

A Phenomenological Investigation of the Lived Experience of Adolescence among Adolescents Based on the Mentalization Capacity

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Extended Abstract

Aim

The critical period between childhood and maturity is adolescence. During this developmental stage, adolescents, spanning in age from 10 to 19, undergo a multitude of physical, psychological, and social transformations. Mentalization is regarded as one of the influential factors during this time period. In the operational definition, mentalization is referred to as reflective functioning. It is a social cognitive ability that enables one to comprehend the mental states of both oneself and others. There are numerous quantitative studies examining adolescent mentalization. However, qualitative research that examines the lived experience of adolescents in an Iranian population and scrutinizes the influence of mentalizing capacity on this experience is scarce. As a consequence of this deficiency, the current study aimed to examine the lived experiences of adolescents in relation to their mentalization capacity.

Methodology

The ongoing investigation is a descriptive phenomenological inquiry. The statistical sample comprised male and female adolescents residing in Tehran in 2021, ranging in age from fifteen to eighteen. To accomplish this, a method of purposive sampling was implemented. The Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RMET) was utilized in this study. Then, four of the adolescents with the highest RMET scores and four of the adolescents with the lowest scores were selected according to inclusion and exclusion criteria. Four of the adolescents were female, while four were male. The investigation commenced with the researcher conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight participants. MAXQDA 2020 was utilized to analyze the data in accordance with the Colaizzi method, subsequent to the verification of interview entries. Data was additionally coded, clustered, and thematized. To substantiate the results, the researcher solicited input from mentalization specialists, disseminated the findings to the participants, and compared their analyses with those of the researchers.

Findings

An examination of the data pertaining to the participants who possessed a higher mentalization capacity yielded the identification of 1713 codes, 23 clusters of meaning, and 6 themes. An analysis of the data collected from participants with limited mentalizing capacity yielded the extraction of 466 codes, 18 clusters of meaning, and 5 themes.

Conclusion

The present study's results indicate that adolescents who possessed a greater mentalizing capacity were more adept at problem-solving and considering the perspectives of others. They were highly self-aware and held relativism to a high degree. Additionally, positive family relationships and reciprocal social interactions were apparent in the results. Adolescents with limited mentalizing ability, on the other hand, exhibited absolutism and an inability to analyze and explain. Also, they held a negative view of themselves. Moreover, they experienced an increase in family conflicts and a sense of insecurity in social interactions. Adolescents who exhibited limited mentalization capacity also demonstrated irritability and an inability to solve problems. The results of the current investigation indicated that adolescents' perception of adolescence is significantly influenced by mentalization, which in turn enhances their intrapersonal qualities and the quality of their interpersonal relationships. As a result, it is recommended that programs aimed at enhancing adolescents' mentalizing capacity be considered.

Keywords: Adolescence, Lived Experience, Mentalization, Phenomenology.