Leadership and Adolescents

This knowledge brief takes a look at the existing literature in the area of adolescent leadership - particularly in the area of high school students. The original search explored research published in the past five years but this had to be expanded to include the previous 15 years or so. It looks as though a good deal of the information was published during the 90s. This was not meant to be an exhaustive search, rather a scan and introduction to the topic. New items will be added to the bibliography as I run across them. The following keywords/subjects were useful in the search: lead*, teen*, adolescents, high school, student*, secondary school, competencies. Abstracts and links will have to be removed when we role this out to the public to keep with copyright and licensing agreements.


Primary determinants of adolescent physical and mental health involve participation in a variety of health risk behaviors (Center for Disease Control, 2000). Adolescent self-report about participation in such behaviors informs a variety of national, regional and local efforts to promote healthy youth development. The purpose of the current study is to explore whether a data collection method that employs adolescents as collectors of data from peers is a viable method for use in survey and behavior research studies involving adolescents. We reviewed individual participant program files generated by adolescents who participated in a series of experiential, psycho-educational groups designed to develop leadership skills among high-school aged adolescents. Eight-hundred thirty-seven anonymously completed youth surveys were collected by adolescent group participants as part of an experiential exercise where youth, as leaders, ask peers to complete a survey to better help adults understand teens and their points of view. Analysis of returned surveys indicated that 772 (92%) of respondents completed all closed-ended items, while 816 (97%) completed all open-ended items. Content analysis of open-ended survey items revealed that the majority of responses could be categorized, signifying that the data were of high quality. These results provide preliminary support for the utilization of peers in the collection of data from adolescents. – Abstract


Recent research suggests that, along with identity, intimacy is an important developmental construct during adolescence. Are there gender differences in current society regarding intimacy development? Two hundred and seven middle adolescents (70 males and 137 females) were measured using Schutz's (1958) Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship Inventory (FIRO). The FIRO is a self-report survey which assesses the subject's perceived expressions and perceived desires in three categories of interpersonal relationships: Inclusion (companionship), control (leadership), and affection (intimacy). Results indicated that there were differences in expression of inclusion, control, and affection, and desire for inclusion and affection. A second analysis addressed the perceived ranking in importance of the three interpersonal categories measured. Males ranked control expressed highest and affection desired lowest; females ranked affection desired as highest and control expressed lowest. Both groups ranked inclusion desired and expressed as moderate. The current research suggests that gender differences in the development of intimacy may occur as early as middle adolescence. – Abstract from Pubmed


We tested the validity of two measures of emotional intelligence (EI) and we investigated the relation between EI and leadership in 191 adolescents (M=14.33 years) attending a 3-week military training camp. A scale by Schutte et al. [Personality and Individual Differences 25 (1998) 167] assessed primarily the intrapersonal aspect of EI, whereas selected items from the
Weisinger [Emotional intelligence at work (1998) Dan Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass] scale measured primarily the interpersonal aspect. Participants were also rated by their peers and junior leaders on the Weisinger items. Leadership was assessed using a peer nomination system for task-goal and socio-emotional orientation [Schneider, Ehrhart, & Holcombe (in press) Leadership in adolescence: comparing peer and teacher perspectives and correlates, Leadership Quarterly]. Both measures, but especially the Schutte et al. scale, correlated with social desirability, suggesting problems of discriminant validity. Scores on the Schutte et al. scale did not correlate with any peer nominations, indicating questionable convergent validity. In contrast, scores on the Weisinger scale (self-report) correlated with peer nominations of socio-emotional leadership and task-goal leadership. However, the lack of correlation between the self-rated and the other-rated versions of the Weisinger scale is a concern. – Abstract from author

Abstract not available.

This study examined the relationship between adolescents' participation in athletics and their leadership skills. In a sample of 60 suburban high school students, athletes demonstrated significantly greater leadership ability than did nonathletes (according to their mean scores on the Leadership Ability Evaluation). Female athletes showed greater leadership ability than did male athletes, although the difference between their scores was not statistically significant. The implications of these findings for school athletic programs are discussed. – Abstract from PubMed

For perhaps the first time ever, four generations of workers have been brought together in the workplace. Each of these demographic groups is unique, which raises the question, "How can they work together?" The latest group of workers, most commonly called the Millennial Generation, is large--an estimated 76 million, as populace as the Baby Boomer generation. Here's a look at the distinctive characteristics of the millennials—characteristics that leaders will have to consider as they try to attract, motivate, and retain the newest generation of employees. – Abstract from Staff Pubs Database

This paper reviews a number of studies that have tested Fiedler's (1964) Contingency Model and Least Preferred Co-Worker Scale of leadership style and effectiveness, focusing on studies that have examined the characteristics and stability of this scale across age, ethnicity, and gender. The Contingency Model is based on three determinants of situation favorability. They are, in order of importance: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power. These studies demonstrate that ratings of leadership style can be obtained at ages as young as 4 years (for females), and that for older adolescents these ratings have some stability over a long period of their lifetime. They also have shown that the Contingency Model itself has validity in educational settings across a range of age groups from the middle elementary years into late adolescence and adulthood. – Abstract from ERIC

Abstract not available.

Controlling for cognitive skills, we find that men who occupied leadership positions in high school earn more as adults. The pure leadership-wage effect varies, depending on definitions and time period, from 4% to 33%. This effect is not an artifact of measurement error in cognitive skills or differences in a wide array of other physical or psychological traits. High school leaders are more likely to occupy managerial occupations as adults, and leadership skills command a higher wage premium within managerial occupations than elsewhere. Finally, it appears that leadership skills may be fostered by exposure to high school leadership opportunities. – Abstract from author http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bch&AN=18039292&site=ehost-live

This paper discusses the results of a study that investigated whether there are any significant differences in political leadership potential and willingness to lead among three groups of Singapore students from the Gifted Education Program (GEP) (n=86), the best Express Stream class (n=74), and the weakest Express Stream class (n=61). Data were collected through the use of a self-constructed questionnaire that measured potential for leadership, willingness to lead, expectations of national leaders, influence of parents, and influence of school. The findings of the study show that there were no significant differences in willingness to lead when the respondents were compared by educational stream or by sex. However, in terms of leadership potential, a significant difference was found to exist between males and females, with females showing a lead over the males. In conclusion, there was no significant difference between the streams, showing that the GEP students did not have higher leadership potential than their Express Stream counterparts. – Abstract from ERIC

Fostering the innate need to lead, teach and care for others is fundamental to creating a just and moral society. The nurturing begins early in life and becomes especially vital during the adolescent years, when peer pressure and the need to belong are heightened. Unfortunately, many youths believe leadership is associated with being good-looking, athletic, wealthy or smart. Leadership development is viewed differently, as an inclusive process where everyone can be a leader. – Abstract from author

Since leadership in formal and informal high school activities is one possible indicator of positive social adjustment among adolescents, it is worthwhile to better understand why certain adolescents become leaders and others do not. This study was designed to investigate the relationship between leadership behavior (dependent variable) and self-esteem, locus of control, family structure, and career goals. The participants were divided into a leadership group (n = 79) and a nonleadership (comparison) group (n = 124). Adolescents in the leadership group tended to be higher in internal locus of control, to live in a two-parent family structure, and to have more prestigious career goals. There was no significant difference between the two groups in level of self-esteem, although those in the leadership group with higher self-esteem also tended to have higher career goals. – Abstract from PubMed

The purpose of this study was to replicate and extend the work of Glenn and Horn (1993) by examining relationships between peer leadership in sport and social, psychological, and ability characteristics. The sample consisted of 71 female and 67 male high-school soccer players and their coaches. Players completed questionnaires measuring social (peer acceptance and friendship quality) and psychological (perceived competence, instrumentality, and expressiveness) variables, and leadership behavior for self and teammates. Coaches assessed each player on leadership behavior and soccer ability. For female athletes, all psychosocial variables were predictive of self-ratings of leadership, while coach and teammate ratings were related to ability only. For male athletes, all psychosocial variables and ability were related to self-ratings and teammate ratings of peer leadership, while coaches’ ratings were related primarily to ability. These results are discussed with regard to social exchange theory and commonalities among peer relationship variables (acceptance, friendship, leadership). – Abstract from vendor

Depression in adolescence is a common and potentially life-threatening health problem. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of prevention strategies on decreasing the rate of depression in adolescents. A class addressing specific skills identified as having an impact on adolescent depression was taught to youth participating in the program. The nonequivalent control group design was used. The sample consisted of 7th- and 8th-grade students in either the Youth Leadership class or a computer class of a California middle school. The Childhood Depression Inventory was the instrument used. Nine control group subjects and 11 experimental group subjects completed both the pretest and the posttest. The analysis of the data revealed no statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups. This study should be repeated with larger sample sizes and with greater attention to the timing of pretests and posttests. – Abstract from PubMed

The Rotary Youth Leadership Program (RYLP) has been sponsored by CCL for over 20 years. For rising juniors and seniors, it includes insight-based learning through assessments, knowledge-based learning via models and discussions, and activity-based learning via experiential exercises. – Abstract from Staff Pubs Database

Never Too Young to Lead offers faith communities resources and strategies to develop leadership qualities and skills in young adolescents. – Abstract from press

The authors conducted a meta-analysis of the youth leadership development literature and were able to construct a conceptual model for teaching, training, and developing leadership in youth. After citing the need for leadership education, and the lack of information regarding leadership development for young people in career and technical education, the model is described in detail and proposed as a curriculum framework for teaching leadership to all students. The model consists of five dimensions and three stages of development. The five dimensions of the conceptual model are: (1) Leadership Knowledge and Information, (2) Leadership Attitude, Will, and Desire, (3) Decision Making, Reasoning, and Critical Thinking, (4) Oral and Written Communication Skills, and (5) Intra and Interpersonal Relations. The recommendation is made to allow the model to serve as the first step in developing a curriculum designed to teach leadership to youth in a formal setting. – Abstract from author

Knowledge Brief prepared by the Library

February 2, 2007

Part II. Presents a trait theory approach to the prediction of peer nominations of adolescent leaders in high school. Confirmation of earlier results using teacher ratings of the adolescents; Predictors of leader nominations by peers in contrast to the predictors of peer nominations of popularity and friendship. – Abstract from EBSCO


We describe the first stage of a longitudinal research program concerned with the prediction, understanding, and durability of early displays of leadership behavior. The predictability of teachers' ratings of leadership behavior for 242 high school students was explored with respect to predictors from the following construct domains: personality, interests, motivation, behavior, self-rated skills, and academic ability. Results revealed that variables from each construct domain significantly and consistently predicted leadership ratings for as long as 12 months after the collection of the predictor data. In addition, the linear combination of predictors from different domains yielded strong prediction of leadership, with $R^2$s in the .40 range. Evidence also showed that both academic ability and the other measured constructs contributed unique variance to the prediction of leadership behaviors as reported by the teachers. These exploratory findings are discussed in light of a continuing research program designed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the origin, development, and emergence of adult leadership behavior. – Abstract from author


Examined age and gender differences in leadership aspirations among adolescents (N=130) by measuring overall leadership aspirations, valence-instrumentality expectancies for leadership outcomes, self-efficacy perceptions, and attributions of effective leadership. Found significant gender differences in valence scores and age differences in self-efficacy and attribution measures. Discusses results in context of valence and self-efficacy models. – Abstract from author


Based on fifteen years of work with teens and the adults in their lives, Youth Leadership identifies the three major stages of adolescent leadership development. It outlines practical, tactics for developing leadership skills through experiences at home, school, community, and work, and most importantly?a shows how adults in these settings can have a positive impact. Josephine van Linden and Carl Fertman provide flexible strategies that can be used with adolescents in any program and in varied settings, and offer diagrams, tables, and charts to clarify recommendations and processes. From teachers and principals to directors of community programs and religious institutions, anyone interested in developing leadership in young people will find Youth Leadership to be a rich source of information and guidance, and an invaluable tool for nurturing the citizens and leaders of tomorrow. – Abstract from vendor

An analysis was undertaken of the career motivators and perceived leadership skills of 1971 teens reporting high levels of interest in becoming entrepreneurs. Data were drawn from a national study of the career interests of adolescents. Results indicate significant variations across both gender and self-reported race/ethnicity. Overall, interest in entrepreneurship as a career was lower among girls than boys. When analyzed by race/ethnicity, it was found that both African-American and Hispanic girls were more likely to be interested in entrepreneurship than White/Caucasian girls. In addition, girls interested in entrepreneurship were more likely to be motivated in their career choices by social and relational factors, whereas boys interested in entrepreneurship were more motivated by autonomy. Financial gain was a strong motivator for boys in general, and for girls of color. When self-perceptions of leadership skills were examined, it was found that in general, girls rated themselves higher then did boys, with the exception of perceived ability to manage money. The importance or recognizing these different motivations and skills in designing effective educational and outreach programs for future entrepreneurs is discussed. – Abstract from author


Discusses leadership development for youth. Emphasis on using community service as a vehicle for youth leadership development. Also discusses the need for skills to bridge intercultural boundaries in an increasingly globalized society. – Abstract from Staff Pubs Database


Until recently, most of the efforts to develop leadership in young people have focused on improving individual abilities, such as decision making, goal setting, problem solving, and interpersonal skills. Promoting these leadership skills is important, but it is becoming increasingly recognized that youths want to contribute to and make a difference in their communities. Consequently, a number of contemporary youth leadership development programs have embraced a community focus, believing that young people’s involvement in their communities helps them build leadership skills. Have such programs been successful? – Abstract from Staff Pubs Database


We developed and tested a model in which adolescents who perceive their parents exhibiting transformational leadership behaviors would themselves display these behaviors. In turn, adolescents who used transformational leadership behaviors in a team context (as rated by themselves, their peers, and their coach) would be rated as more effective, satisfying, and effort-evoking leaders by their peers and coaches. Participants were 112 high school students (mean age = 15.2 years) who were members of 11 sports teams, and their team coaches. Controlling for the effects of adolescents’ skills, results obtained using structural equation modeling supported the predicted model. Conceptual and empirical issues regarding the development and effects of transformational leadership in adolescents are discussed. – Abstract from author