

Shattered spider web? Developmental challenges faced by secondary school adolescent learners in Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT: The transition from childhood to adulthood is not an event but is rather an emotion laden hectic process which requires the support of adults. The main thrust of this research paper was to unravel the developmental challenges encountered by adolescents in Zimbabwe. The study was theoretically based on the psychological theories of Freud, Erikson and Piaget. The phenomenological and descriptive survey research designs were used together with the chi-square test. Eighty adolescents from both rural and urban settings took part in the study. The stratified random sampling method was employed. Data collection was done using focus group discussions and questionnaires. In essence, the respondents revealed that they were encountering numerous developmental challenges which the society does not seem to try to curtail. The breakdown of the extended family network, peer pressure and the hectic lifestyles of adults as they try to make ends meet in an inimical economic climate were found to be some of the variables which exacerbated the situations surrounding developing adolescents. The researchers recommended that stakeholders such as parents, teachers and all adults in general must be sensitive to the developmental needs of adolescents to facilitate the smooth transition from childhood to adulthood.

Key Words: Extended family network, identity versus role confusion, period of storm and stress, adolescence, peer pressure, volatile economic environment.

Date of Submission: 31-07-2017

Date of acceptance: 01-09-2017

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

According to Swartz, de la Rey, Duncan, Townsend and O'Neill (2011:87) people in virtually all cultures largely believe that adolescence is a volatile and troublesome developmental stage not only for the adolescents, but for the entire family and the society at large. Stanley G. Hall, a 19th century psychologist who came to be known as the father of adolescent psychology, rightfully described adolescence as a period of storm and stress (Dacey and Travers, 2002); Swartz et al, 2011:87). Adolescence as a developmental stage is that time of life when an individual transforms from being a child to become an adult (Santrock, 2004:36; Snowman, McCown & Biehler, 2009: 56-57). Feldman (2009:423) defines adolescence is a developmental stage between childhood and adulthood which is characterised by significant changes and is occasionally a period of turmoil. It does not only entail the anatomical changes within the developing person, but also involves emotional, social, moral, spiritual and cognitive changes which may overwhelm the developing individual. This journey into young adulthood needs a lot of support from adults because allowing the adolescents to operate on auto-cruise can be a fatal gamble. Some of the mistakes which people make during adolescence can be permanently vicious and can lead to tragic consequences such as premature death, suicide, unplanned pregnancies, early unstable marriages and addiction to drugs and alcohol. It is with such considerations in mind that one the researchers decided to undertake a study focusing on the developmental challenges faced by secondary school learners in Zimbabwe.

During adolescence, there are dramatic physical changes which are called the *growth spurt* in which the muscles, body mass and height increase significantly (Kufakunesu, Ganga, Chinyoka, Hlupo, and Denhere, 2013). In girls, ovaries produce hormones which trigger the menstrual cycle and the development of secondary sex characteristics. On the other hand, adolescent girls undergo hip and breast enlargement as well as developing pubic hair (Mwamwenda, 2004). In boys, testes produce hormones such as testosterone which lead to wet dreams and the development of secondary sex characteristics such as significant enlargement of genitals together with the development of broad shoulder muscles, deepening of the voice and an increase in hair, that is,

pubic hair, beard, armpit hair and chest hair. Adolescents normally experience emotional tension and mood swings due to hormonal changes together with the changes in the reproductive system as well as the changes in social roles (Feldman, 2009; Lahey, 2009). Such volatile emotions can be allayed by emotional buttress and counselling from adults such as parents, teachers and pastors. This entire array of physical and emotional changes can trigger numerous behavioural consequences among adolescents. In cases where the support of mature adults is missing, there remains the possibility that adolescents can encounter difficulties such as indecision, depression, suicidal tendencies, alcoholism, prostitution, hopelessness and extravagance.

Before the advent of civilisation and globalisation, Africans used to live as an intact spider web which vibrated in response to the slightest of disturbances at any part of the web. It was a responsibility of virtually every adult in the society to ensure that the needs of all children in the community were attended to with a reasonable degree of seriousness. In that traditional African society, there was emphasis on interconnectedness, inter-dependence, communalism and cooperation (Lassiter, 2000:05). According to Mbiti (1969:109), "Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am, because we are and since we are, therefore I am". Implicit in the above statement is the view that the developmental challenges faced by adolescent children were tackled by the entire community and such a task was not left as a prerogative of the children's individual families. In such a society, loving and well informed aunts, grandmothers and caring family friends used to take it upon themselves to educate adolescents about all the changes which they undergo in the process of changing from childhood to adulthood (Kufakunesu et al, 2013:828). Adolescent girls were also taught about how to relate with their male forks and how to behave when one is married. Uncles and grandfathers used to furnish their nephews and grandsons with information regarding adolescence as a developmental stage and how to optimally adjust amid such volatile changes.

Unfortunately, modernisation and civilisation has led to the permeation of the western and Eurocentric views of life which gyrate around independence and individualism (Kufakunesu and Dekeza, 2017:). Such a development altered the symbiotic communal way of life and people now strongly lean towards solving problems which affect members of their immediate families. The role of the aunts, uncles and grandparents as well as parents themselves in assisting adolescents as they walk along the road to adulthood has been distorted by a myriad of variables. Zarrett and Eccles (2006:20) maintain that the family is a fundamental institution which contributes immensely to the positive development of adolescents through giving financial, emotional, social and achievement-related buttress. Settersten (2005) and Zarrett and Eccles (2006:20) indicate that some adolescents come from families in which parents are unavailable, unable, or, in some cases, reluctant to provide the support their adolescent children need to make a successful transition into adulthood and this is normally a consequence of variables such as parental divorce, poverty, unemployment, death, or psychological estrangement of parents and their children. The current study is an endeavour to establish the extent to which the erosion of the principles of the traditional African society left adolescents vulnerable and wallowing in ignorance.

According to Kufakunesu et al (2013:828) the advent of technological advancement has caused children to rely on information obtained through various media platforms such as Facebook, whatsapp, tweeter, instagram and the internet in general, thereby rendering traditional information from older generations almost obsolete. The resultant generation gap somehow shattered the traditional African cohesion, leaving adolescents as independent immature individuals with a lot of information which can expose them to a multiplicity of risks such as unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, suicide, deviance and wrong career choices. According to Goldin (2008) and Monroe (2008) technological advancement can be a setback in the lives of adolescent learners. Internet facilities, sophisticated mobile telephones, video games and movies, among other things, have all been implicated for stealing pupils' study time (Kufakunesu, Chinyoka and Ganga, 2011:499). While acknowledging that the internet has brought about great convenience in virtually all facets of human existence including education, Subong (2008) laments that the internet unfortunately exposes young minds to emotionally absorbing materials thereby leaving them with more questions than answers. In support of this, MacRae (2007:08) claims that adolescents tend to absorb each new technological innovation so effortlessly that cyberspace is their habitat and members of the older generations who don't join them run the risk of being superfluous and discounted. A study by Kufakunesu et al (2011: 501) established that teachers, who happened to be the respondents, implicated technological advancement such as entertainment found on the internet, digital satellite transmission, sophisticated cell phones, video games as well as movies for disturbing the normal development of adolescents especially in urban areas. This implies that immersing adolescents into technological avenues can saturate their minds with adult activities which they are developmentally incapable of safely handling.

According to Eccles and Gootman (2002) it is during adolescence that children's relationships with their parents dramatically and notably shift from dependency and subordination to one that reflects the adolescent's increasing maturity and responsibilities in the family and the community. In the western world,

adolescents actually gain independence from parents upon becoming 18 years of age. Zarrett and Eccles (2006:20) remark, "During early adolescence, there are increases in parent-child conflicts as children's needs for autonomy and independence increase and they show some resistance to family rules and roles." Moreover, adolescents tend to be rebellious both at home and at school (Lahey, 2009; Collins, 1990; Smetana, Yau & Hanson, 1991). Kufakunesu et al (2013:829) believe that such a scenario is likely to render the parents simultaneously suspicious, confused and worried as they are persuaded to feel that their adolescent children are devising some mischievous acts.

Characteristically, adolescents spend more time with their peers and significantly less time with their parents (Steinberg & Morris, 2001:93). This is backed by Zarrett and Eccles (2006:21-22) who aver, "One of the most major changes during adolescence is youth's increasing focus on peer relationships as indicated by increases in both the time they spend with peers and their engagement in activities done with peers". Santrock (2004:71) allude to the idea that adolescents tend to value the opinions and sentiments of their peers for the sake of being accepted. Peer pressure is normally at its maximum during adolescence (Kufakunesu et al, 2011:499). According to Santrock (2004:81) peer groups serve as avenues where adolescents learn to share information, solve problems and get emotional support. Eccles and Barber (1999) maintain that research has revealed that the peer group is a powerful place for identity formation and consolidation throughout the adolescence. Furthermore, adolescents usually feel comfortable to freely express their most genuine feelings when they are with their peers (Tuckman & Monetti, 2011:117). Consequently, there is need to explore if there are any developmental challenges encountered by adolescents as they pursue their quest for liberation from adult authority and try to occupy vantage positions in the middle of their peers.

It is important to note that in-school adolescents spend most of their time at school where teachers simultaneously act as role models and figures of authority (Herrero, Este'vez and Musitu, 2006:674; Kufakunesu et al, 2013:828). The way teachers interact with secondary school learners can largely determine the extent to which the learners can cope with the developmental and maturational challenges of adolescence (Davis, 2003). Kufakunesu et al (2013) undertook a study to explore the sentiments of secondary school adolescent learners regarding the way they are generally treated by significant others who included teachers in Masvingo urban schools. A gender balanced sample of 80 adolescents took part in the study. The study revealed that adolescents to a large extent harboured negative sentiments towards the manner in which their teachers and other adults treated them at times. The respondents pointed out that some of the norms and values emphasised by their teachers were virtually outdated and anchored on stale information. The adolescents pointed out that sometimes their teachers and parents deliberately prevented them from capitalising on the available technological innovations. The current study tries to examine if adolescent learners are facing any developmental challenges attributable to teachers.

One of the challenges of adolescence is making the right decisions when one is presented with a myriad of options regarding a wide range of issues such as love relationships, friends and identity. Eccles and Gootman (2002) posit that adolescents have to make decisions on issues such as the new social and sexual roles to play, acquisition of skills and values needed to prepare for the impending adulthood and the responsibilities to take in one's family and community. According to Zarrett and Eccles (2006:13), about three decades ago, adolescents used to have clear paths to pursue as they marched into adulthood because by then the effects of globalisations were minimal. The same cannot be said now because of technological advancement and modernisation. Furstenberg, Rumbaut and Settersten (2005) maintain that for most social groups, the well-defined pathways for adolescence into adulthood no longer exist and this compounds the challenges which adolescents have to grapple with.

One domain which is likely to be a poser on the part of adolescents is the choice of a career. According to Olaosebikan and Olusakin (2014:44) a career is an occupation or profession, especially one requiring special training, which an individual follows as their lifework. Career choice is a crucial episode in one's life (Olaosebikan and Olusakin, 2014:44). Navin (2009) posits that exploring career options before committing to a career increases future career success and satisfaction. The choice of a career is a way of satisfying the need to self-actualise as theorised by humanists such as Maslow and Rogers (Olaosebikan and Olusakin, 2014:45). Many studies have established that the quality of the relationship between adolescents and their parents or guardians correlates positively with the quality of the career choices which the adolescents are likely to make (Navin, 2009; Olaosebikan and Olusakin, 2014:45; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Keller, 2004; Taylor, Harris & Taylor, 2004). This implies that adolescents who hail from well-knit families with supportive parents or guardians are likely to have clearly career aspirations and choices. Conversely, adolescents who come from families which are fragmented, or where guardians or parents are physically or emotional aloof are likely to spend a lot of time groping in the dark when it comes to making career choices.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on three psychological theories, namely Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory and Piaget's theory of cognitive development. According to Freud, the founder of the psychodynamic perspective, adolescents find themselves in the genital stage which is characterised by the search for sexual gratification from non-relatives (Mwamwenda, 2004). It is during the genital stage that adolescents instinctively engage in cuddling, hugging, kissing and allied activities in a bid to achieve sexual satisfaction (Lahey, 2009; Mwamwenda, 2004). One wonders how ready the adolescent learners are to manage such seemingly overwhelming emotional and physical demands of the id if the external environment is not sufficiently supportive.

Erikson's psychosocial theory has been rated by many scholars as more comprehensive than Freud's psychosexual theory because Erikson's theory is a lifelong eight stage theory. Relevant to the current study is Erikson's the fifth stage which is called identity versus role confusion. At this stage, adolescents' quest for an identity is at its maximum (Meggitt, 2006:163). According to Erikson (1968), adolescents normally struggle with developmental challenges revolving around the development of a sense of mastery, identity, and intimacy. The developing individuals endeavour to establish autonomy, management of sexuality and intimacy, and making the right career choices.

From a cognitive point of view, Piaget postulates that adolescents are expected to function at the formal operational stage (Feldman, 2009; Kosslyn and Rosenberg, 2006). At this stage, adolescents gain the ability to contemplate about hypothetical concepts such as love, religion and justice through the application of logic, deductive and inductive reasoning (Mwamwenda, 2004). Consequently, adolescents normally engage in abstract thinking and experience mood swings as they battle with the realities of life. It is with such considerations in mind that one can claim that adolescents require a lot of support from parents, teachers and the community to survive the challenges of their development stage.

III. GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following major research questions:

- To what extent do adolescents in Zimbabwe labour with the physical changes which are characteristic of their developmental stage?
- Which emotional challenges do adolescents in Zimbabwe battle with?
- How clear are the career aspirations of Zimbabwean adolescents?

Hypotheses

Apart from the above guiding research questions, the following hypotheses also guided the current study:

H₀: The need for adult intervention in solving the challenges encountered during adolescence is independent of secondary school learners' stage of adolescence

H₁: The need for adult intervention in solving the challenges encountered during adolescence is dependent on secondary school learners' stage of adolescence

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As a form of methodological triangulation, the researcher used two research designs which are the descriptive survey and the phenomenological research designs together with the chi-square test. Kufakunesu (2011:31) and Sidhu (2001) define a descriptive survey research design as an investigation technique in which the researcher concentrates on describing and interpreting the existing phenomenon in the process of effects, attitudes, processes and beliefs. The descriptive survey was deemed appropriate because it accorded the adolescent secondary school learners the opportunity to pour out their hearts regarding challenges which inundate them as they negotiate their journey in the transition from childhood to adulthood.

The phenomenological research design was simultaneously used together with the descriptive survey research design. Kufakunesu and Dekeza (2017:54) elaborate, "the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspective of people involved". In support of this, Kufakunesu, Ganga and Chinyoka (2012:124-125) indicate that in phenomenological research, the lived experiences of the individuals who are participating or those who at some point participated in the situation or subject being explored are examined. Chilisa and Preece (2005:142) together with Groenewald (2004:44) emphasise that the phenomenological research design delves on studying people's experiences in an attempt to garner the meticulous details of their social circumstances. The phenomenological research design considered to be appropriate in the current study because data was collected from adolescent learners who were actually in the process of changing from childhood to adulthood.

Chiromo (2006:17) in Kufakunesu et al (2013:833) indicates that the stratified random sampling involves dividing a heterogeneous population into its non-overlapping layers before subsequently randomly selecting members from each subgroup in proportion of the size of each layer relative to the entire population. In

the current study, stratification was done relative to variables such as gender, stage of adolescence and the rural-urban dichotomy. A gender balanced sample of 80 secondary school learners from both urban and rural schools took part in the study. They had a mean age of 16.71 years and a standard deviation of 3.11 years.

Research data was gathered through the use of focus group discussions and questionnaires. According to Muchengetwa and Chakuchichi (2010:48) a focus group discussion as an innovative way of conducting in-depth interviews with a number of people simultaneously. Kufakunesu and Dekeza (2017:54) elaborate, "A focus group discussion is a version of interviews conducted in small and manageable groups which explore a specific issue chosen by a researcher". Focus group discussions were also used so as to harness the sentiments of the respondents as they spurred one another to open up in groups. The researchers were the moderators who facilitated the proceedings of the focus group discussions (Muchengetwa and Chakuchichi, 2010:49; Bergh and Theron, 2009:211). According to Kufakunesu and Dekeza (2017:54) a questionnaire is a document which contains relevant questions that the researcher intends to pose to the research participants. A questionnaire is a list of methodically and carefully structured questions prepared by the researcher to elicit responses from research participants for the sake of data collection (Swartz et al, 2011:29; Shumbayaonda, 2011). The researchers decided to use questionnaires because the respondents were deemed to be at least moderately literate.

V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

After administering the afore-mentioned data gathering instruments, the following are the research findings which emerged when data analysis and the chi-square test were employed:

- Seventy-five per cent of the adolescents lamented that the extended family network was no longer intact and therefore their aunts, uncles and grandparents have long ceased to be fountains of valuable information which addresses the developmental and existential challenges affecting the adolescents.
- Forty-seven out of the 80 respondents remarked that their parents were too busy and too stressed to exercise meaningful parenting.
- Almost all the respondents admitted that some of the information which they access through various forms of electronic and print media exposed them to material which tempts them to engage in various adult vices.
- Thirty-seven out of the 80 adolescent secondary school learners acknowledged that they grappled with peer pressure especially when they are with their school mates.
- Twenty-five per cent of the sampled adolescent secondary school learners complained about their vulnerability to sexual abuse both at home and at school.
- Poverty was singled out as one of the chief causes of untold suffering by a significant number of respondents especially in rural areas where it takes a serious toll on the female adolescents.
- Bleak employment prospects as a result of industrial decline and economic turbulence was cited as a challenge by a number of research participants.
- The chi-square test revealed that secondary school learners in early, middle and late adolescence acknowledged that they face developmental challenges which they think could be tackled when adults intervene.

VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

During focus group discussions, the research participants openly pointed out that what they hear about the interconnectedness of the original African society has actually degenerated into a mirage. Sixty out of the 80 adolescent secondary school learners who took part in the study reported their so-called aunts, uncles and grandparents were not taking an active role in furnishing them with the information they required to deal with their developmental problems. Some respondents pointed out that their mothers had sour relationships with their aunts and therefore, the aunts were not enthusiastic to socially nurture them in any way. Other respondents in this category remarked that the society has been pervaded by the mentality of self-centredness and very few adults want to devote time to assist adolescents who are not their children. As far as the adolescent secondary school learners were concerned, it is no longer appropriate to describe the society as a spider web which vibrates in response to a very slight disturbance at any of its part. The spider web has been shattered and has gone numb since the adults in society are no longer responsive to the needs of adolescents. The research participants attributed the neglect to a variety of factors which include adoption of individualistic ideas from the western world and the hectic lifestyles people now have as they try to meet the economic demands of an unpredictable global economic climate.

When the researchers were interacting with the adolescent secondary learners, it came to their attention that 58.75% of the responses clamoured for the involvement of their parents in meeting some of their developmental needs. Most respondents who resided in urban areas openly complained that although they lived with at least one parent, they hardly had the opportunity to pour their hearts out to their parents for a number of reasons. Firstly, the urban parents seemed to be ever busy and they behaved like robots which run from one

corner of the room to another without taking cognisance of the need for human interaction. The routine of such parents seem to be leaving home early in the morning and returning late in evening. When they return home, they are mentally and physically drained and would be in no mood to listen to any issues regarding the developmental needs of their children. The situation has been exacerbated by the fact that both male and female parents mostly go to work and the traditional setup where only male parents used to go to work has gone extinct. The respondents acknowledged that they wished they could have at least one hour per week to sit down and open up to their parents and express their existential fears, successes, failures, visions and doubts. This was in agreement with Zarrett and Eccles (2006:20) who maintained that the family remains pivotal to the development of adolescents. The findings of the current study also concurred with Settersten (2005) and Zarrett and Eccles (2006:20) who posit that some adolescents come from families in which parents are unavailable, unable, or, in some cases, unwilling to provide the support their adolescent children need thereby leaving the adolescent children to experiment with their lives. However, adolescents resident in rural areas reported that although their parents were busy, they sometimes find time to talk to them about social issues, especially with their mothers. Nevertheless, the mothers also seemed to be shy to talk about explicit developmental challenges of adolescence such as love relationships.

As a result of being left unattended for long hours by their parents, some adolescents indicated that they resorted to electronic media to find answers to some of their developmental questions. They pointed out that social media platforms such as Facebook, whatsapp and tweeter seriously help them to satisfy their belonging needs. Such platforms enable them to interact with people from different walks of life who live in virtually any part of the world. Digital and satellite transmission was also hailed in high esteem by adolescents as they had the opportunity to be entertained while their parents were busy. However, more than 68 respondents reported that they were worried about some of the material they accessed on the internet and other allied forms of technological innovations as indicated by Goldin (2008), Monroe (2008) and Kufakunesu et al (2011:499). They lamented that they were growing up in an environment where the various forms of technological innovations to some extent exposed adolescents to material meant for adult entertainment. They gave examples of movies showing social violence, injustice, corruption and explicit sexual scenes. The research informants mostly from urban schools confessed that they were not sure if such scenes were for good for their wellbeing because they caused their imaginations to be saturated with adult issues at the expense of their academic work. One research participant made the following remarks:

Although technological innovations of our generation make us knowledgeable, they also expose us to wrong role models in areas such as violence, sex, multiple sexual relationships and injustice. Some of the scenes can lead to prostitution, rape and theft. Censorship on what is viewed by adolescents is required.

This was in agreement with Subong (2008) who laments that the technological innovations unfortunately expose adolescents to emotionally absorbing materials thereby leaving with more questions than answers.

Thirty-seven out of the 80 adolescent secondary school learners revealed that peer pressure was a serious developmental threat to them especially at school. The respondents in this category remarked that they were habitually persuaded by their seemingly knowledgeable peers to engage in some activities against their better judgement. Examples of some activities into which the adolescents were persuaded to engage in were sexual relationships especially on the part of female respondents, smoking and drinking on the part of male respondents and truancy across the gender divide. Thirteen female respondents divulged that some of their peers at one point urged them to engage in love relationships with men of different ages, including married men, particularly for monetary gains. These informants lamented that they were torn apart by the desire to experiment and get the financial benefits on one end and the fear of unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and early marriages on the other end. Some male research participants openly confessed that peer pressure is a real problem among adolescents since failure to conform to the dictates of a give group can lead to social rejection. They pointed out that one has to dig deeper into himself to resist the temptation to join in smoking, beer drinking and other vices which his peers would be comfortably partaking of. The assertion by Steinberg & Morris, (2001:93), Santrock (2004:71) and Zarrett and Eccles (2006:21-22) that adolescents tend to spend more time with their peers and hold the views of their peers in high esteem were thus confirmed by the current study. The claim by Kufakunesu et al (2011:499) that pressure is at maximum was also supported by the findings of the current study.

One of the developmental threats cited by one quarter of the adolescent research participants was sexual abuse. The stories which were making the rounds regarding sexual abuse especially of female adolescents were vicariously haunting them. They pointed out that they were not utterly safe from sexual abuse both at school and at home. Fourteen female respondents disclosed that most males at home, in the community and at school did not view them as developing individuals with wishes, aspirations and rights but merely as reproductive systems moving around. These respondents strongly felt that the pressure by men to exploit their

bodies was too much and unwarranted and they even wondering if such undue pressure was the essence of human existence. One female rural respondent remarked:

The way men look at me as I pass by at school or in the community in general makes me uncomfortable. Some of them look at you so intently and blatantly that you are left wondering if they are not seeing through your clothes. I really wish they could treat me as their sister or daughter. I sincerely wish they could allow the young girls to mature first before viewing them as potential lovers.

Some of the female respondents regrettably cited cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by their parents, relatives and teachers. They lamented that it is a heart-breaking experience to be harmed by the very people who are supposed to protect you.

One of the variables popularly mentioned by the adolescent secondary school learners residing in rural areas as a threat to their development was poverty. They emphasised that it was due to poverty that they get engulfed by feelings of inferiority when they were among their peers. Female research participants remarked that they sometimes missed lessons due to failure to afford the stuff which they needed for their menstrual hygiene. Some male adolescents reported that they toiled for long hours in other people's field where they would be trying to earn some money to buy exercise books or to raise school fees. This left them with little time to study or to do their homework. During focus group discussions, heart-rending experiences regarding the negative effects of poverty were given by secondary school learners who happened to be orphans staying with their old grandparents or were part of child-headed families. Their plight was even aggravated by the degenerating economic situation in the country.

The research participants were also honest enough to expose their intra-personal challenges, that is, matters which they experienced as individuals within themselves. Seventeen out of the forty male research participants, that is, 42.5%, admitted that the physical and hormonal transformations which occur during adolescence were taking their toll on them. They hinted that there were times they seemed to be unable to control their imaginations as their fantasies drifted in strange directions especially with regard to love, sexual matters and relationships. Only nine out of the forty female respondents had the audacity to confess that there were also times when their minds deliberated on emotive issues such as intimacy, marriage, motherhood and general comparative acceptability on the social scene. To some extent, such findings confirmed Stanley G. Hall's assertion that adolescence is a period of storm and stress (Dacey and Travers, 2002; Swartz et al, 2011:87). These respondents pointed that they were still trying to find answers to these intra-psychic dilemmas and they wondered when such solutions would come their way. In fact, some of them revealed that they tried to get answers to the demands of their instinctual whims by surfing the internet and watching movies but in some cases they ended up more confused and more anxious about everything. Such experiences are consistent with Freud's principles of the genital stage where the erogenous zone shifts to the genitals and the individuals endeavours to get sexual gratification from non-relatives (Feldman, 2009; Mwamwenda, 2004).

More than half of the respondents mentioned bleak careers prospects as a developmental challenge which they were labouring with. Some research participants especially those in early and middle adolescence remarked that they were undecided with regard to the career to pursue as suggested by Eccles and Gootman (2002). They cited lack of relevant information regarding various career options and the resultant employment prospects as the sole poser. The absence of adults who are willing and capable of clarifying careers issues to adolescents was singled out as a challenge. This relatively agreed with the hypothesis that the quality of relationship between adolescents and their parents and guardians correlates positively with the quality of the career choices which the adolescents are likely to make (Navin, 2009; Olaosebikan and Olusakin, 2014:45; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Keller, 2004; Taylor, Harris & Taylor, 2004). Respondents in late adolescence, especially those from urban areas, seemed to be familiar with some career avenues which they can pursue. However, the respondents lamented that some of the degree programmes which they wanted to pursue were offered in outside the country or had very minimal employment opportunities locally. There was a group of respondents who maintained that their quest to select specific career paths was frustrated by their low socioeconomic status which made it far-fetched to afford the university fees required when they endeavour to pursue their dream careers. Therefore, the claim by Zarrett and Eccles (2006:13) and Furstenberg et al (2005) that the once available and clear career paths for adolescents have since vanished has been substantiated by the current study.

A chi-square test was conducted at the 5% level of significance using the reactions of the 80 respondents to the hypothetical statement that there is no association between secondary school learners' stage of adolescence and the need for adult intervention in solving the challenges encountered during adolescence. The outcomes of the chi-square test are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Contingency table: n=80

Stage of Adolescence	Agree	Disagree	Total
Early Adolescence	20(18.9)	7(8.1)	27
Middle Adolescence	22(21)	8(9)	30
Late adolescence	14(16.1)	9(6.9)	23
Total	56	24	80

[$\alpha=0.05$; 2 degrees of freedom; Critical value =5.991 and $\chi^2_{\text{calc}}=1.259$]

There was significant statistical evidence to back the null hypothesis which states that the need for adult intervention in solving the challenges encountered during adolescence is independent of secondary school learners' stage of adolescence. The obtained test statistic was 1.259 and comparing it with a critical value of 5.991 resulted in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This means learners at all the three stages of adolescence, that is, early adolescence, middle adolescence and late adolescence acknowledged that they at least faced challenges for which adult intervention could a welcome relief. Therefore adult intervention in solving some of the developmental challenges they encounter at all the three stages of adolescence was deemed necessary by the respondents. Nevertheless, the respondents at the three stages of adolescents expressed different developmental challenges. While the respondents in early adolescence clamoured for being assisted to understand and manage the changes in their bodies, those in middle adolescence expressed the need to be helped to know how to relate with various members of society without being led astray. The research participants in late adolescence lamented the lack of assistance in career and relationship issues. Lahey (2009: 337) and Steinberg and Morris (2001:88) concur with the view that although adolescents have developmental needs at each of the three stages of adolescence, the needs vary from one stage do the other. In general, the respondents expressed the view that teachers, parents and senior siblings as well as all adults in the community should not ignore adolescents especially when it is universally documented that adolescence is a period of storm and stress. Just as established by Kufakunesu et al (2013), the generality of the respondents emphasised that they must be pardoned for some of their actions because they acted out of impulse principally due to hormonal changes which would be taking place within them.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The current study managed to reveal that adolescent secondary school learners have a myriad of developmental challenges ranging from intra-psychological ones to global economic problems. The need for adults to be sensitive and responsive to the developmental needs of people who are in the process of changing from childhood to adulthood was stressed by the generality of the research informants. They particularly pointed out that their plight was exacerbated by the fragmentation and collapse of the extended family network which used insulate adolescents of previous generations from some of the developmental challenges which they are struggling with. The once intact spider web has been shattered, leaving adolescents at the mess of a multiplicity of social ills. Globalisation and technological advancement were also implicated for compounding the developmental problems of secondary school adolescent learners.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the research findings of the current study, the researchers made the following recommendations:

- Parents should make efforts to create time for their adolescent children. It is during such quality interaction that parents could detect what exactly would be bothering their children before taking deliberate steps to assist them to solve their developmental problems.
- Secondary school classroom practitioners should be considerate when dealing with adolescents given the emotional and hormonal upheavals they habitually experience. If anything, teachers should intentionally equip adolescents to overcome their existential problems.
- Community leaders such as chiefs, village heads and councillors should take a leading role in encouraging practically all adults to adopt a nurturing attitude towards children and adolescents in their communities. A semblance of what used to prevail at least five decades ago should be restored.
- Schools should intermittently invite expert resource persons to educate secondary school learners on crucial issues such as ways of minimising sexual abuse, managing natural instinctual libidinal desires and how to safely use the various available technological devises and applications.
- Guidance and counselling services should be regularly given to secondary school learners by qualified personnel to tackle existential adolescent issues such as choosing careers, love relationships, identity formation, reproductive health and dealing with peer pressure.
- Other researchers interested in adolescent psychology can replicate the current study in other Zimbabwean provinces or even broaden the study to focus on the whole country. The current study can also be replicated

in any part of the world for the sake of gathering vital information pertaining to the developmental needs and challenges of adolescents.

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Moses Kufakunesu. "Shattered spider web? Developmental challenges faced by secondary school adolescent learners in Zimbabwe." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* , vol. 22, no. 09, 2017, pp. 26–35.