

# **Social-emotional Development in Adolescents and Friendship. A Theoretical Review**

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# Social-emotional Development in Adolescents and Friendship. A Theoretical Review

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

socio-emotional development; adolescence; friendship; socio-emotional skills; emotional intelligence; self-centeredness; moral development; development identity; self-esteem.

In this research we conducted a systematic review of the characteristics of social-emotional development in adolescents and the extent to which they are influenced or correlated by the concept of friendship. We also investigated the influence of socio-emotional traits on the quality of friendship in adolescence. To achieve this, we searched for published scientific studies from several major databases. The main keywords used for this study were "Adolescence", "Friendship", "Social-emotional development", "Social development", "Emotions". We initially identified 123 studies with the mentioned keywords and we decided that 73 studies are eligible for the purpose of this research. Those were read and analyzed in full-text format. Following this stage, we decided to include 29 studies in the review. We identified a large diversity in the sample of participants presented in the study, with a total of 11,684 participants; from the total of eligible studies, three are systematic reviews that have explored our key concepts (friendship and concepts related to social-emotional development). Through this systematic review, we were able to summarize the current data and knowledge about friendship, social-emotional development and relationships between the two, during adolescence.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Sozio-emotionale Entwicklung; Adoleszenz; Freundschaft; sozio-emotionale Fähigkeiten; emotionale Intelligenz; Selbstbezogenheit; moralische Entwicklung; Entwicklungsidentität; Selbstwertgefühl.

In dieser Forschung führten wir eine systematische Überprüfung der Merkmale von sozial-emotionalen Entwicklung bei Jugendlichen und das Ausmaß, in dem sie durch die Konzept der Freundschaft. Wir untersuchten auch den Einfluss sozio-emotionaler Merkmale auf die Qualität der Freundschaft in der Adoleszenz. Um dies zu erreichen, suchten wir nach veröffentlichten wissenschaftlichen Studien aus mehreren großen Datenbanken. Die wichtigsten Schlüsselwörter, die für diese Studie verwendet wurden, waren "Adoleszenz", "Freundschaft", "Sozial-emotionale Entwicklung", "Soziale Entwicklung", "Emotionen". Wir identifizierten zunächst 123 Studien mit den genannten Schlüsselwörtern und entschieden uns für dass 73 Studien für den Zweck dieser Forschung in Frage kommen. Diese wurden gelesen und analysiert in Volltextformat. Nach dieser Phase haben wir beschlossen, 29 Studien in den Review einzubeziehen. Wir identifizierte eine große Vielfalt in der Stichprobe der in der Studie vorgestellten Teilnehmer, mit insgesamt 11.684 Teilnehmer; Von der Gesamtzahl der in Frage kommenden Studien sind drei systematische Übersichtsarbeiten, die erforschte unsere Schlüsselkonzepte (Freundschaft und Konzepte im Zusammenhang mit sozial-emotionaler Entwicklung). Durch diesen systematischen Review konnten wir die aktuellen Daten und Erkenntnisse zusammenfassen über Freundschaft, sozial-emotionale Entwicklung und Beziehungen zwischen den beiden, während Adoleszenz.

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence is marked by the freedom of decisions made by individuals and the beginning of a period full of changes (emotional, physical, social), all encompassing transformation of the child, initially in a teenager and later in a budding adult. Puberty is a period of rapid changes in development, and at the end of this period, adolescents become capable of reproduction.

The authors (Curtis, 2015; Eaton et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2014; Steinberg, 2008) frame adolescence in different age segments. For our study, we chose an age range of 11-18 years. The World Health

Organization (2021) defines adolescence as a phase of transition in growth and development between childhood and adulthood, a teenager being any person between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Sullivan (1953) presents a theoretical approach to explain the importance of friendship. The author explains that specific interpersonal needs appear in different periods of development, and there are social relationships suitable for these needs.

Our work aims to identify the extent to which friendship influences socio-emotional development, respectively socio-emotional skills. We track traits

friendship and factors that can develop specific skills during this period of development, through a systematic review from multiple sources. Thus, we have ensured a minimum of biases.

Researchers (Larson & Richards, 1994; Larson & Sheeber, in press) shows that adolescents experience daily fluctuations in emotional states, and the ability to learn to organize and control these emotions is absolutely a must for their effectiveness in everyday tasks and well-being. And this is valid for both adolescence and adult life, in fulfilling different roles: friend, student, parent, colleague (Hartel, Zerbe, & Ashkanasy, 2005; Salovey & Sluyter, 1997). Studies show that emotional development must be understood in relation to the specific cultural contexts of real life (Haviland & Kramer, 1991; Saarni et al., 2006; Zeidner, Matthews, Roberts, & MacCann, 2003).

Friendship therefore has a significant role during adolescence due to dynamics present in this stage of development: the risk of deviant behaviors is at its' highest, the social environment is very diverse and requires communication strategies, coping and emotional regulation, predominantly new emotions appear and adolescents are much more aware of feelings such as shame, anger, pride. It is a time when, due to uncertainties and sudden changes, isolation may occur, and with it, depressive symptoms and disorders of sleep or problems of outsourcing and internalization.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Eligibility criteria:

- Study participants must be between the ages of 11-18 to encompass all stages of adolescence (early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence); a period in which social relations have a significant impact;
- Collection of studies that provide results on the topic of concern (friendship and traits of socio-emotional development);
- We have included studies that have at least two keywords mentioned in the section "Defining the problem";

### 2.2. Search strategy:

The terms used in the search process are summarized in Table 1. Main keywords dominant were "Adolescence", "Friendship", "Social-emotional development", "Development social", "Emotions". The platforms from which we extracted the articles

from the literature are: Google Scholar, Social Science Index Database, SSRN, Semantic Scholar, Science Direct, PsycINFO, Med Line, D.A.I., Open Access Thesis. We also conducted a search in the list of references of the articles selected for the work.

Table 1. Search strategy overview

<i>Databases</i>	Social Science Index Database, SSRN, Semantic Scholar, Science Direct, PsycINFO, MedLine, D.A.I., Open Access Thesis.
<i>Other sources</i>	List of references to articles about friendship, adolescence and socio-emotional development.
<i>Search terms</i>	Terms related to friendship: friend* Terms related to adolescence: "teen", "youth", "preadolescent", "juvenile", "middle" school", "high-school", "secondary school", "student". Terms related to social-emotional development: attachment, self-esteem, development morals, emotion management, risk and resilience, empathy, problem solving, emotional intelligence, parenting.
<i>Restrictions</i>	Articles published in English, samples of people, average age between 11-18 years.

### 2.3. Selection of studies:

As can be seen in Table 2 of the classification of studies according to the PRISMA model and in the PRISMA diagram, we initially identified 123 studies through the chosen search strategy. Then, there were 106 items left and 17 were excluded because they did not meet any of the eligibility criteria stated. The screening process involved analysis of each title and abstract of the identified studies. We assessed the eligibility for 73 studies in full-text format, and following this stage we decided to include in the review 29 Studies.

### 2.4. Data extraction:

We extracted the reference information, methodological characteristics and a summary of the results relevant from eligible studies.

PRISMA diagram:

2.5. *Identification of studies via databases and registers:*

*Identification:*

Records identified from \*

Databases (n=117)

Registers (n=6)

→ Records removed before screening: Duplicate records removed (n=17)

*Screening:*

Records screened (n=106) - Records excluded (n=11)

Reports sought for retrieval (n=106)

Reports assessed for eligibility (n=73)

*Included:*

Studies included in review (n=29)

Table 2. Classification of studies according to the PRISMA model

IDENTIFICATION	Studies identified through search platforms: n=117
	Additional studies identified from other sources: n=6
SCREENING	Studies remaining after screening: n=106
ELIGIBILITY	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility: n=73
STUDIES INCLUDED	Studies included in the Qualitative Synthesis: n= 29

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. *Sampling, population and design:*

From the articles eligible for review we have extracted the following key information (see Table 5): the author and year, sample size, design, recruitment mode, tools used, and traits of social-emotional development influenced or influencing friendship. Studies were performed in China (Qu, Li & Wang, 2021), USA (Weimer, Kerns & Oldenburg, 2004; Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Rubin, Dwyer, LaForce, Kim, Burgess & Krasnor, 2004; Rawlins & Holl, 2014; Buhrmester, 1990; Rubin & Fredstrom, 2008; Cillessen, Jiang & West, 2005; Kraft & Mayeux, 2018; Dougan & Pearson, 2014; Larson & Brown, 2007), Europe, and America (Matheson, Olsen & Weisner, 2007), Russia (Kon & Losenkov, 1978), Germany (Berndt, 2015; Bechtiger, Steinhoff, Buchmann &

Shanahan, 2021), Canada (Poulin & Chan, 2010; Bowker, 2004), Turkey (Demir, Simsek & Procsal, 2012), Norway (Melberg, 2020), Ireland (Keijsers, Branje, Frijns & Meeus, 2011; Kenny, Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2013), Italy (Cairano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, Bonino & Beyers, 2007), Korea (Park & Enright, 1997).

In total, we found 11,684 participants in all eligible studies; the majority of the studies were correlational, then observational, a cross-analysis (follow-up analysis), a path analysis, two longitudinal studies and four reviews. The average age of the participants was 14.4.

#### 3.2. *Tools for friendship:*

The most common tool for the concept of friendship was the "Friendship Quality Questionnaire" (Qu, Li & Wang, 2021; Weimer, Kerns & Oldenburg, 2004; Rubin, Dwyer, LaForce, Kim, Burgess & Krasnor, 2004; Bukowski, Hoza & Boivin, 1993; Cillessen, Jiang & West, 2005; Cairano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, Bonino & Beyers, 2007), and a study used the revised version of this questionnaire.

The "Friendship Quality Questionnaire" has six reported subscales: validation and care, conflict resolution, conflict and treason, help and guidance, companionship and recreation, privacy. The main constructs measured by this tool are interpersonal skills, and the scale is Likert type. It is administered in writing, on paper. Some items from the tool are: "My friend and I spend all our free time together", "If I forgot my lunch or needed the money, my friend would borrow", "If my friend had to move, I would miss him/her".

#### 3.3. *Tools for socio-emotional development:*

We found a tool that evaluates the attachment "Adult Attachment Interview" (Zimmerman, 2003). The interview contains 20 open questions, and some dimensions of evaluation are: description of relationships with the parents of the subject, features that reflect the participants' relationship with their mother, if they have experienced the loss of a loved one. Other tools are "Socioemotional Adjustment", "Self-Reports of Social Behavior", "Network of Relationships Inventory".

#### 3.4. *Concepts of social-emotional development that influence friendship:*

The model of parent-child communication formed in the family environment is an important pattern for

friendship relationships in adolescence (Qu, Li & Wang, 2021). The dyads in which both partners have a secure attachment, with a behavior that encourages connection and shows clarity in relation to the message sent by the interlocutor; in other words, teenagers with secure attachment will develop more effective communication skills that will then be useful for friendly relations in the context of a conflict or in the process of taking decisions (Weimer, Kerns & Oldenburg, 2004). Teenagers with secure attachment report that they integrate more easily into collectives (even at school) and develop emotional regulatory skills in the context of conflicts with their friends; they also show less hostility and have low scores on social anxiety (Zimmerman, 2003).

### *3.5. How friendship influences social-emotional development:*

Friends are a source of trust and help (emotional and physical), both in the academic and non-academic environment. Friends can help develop self-esteem and self-confidence in social contexts of vulnerability or bullying. They can encourage participation in extracurricular activities and the formation of a psychological bond with the school. Acceptance by colleagues and friends has a strong impact on the formation of the feeling of belonging to school. Friendship can work as a buffer for stressful events in the family or in relationships with colleagues. Close friends have a protective, adaptive and resilient role in the face of problems and stressful academics (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Matheson, Olsen & Weisner, 2007). Friendship has a major impact (in early adolescence) on the development of personality, social skills and social behavior. Friendship encourages prosocial behaviors and an important feature is reciprocity (Berndt, 2015). Friendship provides emotional security and promotes increased social skills (Rubin & Fredstrom, 2008). The feeling of uniqueness correlates positively with the quality of friendship and with happiness. Friendship experiences are positively correlated with the feeling of uniqueness. Positive experiences of friendship create several indicators for the individual that promotes self-acceptance and uniqueness, these factors contributing to the happiness of the individual (Demir, Simsek & Procsal, 2012).

## **4. Discussions**

Our systematic review aimed at identifying common traits attributed to the concept of friendship, its relationship with the features of socio-emotional

development in the period of adolescence and the extent to which the two concepts influence each other, in positive or negative valences.

We identified a high diversity in the sample of participants presented in the study, with a total of 11,684 participants; from the eligible studies, three are systematic reviews that have explored our key concepts (friendship and concepts related to development socio-emotional).

In terms of age, the average age of the participants was 14,4, having thus a representative sample of adolescents from both early adolescence and from late adolescence. In the systematic review conducted by Hair, Jager & Garrett (2002), 360 articles were introduced into the study in which to explore or assess social competence in the period of adolescence. In Berndt's review (2015), the sample of participants was from the period of early adolescence, showing that the features of friendship to this age are more positive in terms of intimacy and responsiveness in relation to other years of adolescence. In the review conducted by Poulin & Chan (2010), the sample of participants was made up of children and adolescents, with the main objective of assessing stability in time of friendship relations; the conclusion of the study was that friendship is a dynamic construct, and is constantly influenced by stimuli and events from the outside.

Review by Rubin & Fredstrom (2008) explores the functions that friendship performs in late childhood and early adolescence. The results of the study showed that friendship provides affection, emotional security, gives advice and has instrumental purposes. It also forms patterns for future romantic relationships, for marital relations and for the relationship with the parents.

## **5. Future implications and limits:**

A major limit identified is the database insufficiently large to cover variations in age or gender. Another limit is that all the studies included in the systematic review were in English, and in this context we can say that an important future direction is the collection of studies in several languages. Also, a limit to the study was that we did not have access to all the databases eligible for the study.

## **6. Conclusions**

Some conclusions related to the study carried out by us would be that the attachment of a child will have significant influences in all the social relationships that

it will form in adolescence and in the adult period, and the relationship between the child and the parent and the communication between them will be, by also a predictor of the quality of friendship. We believe that future studies could observe the causal relationships between these concepts and a future longitudinal study could discover the social evolution of a child with insecure attachment when the factors are favorable. On the other hand, we have noticed that friendship is very often correlated positively with social adaptability, with the formation of a positive self-image, with development resilience and with the development of an ability to express thoughts and emotions.

Through this systematic review we were able to summarize the current data and knowledge about friendship, about the social-emotional development and about the relationships between the two, in the period of development of adolescence. To outline a clearer picture of attachment influence in forming friendship we need a more detailed study and more data from studies longitudinal because it is more relevant to consider data about this topic over a long period of time, thus noting the changes from one year to the next and the implications of life experiences.

#### Authors note:

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**Vaida Sebastian** is a PhD Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Babeş-Bolyai interested in the fields of social-emotional competences development, psychology of advertising, adaptive learning and IT&C applied to psychology.

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