Psychosocial Implications of Precocious Puberty

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Puberty

- Marked by activation of the reproductive system.
- Activation leads to increased estrogen, which causes development of primary and secondary sexual characteristics.
Defining Precocious Puberty

- The development of pubertal signs at a younger age than the accepted lower limits.

- Typically: Puberty that begins before age 8 in girls.

- Determined by many things including genetic factors, nutritional status, secular trends and familial situations.
Psychosocial implications of precocious puberty

What happens to girls who go through puberty earlier than the defined normal, psychologically? What are the social impacts?

Research suggests earlier puberty is correlated with several detrimental outcomes.

- Behavioral disorders
- Sexual activity
- Eating disorders
- Academic achievement
- Substance abuse
Themes explaining psychosocial complications

- Physiological changes impacting mood and behavior.

- External physical changes social interactions with both peers and adults.
Behavioral Disorders

Internalizing Behaviors
- Depression
- Social Withdrawal
- Somatic Complaints

Externalizing Behaviors
- Lying
- Stealing
- Cheating

Higher instance of adult psychiatric disorders

Higher instance of criminal activity in adulthood
Sexual Activity

- Earlier reports of sexual intimacy and intercourse
- >2x more likely to report pregnancy before the age of 18.
- More likely to contract HPV
- Increased frequency in date rape and unwanted sexual advances among early maturing girls.

Biological Environment + Social Environment → Inappropriate Sexual Experience
Eating Disorders

- Menarche serves as a turning point for girls in regards to body image.
- More likely to engage in excessive dieting and disordered eating.
- Clear correlation between early puberty and bulimia nervosa.
Academic Achievement

- Poor academic performance in high school.
- Increased incidence of disciplinary action.
- Lower income level and less prestigious jobs in adulthood.
Substance Use

- Earlier initiation of smoking and drinking.
- Increased likelihood of long-term substance abuse.
- More likely to experiment with other illegal drugs.
A vicious cycle

Precocious Puberty

Bear children at a younger age

Lower socioeconomic class

High psychological stress

Children raised in environments of chronic stress
Conclusion

- Psychological challenges in precocious puberty can be profound and contribute to very detrimental social outcomes.
- Biological contributions to the troubles of precocious puberty.
- Social Isolation.
- Inappropriate social pressures and expectations.
- Leads to a vicious cycle generation to generation.
Thank you!

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