

## **The changing body: Importance of adequate adolescent development**

### **Abstract**

Adolescence is a phase of great physical, emotional and social transformations that human beings go through in the transition from childhood to adulthood. During this period, bodily changes and the maturation of emotions occur, which can cause difficulties in understanding on the part of adolescents. Body image, which is constructed at this stage of life, is one of the most worrying elements among adolescents, who try to follow the standards spread among their peers. This article presents some aspects of the evolution of adolescents, the influences on the formation of their body image and practices of modifying their appearance (tattoos and piercings), as well as suggestions so that those responsible for adolescents' health care can understand these conditions and act effectively in welcoming and guiding these individuals.

Keywords: body image; adolescent; tattoo; piercing

### **Introduction**

Adolescence can be understood as a specific and complex process of physical, social and emotional development that human beings go through to transition from childhood to adulthood [1]. This process gives the changing body different values according to its origin and culture, to which individuals attribute beliefs and ideals that must adjust to biological parameters. In this context, physical development translates into what is called the pubertal spurt and is easily identified as it includes the modification and increase in body mass in all its segments, the emergence of secondary sexual characteristics and full reproductive capacity [2].

Also during adolescence, the process of emotional development can be understood based on the maturational evolution of the different structures of the nervous system, initially the limbic system - which is responsible for some characteristics presented in the first years of adolescence, such as the search for autonomy, detachment of family members and search for peer groups, impulsiveness, impatience, immediacy and little ability to assess risk situations -

which will be modified as maturation reaches the prefrontal lobe, generally at the end of the second decade of life or until mid-life. third decade, configuring a new personal identity [3].

Observation of the different events that occur during adolescence presents a variety of characteristics, including the search for oneself and a new identity, temporal relocation and mourning for the child's body[4] In this new stage, the teenager is faced with new physical, emotional and social demands that challenge him, needing to understand the process of body modification and adjust to this new condition [5].

### **Body image**

Within the integrative process of emotional evolution of adolescents, the development of body image (BI) can be observed, characterized by morphological assessments of size and physical appearance associated with emotional factors that affect satisfaction with the body or certain parts of the body [6].

The importance of adequate adolescent development justifies this article, which aims to describe some factors that may be associated with changes in their body image. For this purpose, articles available on the "PubMed" and "Scielo" platforms were selected, using the descriptors "adolescence", "body image" and "adolescence", whose themes were related to the physical, social and emotional development of adolescents.

### **Adequate adolescent development**

Nowadays, when appearance is worshiped intensely, the consequences can be even more disturbing for teenagers. BI is a complex human phenomenon with multidimensional aspects that encompass a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors in relation to their own appearance, regardless of the actual condition of their body. In its conformation, it includes evaluative aspects (such as satisfaction or concern with appearance) mainly regarding shape and weight and is strongly influenced by social, ethnic, cultural and economic conditions [7]. BI is linked to personal confidence, self-esteem, eating and exercise behaviors and other factors that can interfere with people's daily lives and well-being [8].

The concept of BI also includes cognitive aspects (such as thoughts and beliefs about the body), perceptual (how people perceive the size and shape of

the body and its parts), affective (feelings about the body) and behavioral (attitudes and actions that people perform to examine, understand, modify or hide their bodies) [9]. Therefore, recognition of their characteristics and acceptance of their own body and their ability to use it effectively depends on the adolescent's adequate, positive and realistic understanding of their body image.

Among several peculiar aspects that can stand out during adolescence, such as the appearance of acne, the occasional need to wear glasses, scars and congenital characteristics, among others, body weight is one of the factors of body concern most reported by adolescents. While women tend to avoid being overweight, men are more concerned about being thin and lacking muscle mass [2]. The beauty standard created, forced and disseminated by the media, of slender and elegant bodies, has a great influence on the formation of body image, encouraging the appreciation of thinness and the perfect body, especially in females [10].

Furthermore, the mandatory changes that occur in adolescents' bodies (increase in height, changes in the composition of lean mass and fat mass, emergence of secondary sexual characteristics) associated with little understanding of this physiological process and concerns arising from their emotional development can induce thoughts that they will not be accepted and approved by their peers, exacerbating attitudes to try to change their body and, consequently, body image. The search for acceptance from others, especially from peers, is one of the factors that generate anxiety in adolescents, as rejection by people or social groups to whom they attribute importance has a negative impact on their behaviors and emotions [11].

It is important to understand that dissatisfaction with body image stimulates the desire for changes based on a negative evaluation of one's own body. Adolescents seek different ways to transform themselves to achieve their immediate goals of satisfaction and appear acceptable to their peers, which makes them subject to various physical and mental health problems, including eating disorders, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and risky behaviors. such as alcohol and illicit substance abuse [12,13]. This importance is corroborated by the high prevalence of dissatisfaction with body image, which varies between

58% and 78% according to some studies carried out with adolescents from different continents such as the United States, Portugal, Brazil and some Asian countries [14].

### **Modifying appearance: tattoo and piercing**

Changing body appearance through tattoos and piercings occurs frequently throughout the world, which makes this practice an important topic in the health sector and requires a better understanding of the reasons that lead people to carry out these procedures on their bodies. Specifically among adolescents, concerns about body image make them more susceptible to these changes that may not be so innocuous or free from complications.

#### **Tattoo**

Tattooing is a form of body modification that is well known and worshiped around the world. It consists of a permanent coloring process applied to human skin through the subcutaneous and intradermal introduction or penetration of pigments using needles or by scarification, to form drawings or figures. History records that tattoos have been found since 4000 BC, among the Egyptians and, later, present on the bodies of natives of Indonesia, Polynesia, the Philippines and New Zealand, expressing cultural and mystical aspects throughout time. Although unintentional tattoos can occur - after injuries or trauma - in medicine they can be used as a dermatological camouflage technique in the presence of scars, vitiligo and in reconstruction processes after some surgical procedures. However, tattoos are more commonly used for aesthetic reasons, following current fashion or personal meanings [15,16].

Although there may be a false belief that tattooing is harmless, the risks or complications inherent to this practice have been widely described and are related to allergic reactions to pigments, the appearance of papular lesions, nodules and/or granulomas and the exacerbation of pre-existing dermatoses [17].

#### **Piercing**

Piercing or body piercing designates a type of adornment or decorative piece inserted through piercing in certain parts of the body such as the nose, lips, tongue, umbilical scar, ear, eyebrow region, nipple and genital region[18].

Piercing is also a very old practice of body modification that dates back ancient cultures and civilizations, being used for a variety of reasons, mainly cultural and religious, in addition to aesthetics. According to historians, its use emerged between 3 thousand BC and 4 thousand BC and was practiced among the Egyptians and Indians, having been later adopted in other regions of the world such as tribes in South America and Africa [19,20].

The most important complications related to piercing implantation are bleeding, infections, trauma, allergies and scars. Infection is the most common complication and may be of viral or bacterial etiology [21].

Given this knowledge, the process of supporting adolescents becomes fundamental. Due to the emotional characteristics that characterize adolescence and the importance of body image in the adolescent's personal maturation and future life, it is important to provide conditions for this phase to be overcome in a harmonious way, preventing the multiplicity of factors involved in creating body image predominates over other challenges that teenagers must overcome. In this sense, some guidance can be offered to support adolescents: [22,23].

1. focus on your positive characteristics
2. accept your own body even if you are not satisfied with all aspects
3. understand the changes in the body during the puberty process
4. find individual characteristics that distinguish people from others
5. think about the body's potential as an active being and not just through appearance
6. understand beauty as different appearances and forms, recognizing diverse models in the arts and cultural events
7. adopt positive thoughts and a posture of self-confidence
8. promote self-care with nutrition, physical activity and adequate mental hygiene and sleep
9. promote social coexistence with healthy family members and groups
10. avoid contacts on social networks that promote negative body image messages
11. identify and avoid inappropriate messages in the media

12. seek help from support networks and specialized professionals to help understand the physiological evolutionary phases during the adolescence period.

### **Conclusions:**

Although maintaining an adequate body image during adolescence is very important, there are many important factors that can interfere with this process, such as those described in this article. They need to be recognized and addressed, individually or collectively through public health care policies for adolescents, so that they can reach adulthood healthy.

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