioral risk in the long term [8]. To conclude, when encountering low levels of peer relationships, the support from parents and teachers paves the way for adolescents build effective social connections.

2.2 The interaction between peer relationship and adult support

In the discussion of the role played by peer relationship and relationship with adults in adolescents' psychological well-being, the interaction of them both needs to be clarified. The level of relatedness of adolescents to both peers and teachers is correlated to adolescents' school outcomes. According to the relatedness construct, which refers to the perception of being near to and linked to important persons, good adjustment will occur in situations where students see that important school figures like instructors or

classmates genuinely care about them. In the study by León and Lieu, a total number of 1964 adolescents classified into different groups identified as relatedness clusters according to their relationships with their peers and teachers were assessed with their psychological and academic adjustment by latent profile analysis [9]. In order to measure the students' relatedness to their friends and homeroom instructors, researchers first provided middle school pupils in 1964 two scores. In accordance with the findings, the participants were then split into four groups: moderate relatedness with peers but low relatedness with teachers (MP-LT), moderate relatedness with peers and teachers (MP-MT), low relatedness with peers and teachers (LP-LT), and high relatedness with peers and teachers (HP-HT). Then, well-being measures were taken for the same groups of students. In the analysis part, preliminary analysis and latent profile analysis are done respectively to the results. According to the study, students' academic performance is not always correlated with their sentiments of relatedness to or responsiveness to their teachers if they have at least modest levels of relatedness to their peers (low grades or low well-being) [9]. According to the results, though adolescents' relationships with both peers and teachers are discussed, peer relationship is emphasized in adolescent's school outcomes. Therefore, keeping an at least modest relatedness to classmates is essential to adolescents' school outcomes.

Apart from relationship with teachers, parental relationship can also be compared to peer relationship in terms of its influence on adolescents' psychological well-being. In the research by Evelina et al., the influence of parental and peer relationships in adolescence on internalizing and functional somatic symptoms in adulthood was studied using questionnaires [10]. Internalizing symptoms (INS) is a well-recognised term for depressive, anxiety, phobia and panic-related symptoms, while ten elements of self-reported physical symptoms served as the basis for an index used to measure functional somatic symptoms (FSS). The research team conducted the test on 1083 participants and asked them to self-rate their peer and parental relationships at the age of 16. Also, they are asked to complete questionnaires about INS and FSS at the ages of 21, 30, and 42. After analysis, it became clear that weak peer connections, as indicated by time spent alone after school, and self-rated poor parental ties were the main relationship-related predictors of adult INS. On the other side, at age 16, FSS was most significantly associated with inadequate parental involvement and unhappiness with peers. Additionally, the strength of parental and peer connections in adolescence can predict adult mental health as well as functional somatic health as much as 26 years earlier [10]. These results emphasize on the coeffect of both peer and parental relationship which build the foundation for adolescents' psychological well-being and future health.

Peer interactions can also act as a barrier between youngsters and their dysfunctional parents. The mediating effects of peer and teacher support on the link between mother-adolescent attachment and teenage anxiety and the mediating effects of maternal

psychological flexibility on the link between maternal adult attachment and adolescent anxiety were examined in the study by Xin et al. [11]. In the study, a convenience sample approach was employed with a group of families, and 1139 Chinese moms and adolescents who were participants were provided questionnaires that were scale-conforming to several scales. The study found that teenage anxiety was positively impacted by maternal adult connections. Parental psychological adaptation and the mother-adolescent attachment chain served as mediators in the connection between parental adult attachment and teenage anxiety. Additionally, peer and teacher support reduced the link between mother-adolescent attachment and adolescent anxiety [11]. The results strongly support that when adolescents' psychological well-being is compromised by poor mother-adolescent attachment, peer relationship helps to moderate the negative impacts of it on adolescent anxiety, which further proves that peer relationship matters to adolescents' psychological well-being in a large extent.

In fact, it's better for both adolescents' peer and adult relationship to work together to promise psychological well-beings. In the study led by Lela and Elizabeth, on school misbehavior, health, and wellbeing in adolescence, a cross-sectional model of healthy family and peer interactions was developed [12]. To assess family interactions and peer relationships, researchers created two family measures from the Family Dimension and five items from the Friend Dimension. The results showed that family togetherness, parental behavioral expectations as well as support from friends were related to a greater extent of health and well-being. From another perspective, less misconduct at school was linked to friend support and parent behavioral expectations [12]. These results strongly suggest that harmonious family relationships and supporting peer relationships contribute to both well-behaving and psychologically healthy characteristics of adolescents.

3 The impact of stressful life events

Similar to results shown in Xu's study, gender differences also occur in research on the importance of peer relationship of adolescents relating to stressful life events [7]. The quality of parent-child and peer connections was examined in the Grace et al.'s study to see how they affected the association between stressful life events and teenagers' psychological health [13]. The study captured the number of stressful life events those adolescents had had. For further analysis, gender differences were considered and studied. It was found that adolescents' psychological well-being is negatively impacted by stressful life events. Additionally, it was shown that females who had more stressful life events also had fewer positive interactions with their parents and friends, which in turn had a negative impact on their psychological wellbeing. On the other hand, for males, this type of influence was only evident for the nature of the parental connection, but not for peer relationships. [13]. The results indicate that it is crucial to consider

gender differences when discussing the effect of stressful life events on adolescents' psychological well-being.

4 Conclusion

Peer relationship is undoubtedly a highlighted factor contributing to adolescents' psychological well-being. This is because adolescents are more prone to act in ways that mirror those of their peers. Also, adolescents' academic success depends on maintaining at least a minimal level of relatedness with their peers. Moreover, it is important to not overlook the supplementary effects of peer and parental relationships, which lay the groundwork for adolescents' psychological well-being and long-term health. In addition, adolescents can form strong social connections even when they have few peer contacts because of the assistance from parents and teachers. In respect of the moderating effect of peer relationship, the anxiety that adolescents experience in regard to mother-adolescent attachment can be soothed by a good peer relationship. Meanwhile, adolescents who are well-behaved and possess psychologically sound traits typically have harmonious parental ties and supportive peer relationships. Finally, it's important to take gender variations into account when talking about how peer relationships affect adolescents' psychological well-being.

However, there are still some limitations of this review. One concern about the review is that in the field of adolescents' psychological well-being, only a small portion of papers are reviewed and included. Results may be different in other studies that are not mentioned in this review. Plus, in this review, adolescents are not clearly divided into more specific age groups (e.g., middle school students and high school students). In this case, it may be inappropriate to directly compare some of the results as they may represent different age groups. For future research, the role of peer relationship of adolescents plays in moderating specific mental illnesses can be assessed. For example, high relatedness of adolescents to their peers may moderate their major depression in some extent. Also, rather than only focusing on adolescents, following research can be undertaken to explore the effect of peer relationship on middle-aged and elderly groups' psychological well-being. Meanwhile, the results can be examined and compared to those of studies on adolescents' psychological well-being.

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