

# Social Competence and Altruistic Behaviour Among Adolescents: A Review Study

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## Abstract

Adolescence, spanning from 10 to 19 years, is a pivotal stage marked by profound physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes as individuals transition from childhood to adulthood. This period emphasizes significant growth and exploration. Social competence is integral to adolescents' overall development, involving skills to navigate interactions, build connections, and thrive in social settings, with a focus on peer relationships, self-identity, and societal expectations. Altruistic behaviour, characterized by selfless actions and care for others, is prevalent in this phase, fostering social connections and shaping ethical values. Recognizing and encouraging altruism significantly impacts adolescents' social and emotional maturation, fostering responsibility and compassion. This review study aims to explore the social competence and altruistic behaviour of adolescents. A careful curation of relevant literature has been conducted, drawing from reputable sources including Frontier, Springer, Elsevier, and ResearchGate. This thorough investigation ensures the delivery of valuable insights into the social competence and altruistic behaviour of adolescents.

**Keywords:** Social competence, Altruistic behaviour, Adolescence

## Introduction

Adolescence marks a crucial stage in human life characterized by numerous physical and cognitive shifts. These transformations contribute significantly to behavioural changes, ultimately molding an individual's personality. During this dynamic and formative period, young people encounter a plethora of new experiences. The term adolescence originates from the Latin word *adolescere*, meaning to mature. Nevertheless, accurately characterizing the stage of life between childhood and adulthood has been a persistent challenge. In the early 20th century, G. Stanley Hall provided a broad definition, describing adolescence as the developmental span from 14 to 24 years in his work on the subject (Hall, 1905). Over 50 years ago, the World Health Organization (WHO) suggested that adolescence encompassed the age range of 10 to 20 years. They emphasized that while it begins with puberty, the conclusion of this period is not clearly delineated (WHO, 1965). The definition of a child, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, encompasses individuals from birth to 18 years. Over time, the UN has officially designated adolescence as the phase spanning from 10 to 19 years of age (WHO, 2015). In various nations, cultures, and situations, there is consistent astonishment regarding this definition. People are surprised by the idea that a 10-year-old is considered a child, not an adolescent, and there is also disbelief about the notion that a 19-year-old is already considered an adult (Sawyer et al., 2018). In its most general terms, adolescence signifies the phase that signifies the shift from childhood to adulthood. Traditionally, this phase usually extends from the onset of puberty, characterized by distinct hormonal changes, to the

attainment of guardian independence, as legally defined as "adulthood" in numerous countries, typically spanning from 12 to 18 years of age (Dhal,2004). Adolescence often coincides with puberty, a biological occurrence marked by a series of events triggered by heightened levels of adrenal and gonadal hormones. These events include the emergence of secondary sex characteristics and adjustments in muscle and fat distribution (Spear,2000). It is linked to a phase characterized by heightened engagement in risk-taking behaviours and amplified emotional responsiveness (Casey et al.,2010).

### **Social competence**

According to Orpinas (2010), Social competence is described as the capacity to navigate social interactions successfully. In simpler terms, it involves the ability to interact positively with others, establish and sustain close relationships, and react adaptively in social environments. Due to the intricate nature of social interactions, social competence results from various factors such as cognitive abilities, emotional processes, behavioural skills, social awareness, and individual and cultural values associated with interpersonal relationships. Social competence can be defined as a child's ability to effectively participate in social interactions with both peers and adults (Fabes et al.,2006). It involves observing how a child displays emotional and regulatory abilities when engaging with others. Social competence is not a fixed trait; instead, it should be seen as a developing concept that reflects the stages of growth. As children mature, society anticipates more advanced interactions. As they grow, interactions beyond the home environment become more significant and diverse. Achieving effectiveness in various social interactions necessitates the mastery of several skills, including perspective-taking, social problem-solving, and emotion regulation. It is important to note that these skills may vary across different developmental stages. Understanding (a) these foundational skills, (b) the settings in which interactions occur, and (c) the various stages of development all contribute to a comprehensive comprehension of social competence. These three aspects are considered essential dimensions or fundamental components of social competence (Junge et al., 2020).

Social competence involves three key elements: (a) the capacity to establish positive and thriving interpersonal connections and effectively address interpersonal conflicts, (b) the cultivation of a distinct self-identity and, more broadly, a collective identity such as national identity, and (c) the commitment to being a responsible member of one's society and a compassionate global citizen. Nurturing positive and supportive relationships with diverse individuals, including parents, siblings, relatives, peers, teachers, and other adults, is crucial for children and adolescents to successfully navigate and find happiness in our society (Ma,2012).

### **Altruistic behaviour**

People frequently exhibit altruistic behaviour towards unfamiliar individuals without any expectation of receiving something in return. From an evolutionary standpoint, this phenomenon poses a puzzle. The evolution of altruistic and cooperative behaviour, where an organism's actions decrease its own fitness but enhance the fitness of another organism (such as sharing food), typically aligns with scenarios involving genetically related organisms (kin selection) or situations where reciprocity can be anticipated (reciprocal altruism) (Vleric,2021). Altruism is characterized as conduct that benefits someone else, even at one's own expense (Trivers,1971). Researchers suggest that one of the adaptive advantages of altruistic behaviour in humans is its potential to enhance reproductive success, as it is considered a desirable trait in mate

selection (Miller,2011). Altruism is characterized as a selfless and unselfish regard for the well-being of others, encompassing purposeful and voluntary actions aimed at improving another person's welfare without expecting any external rewards (Bhuvana et.,al 2021). Collaboration among individuals without familial connections is prevalent in human societies, fostering the establishment of markets, trade networks, public infrastructure, and social institutions. The regulation of human cooperation is facilitated by social norms, reinforced by penalties for those who violate these norms. Prosocial emotions and altruistic social inclinations, including compassion, guilt, concern for others' well-being, and a preference for fairness, play a role in resolving conflicts between self-interest and altruism (Silk & House, 2016). Infants as young as 14 to 18 months display altruistic behaviour, helping others without expecting rewards or considering reciprocation and reputation. Similarly, chimpanzees, our closest primate relatives, also engage in instrumental helping behaviour without specific rewards. These discoveries indicate that human infants possess an inherent inclination towards altruism. As they develop and interact more independently in social settings, their initial altruistic tendencies are influenced by socialization and feedback from interactions with others (Warneken&Tomasello,2009).

### Literature Review

The social proficiency of teenagers is influenced by various factors, such as their social abilities, awareness of social dynamics, and self-assurance (Spence,2003). Social awareness involves examining how adolescents choose social objectives, determine the most suitable course of action in a given situation, and implement their chosen response. Meanwhile, self-confidence is reflected in the growing body of proof exhibited through social interactions, aiming to enhance their social competence and academic achievements (Lease et.,al2002).

The basis for anticipating future interactions with others and forming perceptions of one's own behaviour lies in social competence. This competency involves the capacity to consider another person's perspective in a given situation, assimilate lessons from past experiences, and apply that acquired knowledge to navigate changes in social interactions (Semrud &Clikeman,2007). These abilities empower us to understand what to express, how to make sound decisions, and how to conduct ourselves in various circumstances. The quality of social skills in children and adolescents can impact their academic achievements, conduct, relationships with family and peers, as well as their participation in extracurricular activities (Wentzel,1991). In the stage of adolescence, the significance of peer relationships becomes especially pronounced for individuals. A crucial aspect of this developmental phase is the establishment of identity, involving the understanding of oneself and the desired qualities and characteristics one aspires to possess (Ladd,1999). During adolescence, individuals experiment with various social roles through interactions with peers. Peers play a crucial role as a social catalyst, facilitating adolescents in transitioning from emotional reliance on their parents to achieving independent functioning as adults (Jena,2018).

Typically, young adolescents are thought to be self-centered, Research suggests that they may lack certain cognitive abilities, like impulse control, which typically develop in early adulthood. Despite this, their idealistic nature may make them less tolerant of unfair treatment towards others, potentially leading to more altruistic behaviour (Hao et., al2016). Adolescent altruistic behaviours within social networks are predicted to be positively influenced by self-presentation, particularly through network sharing which has the most significant positive impact, while network support has the least. The mediating factor in this

relationship is the cognitive aspect of social ability, suggesting that self-presentation influences adolescent network altruism through the lens of social cognitive abilities (Zhu et., al2020). (Simantupang et., al 2023) found the significance of altruistic intelligence in mitigating juvenile delinquency among adolescents. Enhancing acts of altruism has the potential to effectively curb delinquent behaviour in teenagers. Heightened altruism in young adolescents not only indicates altruistic traits during early adolescence but also underscores the domain-specific nature of altruistic proficiency to some degree. Overall cognitive abilities typically show an upward trajectory from childhood to early adulthood. For instance, a crucial aspect of executive function, inhibitory control, exhibits a consistent developmental pattern across diverse individuals (Bedard et.,al 2002). Parenting styles have a notable impact on shaping the pro-social behaviour of both children and adolescents (Hastings et.,al 2007).

The evolution of altruism in humans exhibits dynamic characteristics, influenced by various factors in adolescents and early adolescents. Empathy serves as an intrinsic driver for altruism in both age groups, and adolescents demonstrate altruistic behaviour through self-motivation driven by emotional intelligence (Atabaeva,2019). Adolescents' altruism exhibited negative correlations with childhood trauma, including emotional and physical maltreatment, low socioeconomic status (SES), and a fast life history strategy the research indicated that the association between emotional maltreatment, low SES, and adolescents' altruism was mediated by life history strategy. In contrast, the impact of physical maltreatment on altruism did not show mediation through life history strategy (Gao et., al 2024). Understanding moral development, health, and overall well-being involves examining prosocial behaviours, actions that contribute to the well-being of others. The study specifically delves into prosocial behaviours during adolescence, a crucial period marked by age-related changes in these actions that play a significant role in shaping moral identity. This exploration carries implications for addressing societal and global challenges (Carlo & Padilla-Walker, 2020). Adolescence is characterized by heightened social sensitivities, with ongoing brain development extending into the early 20s, shaping social experiences. An essential component of this developmental stage is prosocial development, encompassing behaviours that benefit others. The neural pathways involved in prosocial behaviours include valuing, perspective taking, and goal-flexibility. Contextual factors, such as recipients, audience effects, and strategic motivations, play a role in influencing these processes. Engaging in prosocial experiences within different contexts is vital for adolescents, fostering their ability to become active and contributing members of society (Crone et al.,2022).

## Conclusion

There have been done multiple studies on social competence and altruism among adolescents, however out of the selected and reviewed literature it can be concluded that Social-competence and altruism play crucial roles in the social and moral development of children. To establish positive social relationships, it is essential to possess effective social skills. These skills enable individuals to navigate social interactions successfully, fostering the construction of meaningful connections with others. Additionally, altruistic tendencies contribute significantly to moral development, shaping individuals into valuable and contributing members of society. The willingness to engage in selfless acts and consider the well-being of others not only enhances personal moral character but also promotes a sense of community and cooperation within society. Adolescents require a harmonious blend of effective social skills and altruistic qualities for their social and moral development. Cultivating a balance between adept social abilities and

a compassionate, selfless nature is essential during this crucial stage of growth. A well-rounded set of social skills enables adolescents to navigate various social situations adeptly, fostering positive interactions and relationships.

### Future recommendations

The study focuses on examining the social competence and altruistic behaviour of Adolescents. After a thorough analysis of various literatures, we came to certain conclusions. Future studies can employ techniques like text analysis to identify patterns of individual self-representation on social networking sites and gather data on altruistic behaviours within the network. These approaches aim to yield more dependable outcomes in the research (Zhu et.al., 2020). In spite of recent progress in the study of prosocial behaviours in adolescents, there are still gaps and constraints. One primary issue is that a significant portion of developmental research relies on correlational studies, impeding our capacity to establish causation and determine the direction of effects. To address this limitation, it is recommended that researchers employ more robust research methodologies, such as interventions, experimental manipulations, and prospective longitudinal studies, to better establish causality and directionality (Carlo & Padilla-Walker, 2020).

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