The Issue of Aggressiveness in Adolescents in Light of Social Transition and changes: Description of the Phenomenon in Terms of Background and Dimensions

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Abstract:

Adolescents, due to the range of developmental changes they undergo, feel an urgent need to search for their place in society, especially in light of the dual-dimensional transformations they experience: on a social level and a personal level. Therefore, their involvement in aggressive behavior may serve as a way to assert their identity as a fully formed individual with roles and a social position, as well as a means of coping with societal pressures and contradictions.

In this perspective, this research paper aims to understand the issue of aggressive behavior in adolescents within the framework of the social transition process, through the following elements:

•   The context of social change and the practice of aggressive behavior.

•   Social change and adolescence.

Keywords: Aggressive behavior; adolescent; social transition; family.

Introduction:

It is certain that adolescence represents a "critical" opportunity to restructure an adolescent's identity across its various dimensions (sexual, psychological, and social). During this time, adolescents experience a state of conflict and contradictions between desires they wish to fulfill and the social pressures and obligations they are expected to adhere to. Navigating the tension between these forces can only be achieved within an interactive context, under the guidance of the family unit, which provides containment and acceptance, ensuring the proper development of the adolescent's identity.

However, in the context of rapid social change, the family may struggle to fully understand the needs and demands of the adolescent, who is also undergoing personal and emotional changes alongside social ones. In such cases, the family is faced with two choices:

• Either it adapts and builds healthy mechanisms to deal with the adolescent.

• Or it weakens, losing its educational foundations, and fails to offer the necessary support and care.

In cases where the family system is fragile, parental control may weaken, and the parents may lose effective parenting strategies for guiding their adolescent children, who are seeking autonomy and may sometimes act by breaking rules and not adhering to them.

Thus, in this context, we are discussing social change—as a natural process experienced by all societies—and the new mechanisms the family must adopt to coexist with it. Additionally, we add to this duality the "adolescent" phase, which has its own unique characteristics and requires a form of "protective parenting." Does the contemporary situation demand a new approach to "parenting" adolescents in light of the various changes we are experiencing?

It is important to note that if the adolescent lacks the protection to shield them from undesirable behaviors, they may gravitate toward bad company and become involved in gangs, offering them an escape from all forms of societal pressures. Therefore, adolescents exhibiting dangerous or unacceptable behaviors—despite the best efforts of their parents—may require greater understanding.

This analysis attempts to discuss the issue of adolescence—as a phase with its own needs and requirements—and the role of the family—as a fundamental system in shaping the identities of adolescent children—and the interplay between these two factors in light of societal changes that may impede the effective and functional performance of parents, thereby potentially contributing to some adolescents resorting to harmful aggressive behaviors that pose risks to their mental health.

1.   The Context of Social Change and the Practice of Aggressive Behavior

Social change is a natural phenomenon that affects all aspects of the world, with human societies and their various manifestations continuously undergoing transformation. However, some phenomena change and develop faster than others, and it is difficult to imagine human life in a state of stagnation or immobility. Therefore, social change must be viewed as a natural inevitability that affects and is experienced by all systems, including the family unit.

That said, social changes often result in instability concerning social norms and values. This instability encourages the emergence of undesirable behaviors such as drug use or various forms of violence and aggression, either self-directed or directed toward others. These behaviors can also be linked to the absence of meaningful roles for young people and adolescents in a society that neglects their concerns and aspirations, often failing to meet their needs.

Furthermore, adaptation tends to be more successful in societies where stable systems and values prevail, compared to societies where conflicting cultural currents collide or attempt to adopt new elements. The more a society is exposed to intense social change, the more it is vulnerable to cultural conflict, either at the societal level or within its individual members and groups. This sets the stage for certain segments of society to experience difficulties in adaptation and poor adjustment in various forms.

According to Khader (2006, p. 46), this can lead to "crises within social institutions, with a particularly strong impact on the family as the primary unit of society and the custodian of values and traditions."

Hassan (1981) also pointed out that in this context, adolescents find themselves confused by contradictory standards, leading them to engage in deviant behaviors because they do not know which path to follow.

As societies experience various changes, the Algerian family has been particularly affected by structural transformations in recent years, due to modernization and rapid economic changes. These transformations have led to a reduction in the family's social functions, particularly with the absence of traditional controls that once regulated social behavior and governed the family system both internally and externally. This has weakened the authority of the traditional family structure and given rise to unfamiliar practices.

In this regard, both Ghanim and Nasif (2000) argued that rapidly and unevenly changing conditions lead to an increase in various undesirable behaviors, which in turn generate many social problems. These transformations, particularly rapid changes in the economic and cultural fields, lead to numerous disruptions that open the door to potential deviance, marginalization, and poor adaptation. These issues not only affect society but also extend to the individual's personality. As such, the production of violence and the practice of various forms of aggression can be seen as a result of these deep transformations.

Boutafnouchet (1982) mentioned in his book on social change in Algerian society that Algerian society contains three social systems: the first is an advanced system derived from the West, the second is the traditional system, and the third is an emerging intermediate system that is still under construction. In light of these different models, values within society, particularly within family systems, are in conflict. Violence, therefore, is a significant indicator of social structure weaknesses and represents a failed response in the adaptation process itself.

Without a doubt, these social changes and the crises societies and families face create fertile ground for the emergence of social ills. Thus, Douville (1994) linked these changes to the socialization process of adolescents who are not provided with spaces to exercise their freedom and establish their position in society, which opens up broader opportunities for undesirable behaviors.

Abu Housa (2001) pointed out that difficulties sometimes arise that hinder the understanding or fulfillment of roles, both within the family unit and externally. In such situations, temporary conflict may arise between the expectations of family members. If this conflict becomes ongoing, it could affect the unity of the family as a whole. Similarly, the social changes that occur in the broader society—of which the family is a part—can lead to changes in family structure, which, in turn, directly impacts the children, particularly during adolescence.

2.   Social Change and Adolescence

It is evident from studies that address adolescent issues in general that they rely on different theoretical frameworks and varying approaches to explain these problems. Some approaches emphasize the importance of biological factors as the causes of adolescent crises and issues, while others attribute these problems to the prevailing conditions in social life. Psychological approaches, on the other hand, attempt to reconcile social and biological aspects. Additionally, other approaches have emerged that explain and understand adolescent problems in terms of the goals and demands that adolescents strive to achieve during this stage.

In light of this diversity in theoretical frameworks for understanding adolescence, practical issues also arise, particularly concerning how parents interact with adolescents. Lord (1984) explained that rapid progress significantly affects parental tasks, which may deviate from their natural course. As a result, parents may lose the ability to monitor and guide their children, who are more open to and engaged with the changes of the era. Adolescents are more capable of adapting to social, cultural, and technological changes than their parents.

It is also important to note that aggressive behavior in adolescents is not necessarily indicative of a pathological condition. Rather, it could be seen as a process of searching for a social identity through which the adolescent seeks recognition or a process of searching for personal identity. The adolescent phase is the most sensitive to rapid social changes, which amplify the confusion adolescents feel regarding their roles and place in a society in flux.

Khaled (1986) added that when the family fails to fulfill its socializing role due to these changes, this failure generates feelings of insecurity and familial deprivation in the adolescent. This leads the adolescent to seek out gang affiliations or groups of pre-deviants to feel a sense of belonging and fulfill their various needs. To achieve this, they engage in processes of adaptation to the norms of the group, and thus, the group begins to influence the adolescent's personality, gradually leading them down a path of maladaptation.

Furthermore, during this phase, the adolescent experiences significant and rapid physiological and psychological changes, along with numerous and changing social demands. This makes it difficult for them to feel stable and secure in their identity. They need time to integrate these sudden changes into a more stable sense of self.

Adolescence, by nature, is marked by physiological and psychological changes associated with puberty. These changes push the adolescent beyond childhood, which, according to Dellattre (1994), is rarely without distress. The adolescent feels the need to rebuild their self-image and body image, reassess their relationships with their parents, and re-evaluate their interactions with the adult world. This period also reflects the adolescent's strong desire for independence and freedom.

To clarify this idea, Goldberg (1994) pointed out that activities involving role-playing begin intensively, accompanied by contradictory tensions between adopting roles and counter-roles. However, the adolescent is not prepared for these new transformations they experience during this difficult and decisive stage of life. The various influences exerted by the family and surrounding environment (neighborhood, peers, etc.) may lead the adolescent to a break with these influences, acting out, and searching for their identity in ways that may become violent and aggressive. In this case, the adolescent seeks to distance themselves from impulses and uncomfortable situations, trying to escape from oppressive internal conflicts.

This approach is similar to Kestemberg's (1978) perspective, which stems from the idea of reviving the Oedipal conflict, resulting in a crisis in the adolescent's identity. The adolescent finds themselves in a fragile narcissistic state, feeling weak and searching for any support that can provide a sense of strength. Kestemberg referred to this type of relationship as a "fetishistic relationship with the object" (La relation fétichique à l'objet), where the object holds all the potential to become an idealized figure, a result of the adolescent's fragile narcissism.

Thus, we can understand that aggressive behavior serves as a means for the adolescent to find external, safer, and less threatening subjects. However, the search process resembles a state of dependency, as if their "ego" remains centered around its primitive object.

Jaber (2001) emphasized an essential idea that can be applied to understanding this issue, though from a different perspective. This is the concept of "self-concept," a central component in subcultural theories, alongside the concept of symbolic interaction. When the individual (the adolescent) fails to develop an adequate self-concept within the prevailing cultural framework of society, they turn to another culture that offers them the principles necessary to build a self-concept that satisfies them.

From this, we understand that the adolescent who exhibits aggressive behavior feels accepted among their peers, having achieved important goals such as belonging and active participation. They see themselves as a member capable of adhering to group norms, which gives them a sense of security and self-confidence.

In some cases, we might view the adolescent's aggressive behavior as a positive attempt to resolve the crisis of adolescence. Conversely, it could be seen as a reflection of the adolescent's failure to achieve satisfactory integration of their new needs within their family and social environment, to the extent that Miller et al. (1980) described these adolescents as experiencing an existential crisis, labeling it as "a life devoid of meaning."

On the other hand, family circumstances (fragility, disintegration, lack of communication, etc.) exacerbate these social pressures. As a result, aggressive behaviors may be considered as expressions of rebellion against the family, an indication of dissatisfaction with parental authority, and a desire for liberation and independence, leading the adolescent to escape to a world of freedom away from family obligations. Al-Miliji (1978) pointed out that family authority can have a harmful influence on adolescents, exerting emotional pressure (strict orders, interference in their affairs, constant surveillance) that undermines their potential and leads to failure. In response, the adolescent seeks to assert their personality and personal freedom, regardless of the harmful consequences of their undesirable actions.

It is clear that the adolescent undergoes a phase of changes across all aspects of their development. This "whole" is closely tied to their experiences, relationships, and interactions within the family and their environment, as well as how they perceive these relationships and interactions, whether positively or negatively.

Conclusion:

From the above, it can be concluded that the process of social change is a natural necessity for the development of societies. However, when society changes at an imbalanced and rapid pace, the natural relationship between generations shifts, creating a divide between them (the parents' generation and the children's generation). This means that the faster societal change occurs, the greater the inclination toward "family disorder," which becomes increasingly dangerous. These changes are often experienced as situations of disturbance and maladaptation. The social disturbances and crises that society faces can, to varying degrees, push certain adolescents to engage in various forms of deviance, as these behaviors are easier to carry out without sufficient supervision. These factors affect family control, which becomes weaker or, in some cases, entirely absent.

In this context, the issue of aggressive behavior cannot be considered in isolation from the repercussions of change and its impact on both individuals and society.

Based on this, we can summarize the understanding of this issue in terms of its origin and motivations through the following points:

- The Adolescent's Social Position: It appears that modern societies have failed to meet the specific needs of adolescence, to the point where adolescent problems are closely tied to the social role they play in contemporary society.

- Rapid Technological Advancement and its Effect on the Family: This progress has created a significant gap between the parents' generation and the children's generation in terms of values, beliefs, and lifestyle. As a result, this has had negative repercussions, leading to a state of societal and familial instability.

- Attraction to Counter-Cultures: The absence of a clear social position for the adolescent hinders the development of their identity, potentially encouraging them to adopt anti-social behaviors and join subcultures that provide a sense of belonging.

In the absence of a proper understanding of the requirements and particularities of this stage, adolescents tend to adopt behaviors that seem to defy societal norms (such as running away, drug use, violence, etc.) as a way of asserting their identity or seeking a better world.

Therefore, we conclude that aggressive behavior often stems from societal (economic, educational, etc.), familial (family disintegration, disruption of the family system, etc.), and personal adolescent factors, such as the desire for freedom, escaping family pressures, and difficulties in adapting to unfavorable family conditions. Additionally, the street may act as an attractive element, offering new experiences and adventures that appeal to children and adolescents.

In light of this, we can offer several suggestions that we believe may benefit both adolescents themselves, their families, and those responsible for youth affairs. Among the most important are:

- Providing larger spaces for adolescents to engage in various activities, games, and sports where they can channel their energy.

- Building bridges of communication between children and their families, enhancing positive dialogue to avoid conflicts and violence from both sides.

- Considering socialization institutions—especially schools—as interactive and participatory links between parents and adolescent children.

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