



Healthy Selfishness Among School-Going Adolescents in West Bengal: A Theoretical Analysis

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Abstract

The concept of selfishness is often viewed negatively in social discourse; however, contemporary psychological perspectives distinguish between destructive selfishness and “healthy selfishness.” Healthy selfishness refers to the ability to prioritise one’s well-being, set boundaries, and maintain self-respect without harming others. This theoretical paper examines the concept of healthy selfishness among school-going adolescents in West Bengal. Drawing upon developmental psychology, emotional intelligence theory, and socio-cultural frameworks, the paper argues that healthy selfishness is essential for adolescents’ mental health, academic success, and identity formation. The study highlights the role of family, school environment, and cultural expectations in shaping adolescents’ understanding of self-interest. It further suggests that fostering healthy selfishness can promote resilience, reduce stress, and support balanced personality development. The paper concludes by recommending the integration of life skills education into school curricula to cultivate this important trait.

Keywords: Healthy selfishness, Adolescents, West Bengal, Emotional intelligence, Mental health, Education

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a significant developmental stage during which individuals experience identity formation, emotional instability, and increasing social expectations (Steinberg, 2005). In the socio-cultural context of West Bengal, adolescents often find themselves negotiating between traditional collectivist values and modern influences that encourage individual autonomy (Basu, 2005). Within this context, selfishness is generally viewed negatively, as it is commonly associated with moral decline and a lack of social sensitivity (Chatterjee, 1993).

However, recent developments in psychological theory have introduced the concept of *healthy selfishness*, which focuses on the importance of self-care, personal boundaries, and self-respect (Ryan & Deci, 2001). For school-going adolescents, developing a balanced sense of self-interest is essential for coping with academic pressures, managing peer relationships, and dealing with emotional challenges (Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017; Larson, 2000). Therefore, understanding the theoretical basis of healthy selfishness and its relevance becomes crucial in addressing the developmental needs of adolescents in West Bengal.

2. Conceptualising Healthy Selfishness

Healthy selfishness can be defined as a positive psychological trait that enables individuals to prioritise their needs without undermining the well-being of others. It differs significantly from unhealthy selfishness, which is characterised by disregard for others, manipulation, and egocentrism.

From a psychological standpoint, healthy selfishness includes:

- Self-awareness
- Boundary-setting
- Emotional regulation
- Assertiveness
- Self-care practices

It aligns closely with the concept of self-esteem and personal agency. Adolescents who practice healthy selfishness are more likely to make independent decisions, resist peer pressure, and maintain emotional balance.



3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory

Erik Erikson proposed that adolescence is marked by the stage of *identity vs. role confusion*. During this stage, individuals explore their identity and develop a sense of self. Healthy selfishness plays a crucial role in this process by allowing adolescents to prioritise self-exploration and personal values without excessive dependence on external validation.

3.2 Emotional Intelligence Theory

The theory of emotional intelligence popularised by Daniel Goleman emphasises self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy. Healthy selfishness complements emotional intelligence by encouraging individuals to recognise their emotional needs while maintaining empathy for others.

3.3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow highlighted that individuals must fulfil their basic and psychological needs before achieving self-actualisation. Healthy selfishness enables adolescents to prioritise these needs, such as safety, belonging, and esteem, which are essential for overall development.

3.4 Social Learning Theory

According to Albert Bandura, behaviour is learned through observation and imitation. Adolescents in West Bengal often model behaviours from parents, teachers, and peers. If self-neglect is normalised, they may struggle to develop healthy selfishness.

4. Socio-Cultural Context of West Bengal

West Bengal has a rich cultural heritage that emphasises community, respect for elders, and collective well-being. While these values foster social harmony, they may sometimes discourage individual expression and self-prioritisation among adolescents.

Key socio-cultural influences include:

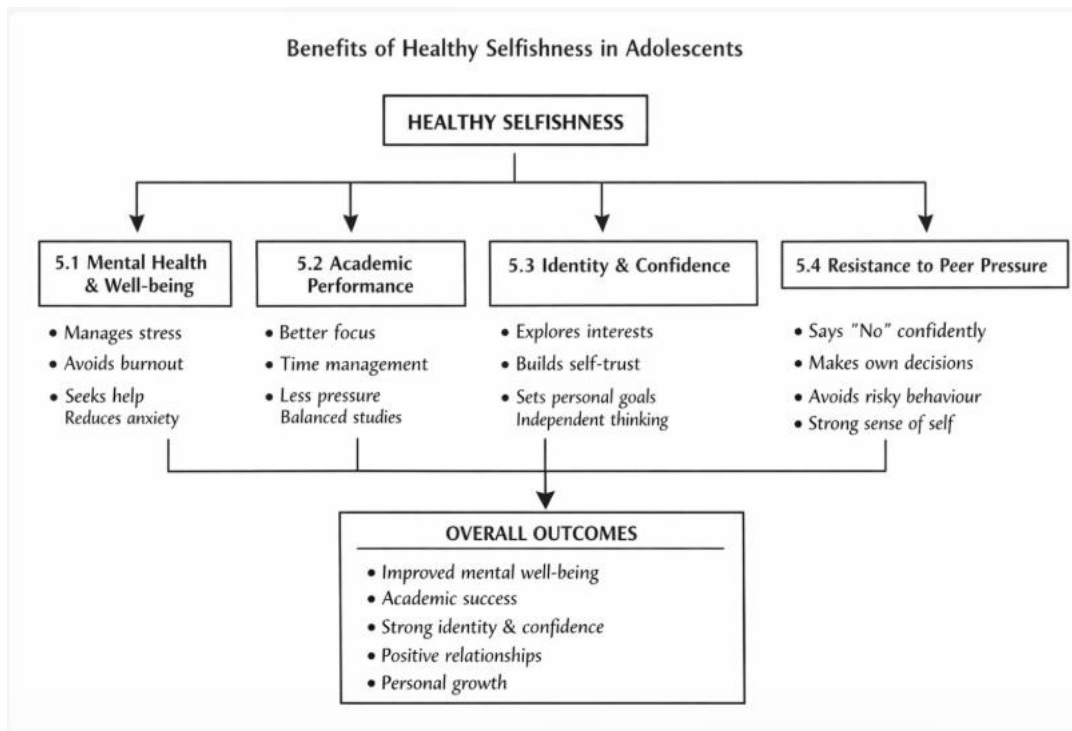
- **Family Expectations:** Academic success is highly valued, often leading adolescents to neglect personal well-being.
- **Collectivist Norms:** Prioritising group needs over individual desires can limit self-expression.
- **Gender Roles:** Girls, in particular, may be socialised to be self-sacrificing.

In such a context, healthy selfishness becomes essential to ensure that adolescents do not internalise guilt when prioritising their mental and emotional needs.

5. Importance of Healthy Selfishness in Adolescence

Healthy selfishness plays an important role in the overall development of adolescents. In terms of mental health and well-being, it helps adolescents manage stress, avoid burnout, and seek help when necessary. Encouraging self-care and emotional awareness, it also contributes to reducing anxiety and depression. Furthermore, healthy selfishness positively influences academic performance, as students who prioritise their own needs are better able to concentrate on their studies, manage their time effectively, and avoid excessive pressure from peers or parents.

In addition, healthy selfishness supports the development of identity and confidence by encouraging adolescents to explore their interests, beliefs, and goals independently, which strengthens their sense of self. It also enhances their ability to resist peer pressure, as adolescents with a strong sense of identity are less likely to engage in risky behaviours and are more confident in asserting their own choices.



6. Role of Educational Institutions

Schools play a vital role in promoting healthy selfishness among adolescents by creating an environment that supports their overall development. Teachers and school systems can contribute to this by incorporating life skills education into the curriculum, which helps students develop essential coping and decision-making abilities. Promoting emotional intelligence training enables adolescents to better understand and manage their emotions, while encouraging open communication fosters trust and allows students to express their thoughts and concerns freely. Additionally, providing counseling services ensures that students receive the necessary guidance and emotional support. Creating such a supportive environment helps adolescents recognize that self-care is not a negative form of selfishness, but rather an important and healthy aspect of personal growth and well-being.

7. Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications for policy and practice highlight the need for a more structured and supportive approach to adolescent development. It is essential to integrate mental health education into school curricula to promote emotional awareness and well-being among students. Additionally, teachers should be trained in adolescent psychology so they can better understand and respond to the developmental needs of young individuals.

Conducting awareness programs for parents is equally important, as it helps them support their children effectively during this critical stage. Furthermore, encouraging gender-sensitive approaches can ensure inclusivity and address the diverse experiences of adolescents in a balanced and equitable manner.

8. Conclusion

Healthy selfishness is an essential yet often misunderstood concept in adolescent development. In the context of West Bengal, where collectivist values dominate, adolescents may struggle to balance personal needs with social expectations. This theoretical analysis highlights that healthy selfishness is not about ignoring others but about maintaining a balanced sense of self. Promoting this trait can enhance mental well-being, academic success, and overall personality development. Therefore, educators, parents, and policymakers must work collaboratively to foster environments where adolescents can develop healthy selfishness without guilt or stigma.

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