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Playgrounds and people skills: Examining the relationship between play area availability and psycho-social behavior in adolescents

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Abstract

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by significant biological, emotional, and social transitions that shape an individual's psychosocial behavior. This study aimed to explore the key dimensions of psychosocial behavior among adolescents aged 14-16 years in rural areas, investigate contributing environmental and psychological factors, and analyze their implications for overall adolescent development. A descriptive research design was employed, and a sample of 300 adolescents was selected from the Rewari district of Haryana, India. A self-made psychosocial behavior scale was constructed and validated to assess three domains: relationship with others, perception towards life, and behavioral changes. Results revealed that the majority of participants exhibited average levels of psychosocial behavior. Gender differences were observed, with boys showing better psychosocial skills in relationships with others and perception towards life. The availability of play areas near residential areas positively correlated with psychosocial behavior of adolescents. The findings highlight the importance of considering environmental and psychological factors in understanding and supporting adolescent psychosocial development. The study provides valuable insights for educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers to create supportive interventions and environments that foster positive psychosocial behavior among adolescents in rural settings.

Keywords: Behavior, perception, psychological, social, play area

Introduction

Adolescence is a pivotal stage of human development characterized by significant biological, emotional, and social transitions that influence an individual's overall behavior and personality (Steinberg, 2014) [13]. During this stage, psycho-social behavior is heavily influenced by a complex interplay of biological, environmental, and social factors. Psychosocial behavior encompasses how individuals interact with their social environment, regulate emotions, form relationships, and adapt to social norms (Santrock, 2018) [12]. Psychosocial behavior during this period is shaped by the interaction of these dimensions, influenced by internal characteristics and external contexts such as family, peers, school, and society. Multiple factors contribute to shaping adolescents' psychosocial behavior, including family structure, peer relationships, school climate, and cultural background (Eccles & Roeser, 2011) [4]. In recent years, additional concerns such as mental health challenges, peer pressure, and media exposure have further complicated this developmental stage (Twenge & Campbell, 2018) [14].

Understanding these influences is crucial for fostering supportive educational environments that address the complex needs of adolescents. Several theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for understanding psychosocial behavior in adolescents, particularly within educational settings. Various theoretical frameworks, such as Erikson's psychosocial development theory and Bandura's social cognitive theory, provide insights into how these behaviors manifest in educational contexts and peer interactions (Khanal & Timilsena, 2024) [7]. Additionally, genetic factors, such as the oxytocin receptor gene polymorphism, have been linked to social behaviors and emotional health in adolescents, highlighting the biological underpinnings of psychosocial characteristics (Kopylova *et al*., 2024) [9]. Furthermore, the rise of social media has introduced new dimensions to adolescent behavior, with studies indicating that excessive use can lead to addiction and associated psychosocial issues like anxiety and depression (Zorrilla & Carolina, 2019). Adolescents often experience heightened emotional reactivity, increased risk-taking behaviors, and a strong desire for peer acceptance and social belonging. They begin to form their own identities, question authority, and seek greater autonomy from parents and caregivers. This period is also marked by the development of more sophisticated cognitive abilities, allowing for abstract thinking and moral reasoning. However, these advances are not always accompanied by equivalent gains in impulse control or decision-making skills, leading to potential conflicts and challenges in various social contexts.

Psychosocial factors have previously been suggested to be the most changeable factors, and are therefore most often targeted by public health interventions (Crutzen *et al*., 2017;

Jansen *et al*., 2015) [3, 6]. Peer relationships take on greater significance during this stage, with friendships and romantic interests playing a crucial role in shaping self-esteem and social skills. Additionally, the exploration of personal values, beliefs, and future aspirations becomes more prominent, as adolescents begin to contemplate their place in the world and consider potential career paths.

The development of identity and autonomy becomes a central focus during adolescence, as individuals strive to establish their unique sense of self. This process can involve experimentation with different roles, interests, and social groups, which may sometimes lead to conflicts with authority figures or established norms. Cambos *et al*. (2019) psychosocial skills were negatively correlated with mental health problems. Adolescents with higher levels of mental health problems, had low academic achievement, a poorer social support network, but were more involved in sports and hobbies, household chores than the adolescents in the normative sample. Gender differences were observed.

Moreover, contemporary research has shown an increase in psychosocial issues among adolescents, such as anxiety, depression, aggression, and social withdrawal, particularly in response to external stressors and lifestyle changes (WHO, 2021).

This study aims to explore the key dimensions of psychosocial behavior among adolescents, investigate the contributing environmental and psychological factors, and analyze their implications for overall adolescent development. By synthesizing recent research findings, this paper seeks to provide evidence-based insights that can guide educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers in supporting adolescents through this formative life stage.

Methods

Research Design

The present study is descriptive in nature and aims to assess the psycho-social behavior of adolescents in the age group of 14-16 years belonging to rural area. This study is based on the assumption that plays area and gender would not influence psycho-social behavior of adolescents. Hence, based on these hypotheses, the study elaborates the selected variables in a descriptive method. The present research work was conducted in the rural areas of the Rewari District.Rewari is one of the district of Haryana state which is known as Brass city. There are seven blocks in Rewari district such as Bawal, Dahina, Dharuhera, Jatusana Khol, Nahar and Rewari itself during the selection of the block for the study. Out of all these blocks, one block i.e. Dahina was selected under which there are 39 villages. As per 2011 census, 74.07% population of Rewari district lives in rural areas of villages (Census of India, 2011). The youth population in the age group of 15-29 years is 7476835 as per census of 2011. Out of the seven blocks of Rewari district, one block was selected by using 'simple random sampling without replacement (SRSWOR)' which gives an unbiased estimate about the target population and is most efficient sampling techniques as compared to other technique.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, 300 adolescents in the age group of 14- 16 years from different family structure, belonging to different socio-economic group were selected from Rewari district. Selection of participants was based on availability and willingness to be part of the study (convenient sampling). Out of these 300 adolescents around 15-25 number of participants were selected from each school to give homogeneity to the sample. Thus unequal number of respondents was obtained from each village. These selected participants were further approached and were included in the study and finally 150 girls and 150 boys participants were approached.

A vital level of trust was established, before collecting information, the principles of schools and participants were informed regarding the relevance of the study and their contribution to carry out this research work. Also they were assured that all the information given by the respondents would be confidential and be used for the research purpose only.

Instrument

The research tool is the actual mode of gathering of information and facts. To measure the selected variables following measures were used.

Basic profile of adolescents (Self-made)

It was constructed by the researcher to get information about basic profile and socio-economic status of the participants such as- name, address, gender, age, class, family size, family type, annual income and marital status of parents etc.

Psycho-social Behavior scale (Self-made)

Psycho-social behavior scale was constructed by the researcher to assess the psycho-social behavior among adolescents. The main objective of this scale is to observe psychological and social factors which affect behavior of an individual. Related review of literature was thoroughly studied and after discussions with experts, a questionnaire was formed in which closed-ended statements were present. The tool was evaluated by the external experts for their valuable insights. Made necessary corrections suggested by the experts and administered on heterogeneous group of adolescents by conducting a pilot study. The final draft of scale contained 50 statements which were sub divided into three domains namely; relationship with others, perception towards life and behavior changes. Pilot studies were carried out to establish repeatability, stability and consistency of the scale. Reliability of the scale was checked for internal consistency. The response sheets of the participants were scored and analyzed in SPSS 16.0 and obtained Cronbach's reliability of the scale i.e. 0.914, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

The scale is rated as Likert rating type and examined on five (5) points scale. The points are: Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree which are rated as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 respectively.

Procedure

The selection of villages was done through chit system. A list of schools was procured from the education department of the Municipal office of Rewari district. These schools were contacted and permission was taken for the data collection. Only those schools were included in the samples who granted permission to conduct the research work.

Before starting the research procedure, the study obtained informed consent from parents or legal guardians of each participant. The written consent given to the parents of the students parents included study's objectives, methodologies, and data collection procedures. These consent forms also highlighted that becoming a part of this research study is ultimate choice of each adolescent without any force and bribe. They can withdraw at any time without facing negative repercussions. The study followed the ethical procedures for smooth execution in which all the information solicited from the participants were treated confidentially and anonymized for analytical purposes. Questionnaire was distributed to the participant during school hours. Approximately 25-30 minutes were allotted to complete the questionnaire. The researcher explained to the participants how to fill the questions and these questions had to be answered in the questionnaire itself by the respondents to ensure their responses were not affected by any third person's presence.

Statistical analysis

The data was collected and the outcomes of the study were analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0). Frequency and percentage were calculated to know level of psycho-social behavior of adolescents. Mean and Standard Deviation were employed to examine gender differences. Also Spearmens' co-efficient of correlation was assessed to get insights about inter-correlation of various domains of psycho-social behavior**.**

Results

For determining the psycho-social behavior of adolescents, the researcher developed and validated a tool in which there was three sub-domains namely; relationship with others, perception towards life, and behavioral changes.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of psycho-social behavior

Variable	Category	Girls (%)	Boys (%)
Relationship with others	Poor	4.0	13.3
	Average	64.0	59.0
	High	32.0	28.3
Perception towards life	Poor	7.0	4.7
	Average	69.3	58.7
	High	24.0	36.7
Behavioral changes	Poor	9.0	8.0
	Average	75.0	77.3
	High	16.7	15.0

In table 1 represents the frequency and percentage distribution of the psycho-social behaviour of the respondents as per their gender. It indicates that majority of the respondents had average psycho-social behaviour. In the domain of relationship with others 64 percent of girls and 59 percent of boys reported average level of relations with their family and friends. It was observed that 69.3 percent girls and 58.7 percent of boys have average perception towards their life. The findings show that 75 per cent girls and 77.3 percent boys feel average behavioral changes in this technology driven world.

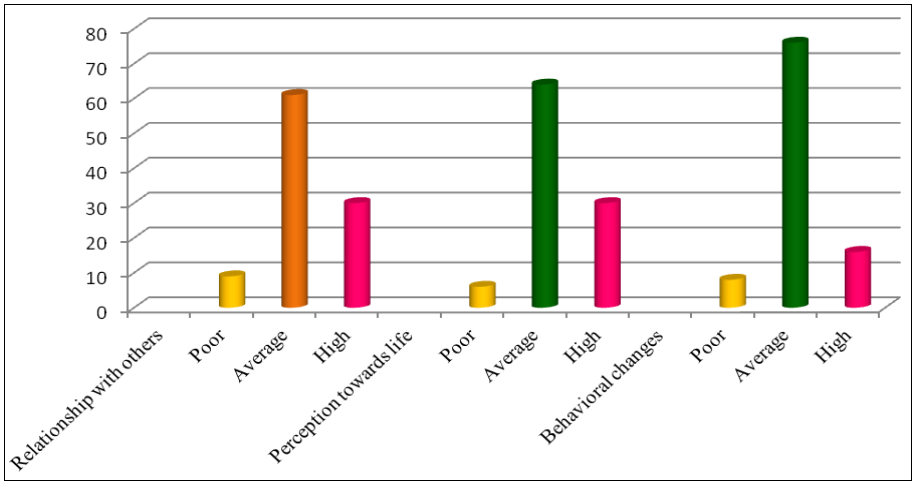

Fig 1: Psycho-social Behavior of the participants

Figure 1 showing the overall psycho-social behavior of the participants which found that majority of the participants had average level of psycho-social behavior in all of the domains.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of psycho-social behavior among adolescents

Variables	Girls	Boys	t-Stat	P-values
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD		
Relationship with others	31.81±7.10	33.79±6.01	-2.552	0.0058*
Perception towards life	50.93±10.28	53.37±9.24	-2.109	0.0182*
Behavioural changes	58.49±11.59	59.74±9.51	-0.927	0.177

Table 2 depicts the significant difference (p= 0.005) in relationship with others among girls and boys (M= 31.8, SD= 7.1 and M= 33.7, SD= 6.0) respectively. Similarly, a significant difference (p= 0.018) in perception towards others among respondents according to gender, i.e., females and males (M= 50.9, SD= 10.2 and M= 53.3, SD= 9.2) was

observed. Among girls and boys a significant difference was not found on behavioral changes due to screen time exposure (M=58.9, SD=11.5 and M=59.7, SD=9.5).

Table 3: Psycho-social behavior and availability of play area

Variables	Yes	No	Total	t-Stat	P-values
	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD			
Relationship with others	33.41±6.50	32.18±6.72	32.79±6.61	1.61	0.1
Perception towards life	53.37±8.78	51.0±10.61	52.18±9.74	2.1	0.03*
Behavioral changes	60.46±9.7	57.55±11.54	59.00±10.62	2.3	0.02*

Table 3 explains the playing area differences on psycho-social behavior of the respondents. A significant mean differences were seen on perception towards life (M= 52.18, SD=9.74) and behavioral changes (M= 59.00, SD= 10.62) at 5% of significance level. No statistical significant difference was observed on relationship with others due to the availability and non-availability of the play area near home. So it can be concluded from the above results that the respondents 'relationship with their loved ones did not affected by the play area which highlights that easy access to digital gadgets helps them to maintain their relationships. From the above outcomes it can be interpreted that play positively impacts perception and behavior by fostering creativity, problem solving, and emotional resilience that ultimately leading to a more positive and adaptable outlook on the world.

Table 4: Correlation between availability of play area and psycho-social behavior of adolescents

	Play area availability	Relationship with others	Perception towards life	Behavioral changes
Play area availability				
Pearson correlation	1	0.09	0.2**	0.15*
Sig. (2 tailed)		.11	0.004	0.01
N	300	300	300	300
Relationship with others				
Pearson correlation		1	.646**	0.3**
Sig. (2 tailed)			0.000	0.000
N		300	300	300
Perception towards life				
Pearson correlation			1	0.34**
Sig. (2 tailed)				0.000
N			300	300
Behavioral changes				
Pearson correlation				1
Sig. (2 tailed)				300
N				

Table 4 demonstrates the correlation between availability of play area near the participants' residential unit. The above table expressed that there is significant correlation between playing area near participants' home and their psycho-social behavior in domains including perception towards life (r = 0.15*, p = 0.01and behavioral changes (r =0.2**, p = 0.004). No significant correlation was found among play area and relationship with others among the respondents. Furthermore, inter-correlation among different domains of psycho-social behavior were also computed which exhibited positive and significant correlation between relationship with others, perception towards life (r= 0.65**) and behavioral changes(r= 0.3**). Similarly, Perception towards life had positive and significant correlation with behavioral changes (r= 0.34**).

Discussion

The results of the study depicted the psycho-social behavior of adolescents in the age group 14 to 16 years. Outcomes revealed that most of the participants had average level of psycho-social skills. Supporting to this study, Singh and Singh (2024) found in their investigation that 63% of the adolescent had average level of psycho-social competence. Factor such as locality, family nature and educational boards significantly influenced this competence. Gender differences were also observed. Contrary to this, Singh and Singh (2024) concluded that gender and educational stream had no significant differences. Findings showed that boys had better psycho-social skills than in domains such as relations with others and perception towards life. Khurshid *et al*. (2024) [8] depicted that in certain cultural contexts such as India, girls face more psycho-social problems than boys, including somatic and adjustment issues. These challenges are influenced by demographic and socio-economic factors, highlighting the importance of cultural context in understanding gender differences in psycho-social behavior. Kumar (2015) [10] supports the results of the present study, indicated that boys exhibit higher level of autonomy and environmental mastery which are measures of psychological well being as well as public pro-social behavior than girls. Conversely, girls demonstrated higher levels of altruism, complaint and emotional pro-social behavior. This study suggested that while boys may have better scores in certain psychological well being as well as pro-social behavior, girls excel in other dimensions showing complexity of psycho-social behavior among adolescents. Play and outdoor activities also help individuals to build social skills. In this study, it was observed that the participants who had play area near their residential area exhibited good psycho-social behavior as compared to those who didn't have.

Studies have shown that outdoor learning positively impacts children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive well-being, which are crucial for children's development. Play is one important means through which young children practice skills, build relationships, and learn autonomy (Gaskill and Perry, 2014) [5]. Play may promote cooperation, compromise, and empathy, which can help develop social skills and cross-cultural understanding (Parker *et al*., 2022) [11]. School children can connect socially, exercise communication skills, and absorb cultural norms and values through play (Alordiah *et al*., 2022) [1]. Play encourages peer collaboration and teamwork (Yogman *et al*., 2018) [18].

Limitations

- Cross-sectional design limits causal inferences about relationships between variables.
- Reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias or inaccuracies.
- Focus on a specific geographical region may limit generalizability to other populations.
- Potential confounding variables not accounted for in the analysis.
- Inclusion of urban adolescents along with rural, may provide a more comprehensive view of the population.

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