

JUSTIFICATION

Those of us who work in the field of health care are surprised by the high number of adolescents who seek intervention for psychosomatic complaints. Teachers come in almost equal numbers complaining of being depressed and anxious to the point of needing to take sick leave as a result. This leads health care providers to ask themselves a series of questions related to this situation.

Why are we always hearing about conflicts in school? Is the educational system in crisis? What are the causes of the alarming number of teachers on extended sick leave? Are adolescents simply problematic? These questions are also being asked by the media, by people in everyday conversations, and by educational authorities in a large number of studies being published on this topic.

If this problem is approached from a systemic point of view, it is clear that there is certainly more than one cause. The "cause" is really multicausal and the effects have an impact on the overall context and on all of the different groups that interact. Therefore, health care professionals should not be the only professionals studying this situation, and the fact of the matter is that they are not.

There has been a significant request for support and advisement made by the teachers in our province. They complain of the difficulties they have relating to adolescents and feel these difficulties are due to a lack of knowledge and/or understanding of the concerns, motivations and interests of their students.

The very high number of adolescents that seek help at mental health clinics who are not diagnosed as psychotic, makes us think that something is going on in their immediate environment.

The need to "learn to educate" is very evident in educational and health care contexts in which parents claim to be unable to relate to and control their children.

A nationwide survey of 3,853 young people between 15 and 24 years of age carried out by a company called DATA showed that Spanish youth, when asked what was most important in their lives, ranked family first (out of 10 options). They ranked teachers right after volunteer organizations when asked whom they most trusted, and this is interesting because teachers state that they do not understand adolescents. (El País newspaper, Nov. 17, 1999) Equally as interesting is the fact that 80% of public school teachers stated that psychological disorders were their greatest problem. (El País newspaper, February 5, 2000).

Although the reasons given are not the only ones that exist, they do justify some research into these issues.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Many of the studies that have been published on adolescence verify the concern that exists regarding young people today. A review of the literature shows that there are some 300 studies that have been done in several countries over the last five years. Some have looked at the language or discourse of youth, others at their drinking habits, and still others at their consumption of drugs. There are studies that focus on how young people use their free time, failure at school, family activities, self-concept, self-esteem, gender/sex roles, mental health, identity issues, values and so on. The majority of these studies has been done by sociologists, social and clinical psychologists and doctors and psychiatrists.

It is important to point out the special issue of the American Journal of Preventative Medicine (January, 2001, 71 pages) that was dedicated to youth violence. Among the conclusions that can be drawn from the seven articles included in this issue, we find questions such as the need to help children who display problematic behavior at school in order to prevent subsequent criminal behavior, the importance of parent-child relationships during developmental stages and of having affective support, healthy lifestyles and issues related to growth and development.

Thus, the current situation as regards the study of adolescence by the scientific community corroborates the need to continue to research these topics. Any contribution which favors a better understanding between people will be beneficial, and even more so if we are talking about groups who are "required to understand each other" which is the case of teachers and students. Furthermore, given the scarcity of studies that focus on the development of specific methodologies for preventing and resolving conflictive behavior, efforts to continue to work in this area are more than justified.