
Preface

Health psychology as a field is focused on the balance between physical and psychological health and disease. While literature on health psychology is not sparse, research on both mental and physical health intervention and outcome in adolescents has historically been neglected (Williams, Holmbeck, & Greenley, 2002). This comprehensive handbook seeks to fill this gap by covering a wide range of topics that fall under five general categories and constitute the organization of this handbook: General issues in adolescent health psychology, the developmental processes that occur during adolescence, treatment, and training of professionals as each relate to adolescent health psychology, mental health and adolescents, and physical health and adolescents. Each of these general categories translates to a section in this book, and each section contains several chapters that address topics that fall within each of the aforementioned categories. A description of each section follows.

General Issues Related to Adolescent Health Psychology

As indicated above, the field of health psychology is vast, and given the development processes that occur during adolescence, certain issues related to the field of adolescent health psychology merit a detailed discussion. In the first section of the book, general issues in adolescent health psychology are discussed. Specifically, a biopsychosocial perspective on adolescent health and disease is presented with an emphasis on risk-taking behaviors and the various biological, psychosocial, and environmental factors found to be associated with adolescent risk-taking behaviors. Next the influences that socio-cultural and socioeconomic factors can have on adolescent health are explored. In this first section of this book, there are also chapters on public health approaches to adolescent health, epidemiology of adolescent health, disease prevention in adolescence, and determinants of health-related behaviors in adolescence. Other topics covered within this general section include stress, emotional regulation, and resilience in adolescence; mental health literacy; measurements and quality life instruments used with adolescents; the effects of physical activity on health; and sexual assault and intimate partner violence as each relates to the adolescent.

Adolescent Development

Adolescence is clearly a time during which much change occurs. These changes occur on multiple developmental levels including changes that are emotional, social, and physical. Naturally these changes can carry an impact on adolescent health both psychological and physical. Thus, the second section of this book focuses on adolescent development. Specifically, a discussion of continuity of behavior and parenting from childhood through adolescence is provided; school performance of the adolescent is discussed (with a discussion on factors that can influence school performance, e.g., chronic illness); brain development in the adolescent is reviewed; puberty and its role in adolescent maturation is explored; and the literature on adolescent sexuality and sexual behavior is reviewed.

Treatment

In fact, in this book, O'Donohue et al. emphasize how adolescents drivers of high health care costs in part due to their underuse of office visits and overuse of emergency department care (Newacheck, Wong, Galbraith, & Hung, 2003); how during the transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents establish patterns of behavior and make lifestyle choices that affect both their current and future health; and how adolescence is a significant intervention point for behavior change (O'Donohue & Tolle, 2009). Therefore, a discussion on the treatment (both medical and behavioral) of the adolescent is warranted. Thus, in this book chapters relevant to intervention effectiveness research, training issues in adolescent health, delivery of interventions, confidentiality and care, and treatment adherence are included.

Mental Health

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the field of health psychology explores the intricate and complex associations between physical and psychological health and disease. Therefore, naturally, sections of this book relevant to medical and physical conditions as well as mental health conditions are necessary. Here we describe the chapters on mental health disorders and below we discuss medical/physical conditions. With regard to mental health disorders, our approach to determining which topics to cover was twofold. First we examined the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4th Edition Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and determined which of the broad categories in the DSM-IV-TR were both relevant to the adolescent and merited a lengthy discussion. Second, we considered other circumstances or situations that arise during adolescence that are related to mental health. This process resulted in the inclusion of chapters on smoking, substance use, ADHD, antisocial behavior, personality disorders, self-harm, eating disorders, anxiety, depression and suicide-related behaviors, and intellectual disabilities.

Medical/Physical Conditions

With regard to physical and medical conditions, a review of the scientific literature, books that focus on adolescents that are related to health (physical or mental), and books that focus on health psychology (although not on adolescents) led us to determine which topics related to medical/physical conditions should be included in this handbook. The topics that we cover that are specific to medical/physical conditions are pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, obesity, cardiovascular conditions, asthma, endocrine disorders, musculoskeletal injuries, and headaches.

Other Themes Present Throughout the Book

In addition to the sections of the book described above, certain themes present themselves throughout the book and are covered in greater detail in the introductory chapter of the handbook. The majority of these themes are largely related to prevention, which can be quite key in the health and well-being of the adolescent. In fact, extant research has indicated that wellness and periodic health checkups are instrumental in disease prevention and early diagnosis in primary care settings illustrating the importance of annual well-child (by child we also include adolescents) check-ups (Schor, 2012) which can include screening for mental health conditions (administered in primary care settings).

Other factors that are important to assess for when working with adolescents include emotion dysregulation and poor social skills as both have emerged as being primary contributors to adolescent psychological and behavior problems (e.g., Compas, Jaser, & Benson, 2009; Haynos & Fruzzetti, 2011; Hughes & Gullone, 2010). While the literature is lacking in empirically validated preventive interventions for this age group that focus on emotion regulation and social skills, we propose that a prevention program focusing on these areas would likely be effective in reducing adolescent psychopathology. Finally, a number of public health care crises uniquely affect adolescents, and their prevalence has shifted over the last decade. These include substance use; teenage pregnancy; and obesity. As are discussed in several chapters, prevention of the above can lead to positive health outcomes for the adolescent although unfortunately there is little empirical support for the prevention of these health crises to date.

Closing Comments

Clearly adolescence can be a challenging time, as the adolescent is faced with the task of dealing with biological and cognitive changes as well as with complex and interrelated sociopsychological tasks such as shifts in relationships with family, friends, the peer group, and the wider world (Coleman & Hagell, 2007; Seiffge-Krenke, 2009). As indicated at the outset of this preface,

adolescents have historically been neglected in the health psychology research. Therefore, this handbook seeks to fill this gap and offer a comprehensive, up-to-date resource for mental health professionals, integrated care professionals, behavioral medicine professionals, and physicians and nurses written by leading authorities in the field. Last but certainly not least, this handbook emphasizes the importance of behavioral health and aligns with the changing perspective on mental health.

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