



# **Buddhism and Human Development: Buddhist Influenced Factors Enables Resilience in Adolescents**

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## **Abstract**

The teenage years are the times that are most susceptible to adaptation problems as noticed by psychologists. Adaptation problems in the development of adolescents' growth result in physical and mental health problems. Physical and mental health problems of adolescents can be remedied by the applications of Buddhist influenced factors that enable resilience. Buddhist influenced factors are sources or conditions for arising of the right views which can facilitate resilience. Resilience is important because as positive psychology explains it is the human capacity to face, overcome, and be strengthened by (or even transformed by) the challenges of life. Therefore, Buddhism enables resilience in adolescents' physical and mental health development.

*Keywords:* Buddhism, Human Development, Resilience, Adolescents

## **The teenage years are the time that is most susceptible to Adaptation problems as noticed by psychologists**

Although teenagers have always been with us, their existence as a specific group, with a unique psychological characters, has been recognized by the society only recently. Until the eighteenth century teenagers were not distinguished from children. In the Victorian era they were regarded as either overgrown children or undergrown adults, and in any case there were expected to be seen or not heard. The teenager was described as ‘just an in-between, too old for toys, too young for boys’. Nowadays, however, adolescents have become identified as a separate social group, and indeed may have become a specially privileged group.<sup>1</sup>

Adolescence is transition from childhood to adulthood. It is distinguished by significant physical changes, especially puberty, are often viewed as a mark of entry into adolescence. But adolescence is more than a period of physical change; it is a period of cognitive development as well. The adolescent moves from thinking about the concrete here and now to abstract thinking and possibilities for the future. Adolescence is also an important time of social development, the length and quality of which varies from cultures to cultures.<sup>2</sup>

The teenage years are a bright and beautiful period in our lives. However, the teenage years are also the time that is most susceptible to adaptation problems, which include physical, mental and social changes. Global research shows that during adolescence, physical and mental health care are often neglected. Adolescence is the period where teenagers need correct information and understanding from the people around them. It is important to give priority to the development of their growth to prevent physical and mental health problems, and to solve other problems that may occur, in a timely manner.<sup>3</sup>

Adolescence is traditionally divided into three parts: puberty (early adolescence); middle adolescence; and late adolescence, the transitional period to adulthood.<sup>4</sup> As they

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon R. Lowe, **The Growth of Personality: from Infancy to Old Age**, Great Britain: Cox & Wyman Ltd. 1972, pp.150.

<sup>2</sup>Terry Faw and Gary S. Belken, **Child Psychology**, Singapore: McGraw-Hill Book Co., pp.411.

<sup>3</sup>Punnada Sulaiman, M.D, “**Understanding, Diagnosing, and Preventing**”, viewed 6 March 2018, <<https://www.samitivejhospitals.com/en/smichcenters/teen-center/#>>.

<sup>4</sup>Terry Faw and Gary S. Belken, **Child Psychology**, Singapore: McGraw-Hill Book Co., pp.414.

approach adolescence, most children have made important social adjustments – to parents, to peers, and to school. Now, they must define themselves against a new set of conditions. They must take a giant step towards independence, develop a personal code of moral conduct, and explore new social roles towards an adult lifestyle.<sup>5</sup>

### **Adaptation problems in the development of adolescents' growth result in physical and mental health problems.**

Adolescents experience dramatic biological changes related to puberty; these biological changes can significantly affect psychosocial development. An increased awareness of sexuality and a heightened preoccupation with body image are fundamental psychosocial tasks during adolescence. Dramatic changes in body shape and size can cause a great deal of ambivalence among adolescents. During adolescence teens develop a stronger recognition of their own personal identity, including recognition of a set of personal moral and ethical values, and greater perception of feelings of self-esteem or self-worth.<sup>6</sup>

When talking about identity, the first definition that comes in mind is Erik Erikson<sup>7</sup>'s psychosocial approach to understanding identity by describing the interplay between the individual biology, psychology, and social recognition and response within an historical context. Furthermore, he identified the goal of adolescence as achieving a coherent identity and avoiding identity confusion. Identity is multidimensional and may include physical and sexual identity, occupational goals, religious beliefs, and ethnic background. Adolescents explore these dimensions, and usually make commitments to aspects of their identity as they move into early adulthood.

Erik Erikson has identified the years of adolescence as a period during which the developing person must establish a sense of social and personal identity. If difficulty is experienced in the achievement of that objective, the end product is role conflict. Personal identity, in Erikson's model, is defined as a sense of contentment about one's own physical, intellectual, and emotional attributes, a sense of purpose and objective, and the anticipation

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<sup>5</sup>Terry Faw and Gary S. Belken, **Child Psychology**, Singapore: McGraw-Hill Book Co., pp.435.

<sup>6</sup>Jamie Stang and Mary Story, "Adolescent Growth and Development", viewed 6 March 2018, <[http://www.epi.umn.edu/let/pubs/img/adol\\_ch1.pdf](http://www.epi.umn.edu/let/pubs/img/adol_ch1.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup>Erik Erikson, **Identity: Youth and Crisis**, New York: W. W. Norton Co, pp.

of recognition from other people who are considered significant to the individual. The search for identity is stimulated by three factors. First, dramatic changes in one's physical appearance at puberty result in the question "Who am I, and how am I viewed by others?" Second, the capacity for formal cognitive processing allows the adolescent to conceptualize the many possible identities that one might have, thus prompting the question "Which of these possibilities is really me?" And third, societal expectations for the individual change, causing a rejection of the established child identity and forcing an exploration of various possible adult identities.<sup>8</sup> Erikson saw adolescence as a period of psychosocial moratorium, in which the adolescent can try different social roles. If the adolescent fails in finding his own role and to take commitments can lead to "identity crisis".

Psychologist James Marcia<sup>9</sup> hypothesized that identity development involves two steps. First, the adolescent must break away from childhood beliefs to explore alternatives for identity in a particular area. Second, the adolescent makes a commitment as to their individual identity in that area. Shifting from the young ages when children tend to copy the behavior of their adult role models – such as their parents – adolescents tend to acquire norms, values, attitudes, motivations and behavior from socialization agents through social interaction, as well as from different media sources ( for instance television). Psychologists reached the conclusion that adolescence is most likely the stage of life where friends are the most influential. Adolescents often find their identity in the social group to which they belong. Studies have shown that friends can determine the success or demise of adolescents.

### **Physical and mental health problems of adolescents can be remedied by the applications of Buddhist influenced factors that enables resilience.**

Resilience in the face of adversity has been studied extensively by developmental psychopathologists for the past 50 years. The definition of resilience has been generally defined as the ability to weather adversity or to bounce back from negative experience. Much of resilience research has examined the interaction of protective factors and risk in

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<sup>8</sup>Terry Faw and Gary S. Belken, **Child Psychology**, Singapore: McGraw-Hill Book Co., pp.436.

<sup>9</sup>James Marcia, **Identity Development - Aspects of Identity**, Child Development Reference - Vol 4.

high-risk populations. As developmental research most of this work focused on children, sometimes in longitudinal studies of factors in the lives of youth that predicted positive outcomes in adulthood<sup>10</sup>

Masten<sup>11</sup> describes resilience as a common adaptive human process, rather than a magical process applicable to a select few. Tugade and Fredrickson<sup>12</sup> similarly describe the process of resilience as being characterized by the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences, and by flexible adaption to the changing demands of stressful experiences. This understanding seems to be closely related to the concept of hardiness, described by the researcher Kobasa.<sup>13</sup> Resilience also enables us to ‘bounce back’ after experiencing stressful life events such as significant change, stress, adversity, and hardship.<sup>14</sup> Most importantly, it incorporates the concept of emerging from the adversity stronger and more resourceful.<sup>15</sup>

For Grotberg, it consists of inner personal strengths (I am), social and interpersonal skills (I can), and external supports and resources (I have), all of them contributing to essential blocks that build personal resilience.<sup>16</sup> According to Grotberg, Resilient adolescents are defined in terms of three sources; I HAVE (social and interpersonal supports), I AM (inner strengths) and I CAN (interpersonal and problem solving skills) To overcome adversities, teenagers draw from three sources of resilience features labelled: I HAVE, I AM, I CAN. What they draw from each of the three sources may be demonstrated as Figure 1.

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<sup>10</sup> Sandra Prince-Embury and Donald H Saklofske, **Resilience in Children, Adolescents, and Adults: Translating Research into Practice**, (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2013), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> A.S. Masten, “Ordinary Magic: Resilience Process in Development,” **American Psychologist**, vol 56, no. 3 (March 2001): pp. 227-239.

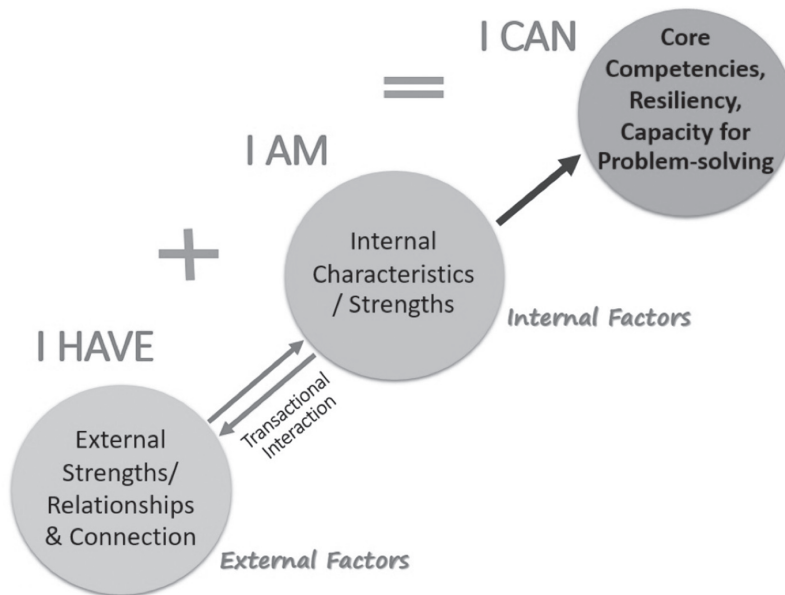
<sup>12</sup> M.M. Tugade and B.L. Fredrickson, “Resilient Individuals Use Positive Emotions to Bounce Back from Negative Emotional Experiences,” **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, vol 86, no. 2 (February 2004): pp. 320-333.

<sup>13</sup> S.C. Kobasa, “Stressful Life Events, Personality and Health: An Inquiry into Hardiness,” **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**, vol 37, no. 1 (January 1979): pp. 1-11.

<sup>14</sup> S.R. Maddi and D.M. Khoshaba, **Resilience at Work: How to Succeed No Matter What Life Throws at You**, (New York: Amacom, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> G.E. Richardson, “The Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency,” **Journal of Clinical Psychology**, vol 58, no 3 (March 2002): 307-321.

<sup>16</sup> Edith Grotberg, **A guide to Promoting Resilience in Children: Strengthening the Human spirit**, (The Hague: The Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1995), p.10.



**Figure 1 Gotberg's Theory of Resilience**

Figure 1 represents Gotberg's Theory of Resilience. It is an interactive and accumulating process of developing different skills, abilities, knowledge and insight that a person needs for successful adaptation or to overcome adversities and meet challenges. For Grotberg, it consists of inner personal strengths, social and interpersonal skills, and external supports and resources, all of them contributing to essential blocks (self-confidence, self-image, responsibility, independence, initiative, effectiveness, trust) that build personal resilience.

Inner personal strengths are determined by bio-psycho-social characteristics and conditions of the individual, when he/she is seeking to find an answer on "Who I am". They enable the development of personal strengths and build the child's self-confidence, self-image, responsibility, independence.

External supports and resources are connected to socio-cultural and environmental factors and are linked to direct and indirect interpersonal relations of individuals within the family and within the wider community (peer relationship, household rules, shared values, school, access to services, health and recreation resources, church, etc.). These "I have" features are conducive to a child's realisation about the reliability of love, belonging, structure and support within the family and community. They build a child's trust.

Social and interpersonal skills represent one's skills and knowledge capital that prepare him/her for active participation, effective communication, understanding and expressing feelings, good problem solving, setting realistic and optimistic future goals. These "I can" features build a child's initiative and effectiveness.<sup>17</sup>

### **Buddhist influenced factors are sources or conditions for arising of the right views which can facilitate resilience.**

There is a teaching presented by the Buddha that elucidates the factors which are sources or conditions for arising of the right views. In the discourse, the most striking expression of the Buddha is that

*"Dveme, bhikkhave, paccayā sammāditthiyā uppādā. Katame dve? Parato ca ghoso yoniso ca manasikāro. Ime kho, bhikkhave, dve paccayā sammāditthiyā uppādāyā" ti.*<sup>18</sup>

*"Bhikkhus, there are these two conditions for the arising of right view. What two? The utterance of another [person] and careful attention. These are the two conditions for the arising of right view."*<sup>19</sup>

The teaching given by the Buddha in this discourse has to be considered as an explanation of right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*). It can be divided into external and internal factors. The external factor is another's utterance; introduction by others; hearing or learning from others. The internal factor is reasoned attention; systematic attention; genetical reflection; analytical reflection. Relevant passage of the discourse and its translation is given below as follows:

*"Kati panāvuso, paccayā sammādiṭṭhiyā uppādāyā" ti. "Dve kho, āvuso, paccayā sammādiṭṭhiyā – parato ca ghoso, yoniso ca manasikāro. Ime kho, āvuso, dve paccayā sammādiṭṭhiyā uppādāyā" ti.*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Grotberg, E.H. "A guide to promoting resilience in children: Strengthening the Human spirit". The international resilience project. The Hague: The Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> A.I.88.

<sup>19</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: a translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya/ translated from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Bodhi*, (Wisdom Publications: USA, 2012), pp.178.

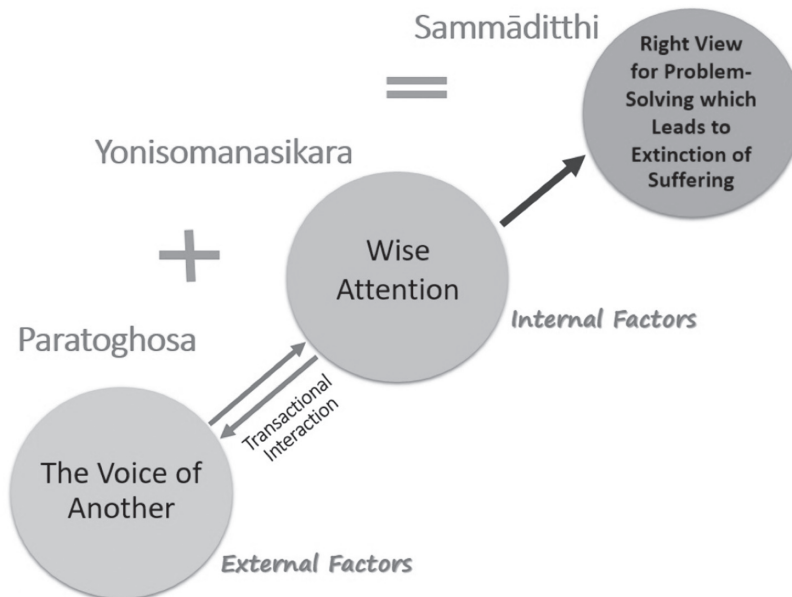
<sup>20</sup> M.I.294.

“Friend, how many conditions are there for the arising of right view?”

“Friend, there are two conditions for arising of the right view: the voice of another and wise attention. These are the two conditions for the arising of right view”<sup>21</sup>

“Friend, by how many factors is right view assisted when it has deliverance of mind for its fruit, deliverance of mind for its fruit and benefit, when it has deliverance by wisdom for its fruit, deliverance by wisdom for its fruit and benefit?”

“Friend, right view is assisted by five factors when it has deliverance of mind of its fruit, deliverance of mind for its fruit and benefit, when it has deliverance by wisdom for its fruit, deliverance by wisdom for its fruit and benefit. Here, friend, right view is assisted by virtue, learning, discussion, serenity, and insight. Right view assisted by these five factors has deliverance of mind for its fruit, deliverance of mind for its fruit and benefit; it has deliverance by wisdom for its fruit, deliverance by wisdom for its fruit and benefit.”<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 2 Buddhist influenced factors that are sources or conditions for arising of the right views which can facilitate resilience**

<sup>21</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: a new translation of the Majjhima Nikāya/ original translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇmoli; translation edited and revised by Bhikkhu Bodhi*, (Wisdom Publications: USA, 1995) p.390.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 390.



Figure 2 demonstrates that the voice of another (*Paratoghosa*) as an external factor and wise attention (*Yonisomanasikara*) as an internal factor are the conditions of arising of right understanding (*sammā ditṭhi*). Both factors are transactional interaction among each other. When one develops the qualities from both factors, it will facilitate the right view for problem-solving which leads to extinction of suffering.

There is a growing body of evidence that the vast majority of human beings are resilient. A previous studies of hospital patients and people who experience trauma states that the core teachings of Buddhism offer each practitioner a path to resilience. The Four Noble Truths acknowledge the truth of suffering in every life, the recognition that the cessation of suffering can also occur, that there is a way to end suffering, and the eight-fold path for relieving suffering.<sup>23</sup> Peres et al.<sup>24</sup> reviewed research on religiousness and resilience. One of the factors which have been investigated relative to resilience is religious/ spiritual. D.A. Pardini et al.<sup>25</sup> examined the potential value of religious faith and spirituality in the lives of individuals suffering from a variety of acute and chronic illnesses. The results indicated that among recovering individuals, higher levels of religious faith and spirituality were associated with a more optimistic life orientation, greater perceived social support, higher resilience to stress, and lower levels of anxiety.

### **Resilience is important because as positive psychology explains it is the human capacity to face, overcome, and be strengthened by (or even transformed by) the challenges of life.**

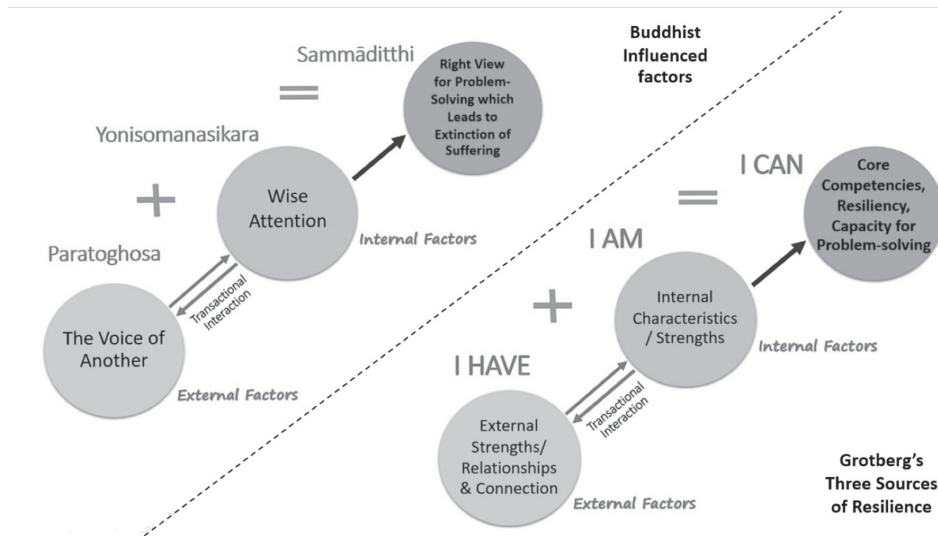
Resilience refers to the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation and problem solving despite challenging or threatening circumstances. Likewise, having *Samma ditṭhi* from the teaching of the Buddha facilitate the right view for problem-solving and leads to extinction of suffering. The figure below shows the similarity of the Buddhist influenced factors that can facilitate resilience and Gotberg's theory of resilience.

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<sup>23</sup> Julia Aegerter, **Resilience: What's Buddhism Got to Do with It?** (USA: Upaya Zen Center, 2012), p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> F. P. Julio Peres et al, "Spirituality and Resilience in Truma Victims," **Journal of Religion and Health**, vol 46, no. 3 (September 2007): 343-350.

<sup>25</sup> D.A. Pardini et al, "Religious faith and spirituality in substance abuse recovery: determining the mental health benefits," **Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment**, vol. 19, no. 4 (December 2000): 347-354.



**Figure 3 The comparison of the Buddhist influenced factors that can facilitate resilience and Gotberg's Theory of Resilience**

There are two conditions for the origin of *Samma ditthi*, or right view, which is the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. *Paratoghosa* is the voice from the other which is external factor of the right view. It may be right information or a good friend (*Kalyanamitta*). The other factor is *Yonisomanasikara*. Literally, this means a critical reflection or thinking in terms of specific conditions such as casual relations or problem-solving, reasoned attention, systematic attention or analytical thinking.

According to the Buddha, right view arises in one who sees things with systematic attention or reflective thought. This leads to extinction of suffering. To see things without reflective attention, leads to wrong view and then to suffering.

Similar to the concept of resilience based on the Gotberg theory which also deals with both internal and external aspects.

When adolescents have external supports and resources that are linked to direct and indirect interpersonal relations of individuals within the family and within the wider community and inner personal strengths that are determined by bio-psycho-social characteristics and conditions of the individual, when he/she is seeking to find an answer on "Who I am". They enable the development of personal strengths and build the self-confidence, self-image, responsibility, independence. These external (I have) and internal

(I am) factors leads to the core competencies, resiliency, and capacity for problem-solving (I can) which is social and interpersonal skills represent one's skills and knowledge capital that prepare him/her for active participation, effective communication, understanding and expressing feelings, good problem solving, setting realistic and optimistic future goals. These "I can" is the capacity to rise above difficult circumstances by external supports and inner personal strengths.

There is no doubt that the foregoing discussion makes it obvious that the Buddhist influenced factors which facilitate the right view for problem-solving and leads to extinction of suffering and Gotberg's theory of resilience that refers to the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation and problem solving despite challenging or threatening circumstances can be realized as solid evidences which prove the fact that adaptation problems in the development of adolescents' growth that causes physical and mental health problems can be remedied by the applications of Buddhist influenced factors that enables resilience as the human capacity to face, overcome, and be strengthened by (or even transformed by) the challenges of life.