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An Exploration of Life's Issues That Adolescent Girls Face: Impacting Their Psychological, Physical and Spiritual Wellbeing

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Introduction



Adolescence is a crucial stage for girl's development and they can experience personal challenges that impact their mental health and personal wellbeing (Call et al., 2002; Tolman, Impett, Tracy & Michael, 2006).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2010) Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (SMHWB) discovered that 23% of girls were diagnosed with mental health disorders.

Light (2000) reveals there are individual differences in girls' psychological and physical wellbeing, yet interrelated in a negative cycle of pain relieving thoughts and high risk behaviours.

Early prevention for girls is pertinent to assist in positive development and management of challenging issues (LeCroy, 2005).

Research Purpose and Aim



This study utilises interpretative phenomenology to explore insight from lived experiences of adolescent girls in psychological wellbeing, physical wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing to discover coping strategies and benefits of prevention or support programs to assist adolescent girls holistically.

Research Design



Methodology

A methodology of interpretative phenomenology assisted in qualitatively exploring the key issues that adolescent girls face and that impact their psychological, physical, and spiritual development.

Participants

The study involved 13 adolescent girls from a youth group/life group. The youth pastor and life group leader were additional participants.

Characteristics:

- Girls aged between 15 and 16 years old.

Research Design



Procedures

Adolescent girls were provided by a church in Western Australia.

Commencing the life group meeting, two 30 minute focus groups (five participants each) addressed key issues that adolescent girls face, coping strategies and prevention or support programs.

A 30 minute face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted before and after youth group meetings which obtained responses from each of the nine adolescent girls, questioning challenging issues that adolescent girls face and personal health and wellbeing.

Post research, the youth pastor and life group leader also participated in a 30 minute interview at the church for further feedback to support the adolescent girls' responses.

Findings



Complete data was available for 11 participants.

Responses were analysed using interpretive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At present, four emerging themes identified are:

1. Coping techniques
2. Physical wellbeing
3. Support systems
4. Church-based youth programs

Key unforeseen theme emerged from this study:

1. Social wellbeing

Finding 1 - Coping techniques



When adolescent girls struggle with personal issues or arguments they:

- Ignore the issue by avoiding the problem
- Disclose the issue by talking about it; or
- With faith turn to their God to resolve the problem.

For example, first adolescent responded:

Yeah. Most of the girls usually hide it up inside.

Second adolescent responded:

I have to tell someone so I'll end up telling someone.

Third adolescent responded:

Even though you go through these tough times it's just God's plan for you to get better in yourself and you just need to pull through it as that is what he wants.

Finding 2 - Physical wellbeing



An adolescent girl's body image perception is hindered by influences from peers, society and the media.

For example:

As a teenager, or as a girl...the thing that everyone talks about like magazines, like how they have the models and then all the girls are like oh! I have to look like that.

Finding 3 - Support systems



To enhance personal health and wellbeing it is crucial to support adolescent girls during development within society and the community.

For example:

Well they could always put more fun things in the community [to create] different friendships. One person you might come across and you trust more than anyone.

A further example is:

[Providing support in] local church, school chaplain or nurse, therapist, friends, family, life group leaders.

Finding 4 - Church-based youth programs



Adolescent girls greatly benefited from youth group or life group.
It is crucial for enhancing spiritual and personal health and wellbeing.

For example:

Everyone in our life group makes everyone feel good about themselves. Like we never have any bad words or anything to say to each other and they're always good and positive.

A further example is:

Youth group's great. There are so many people. You go and it's exciting and you connect with God...You just learn more every time you go and you get closer and closer. It's just great.

Key Unforeseen Finding - Social wellbeing



This social aspect of fitting into society and the problematic issues that may occur in families or peer groups are influences that impact adolescent girls personal health and psychological, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

For example first adolescent responded:

Fitting in...Just anywhere...Just trying to be that, like what everyone expects you to be as a person.

Second adolescent responded:

Boys leading you on and like, heart break.

Third adolescent responded:

Bullying. Friends are like mean and stuff and don't tell the truth...Getting like people talking behind your back that you thought were friends and stuff.

A further example is:

Family issues...Family break ups, people dying...Not having a good relationship with your parents or siblings.

Conclusions



The findings from the present study broaden the psychological research literature for female adolescents' health and wellness and contribute to the theoretical knowledge base of prevention and support programs for female adolescents. It is anticipated that this research may assist in the development of prevention and support programs for adolescent females using holistic (psychological, physical, spiritual and social) community-based strategies.

Possible limitations include:

- Parental feedback not included to support daughters' responses.
- Participants are gender-specific (i.e., female adolescents only)

Future research could:

- Evaluate the dialogue of parents, family and friends.
- Include adolescent males to form a wider scope of knowledge.

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