Review Article

Netflix's *Adolescence*: Let's Protect Our Adolescents

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Abstract

The Netflix mini-series *Adolescence* explores challenges faced by teenagers, focusing on 13-year-old Jamie Miller's experience following a classmate's murder. The show through Jamie's story highlights critical psychological themes such as low self-esteem, cyberbullying, social exclusion, and the lure of harmful online communities, notably incel groups. Applying Bandura's Social Learning Theory, it illustrates how adolescent attitudes are shaped by environmental observation, peer interactions, and toxic digital influences. The series also explores how gender-based violence and toxic masculinity together with the growing lack of parental understanding impact teenagers who use digital platforms. In *Adolescence*, family relationships are shown as a source of love and support, but also as places where signs of a teen's struggles can be overlooked. The show stresses the importance of better parenting skills and understanding of mental health. It encourages spotting problems early and talking openly about them, with families, teachers, and professionals working together to help young people grow stronger, feel cared for, and stay safe.

Keywords: *Adolescence*; mental health; Toxic Masculinity; Social Learning; Family dynamics; Cyber bullying.

Introduction

The Netflix mini-series *Adolescence* provides a powerful and emotional look at the challenges many teenagers face today. It tells the story of 13-year-old Jamie Miller, whose life is impacted after a classmate's murder. The show goes beyond being a crime story. It offers a meaningful exploration of Jamie's mental health, his family, and the pressures of growing up in a digital world.

Main Psychological Themes and What They Teach Us

One of the key ideas in *Adolescence* is Jamie's struggle with low self-esteem and feeling excluded. He faces harsh bullying in person and online, which makes him feel lonely and worthless. The show illustrates how continuous rejection can quietly harm a young person's confidence and sense of self [1, 2]. Part of this story includes Jamie's involvement in an "incel" online group, a community that promotes hateful ideas, particularly against women. This serves as a vital reminder of how isolated teens can be drawn into harmful online spaces that worsen their suffering [3, 4]. It challenges us as caregivers and professionals to recognize and help teens before they sink deeper into these dangerous groups.

Social Learning Theory

According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, much of human behaviour is learned by observing the environment and peers. Teens learn by watching how others behave and then copying it. This means Jamie's

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attitudes and behaviours are shaped not only by his experiences but also by his observations in social circles and online communities. He absorbs negative views toward girls and women through interactions with peers and social media platforms, reinforcing harmful beliefs and actions [5].

Cyberbullying and Social Media Content

Adolescence portrays cyberbullying as a severe issue where digital devices are used to harass, spread rumours, or share private information without consent. It also discusses how certain boy groups engage in online bullying driven by misogynistic influencers who promote hatred toward women. These online content certainly distort young people's views of the world and each other. The series also reveals disconnection between what parents expect and what teens actually encounter online where mobile and computer screens expose them to angry and fearful messages. Jamie, the main character, uses Facebook and Instagram to seek attention from girls, showing how dangerous online content profoundly affects youth perceptions [4].

Gender-Based Violence

Although fictional, *Adolescence* mirrors a harsh reality which is violence and mistreatment of women and girls continue to grow as many young males develop negative views. The show's narrative about a boy's role in killing a female classmate sheds light on this troubling issue. Many disaffected teenage boys feel threatened by social changes and opportunities for women and minorities. This frustration can lead to harmful behaviours, which the series connects to the messages young boys absorb online and offline [4, 7, 9, 10].

Toxic Masculinity

Toxic masculinity and harmful beliefs about how boys and men should act was portrayed too. It shows how boys are expected to suppress their emotions, act tough, and avoid vulnerability. This pressure can cause serious emotional damage and sometimes lead to violence. The show links toxic masculinity to harmful online groups that spread anti-women messages leaving young men feeling frustrated, insecure, and angry. Jamie's struggles reveal how the need for approval from girls and the pressure to fit into these roles contribute to his thoughts, feelings and behaviour [7-10]. The show promotes a shift, encouraging boys and men to express their feelings openly and seek help when needed [11]. This message is especially relevant for those working with teens to encourage healthier ways for them to express themselves.

Family Dynamics and Role

Family dynamics play another critical role in the show. Although the Millers care for each other, they overlooked signs of Jamie's distress. The show honestly depicts the challenges of parenting today, especially with the new digital hurdles teenagers face. *Adolescence* helps us understand the heartache parents feel when they realize their child is not doing great. It explains that parental involvement is crucial. Jamie's father admits to teaching basic safety like road crossing but struggles with guiding his son through the complex and often risky internet world. This gap highlights how many parents underestimate their children's experiences online. It also emphasizes the importance of teaching kids about navigating the internet, dealing with bullying, and managing their emotions. It certainly explains the need for better mental health knowledge and support for parents, so they can engage in open communication with their children before issues become overwhelming [6]. It also beautifully portrays how instead of blaming, parenting is a challenging but caring journey.

What *Adolescence* Means for Mental Health Care and Society

From a mental health perspective, *Adolescence* stresses the importance of identifying and addressing mental health problems early. It calls for open discussions about self-worth, relationships, and online safety at home and schools. It reminds professionals to listen carefully for the subtle signs that a teen is struggling, feeling isolated, or being drawn to risky ideas [1, 7].

The show also highlights how family trauma can worsen a young person's mental health. Teens facing trauma at home are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues. However, strong and supportive family relationships can help protect teens and facilitate their healing. It is important for mental health workers to include families in treatment to rebuild trust and emotional balance [4, 6].

Teens with social difficulties are particularly vulnerable to being drawn into extremist groups that offer a sense of understanding but also exacerbate their problems. This emphasizes the need for parents, teachers, and mental health services to educate about digital safety and provide safe spaces for teens to find a sense of belonging [7-10].

Parents serve as a crucial protective factor in adolescent mental health. Loving, involved parenting that encourages open communication and healthy coping can help teens avoid many mental health risks. The show emphasizes the importance of equipping parents with the right resources to guide their children effectively [6, 11].

A Call for Understanding and Compassion

More than just a drama, *Adolescence* urges families, health workers, teachers, and leaders to work together to support vulnerable teens before their pain escalates into a crisis. It sparks essential discussions about masculinity, family dynamics, digital threats, and the importance of kindness and connection. This deeply human story invites mental health

professionals to look beyond symptoms and diagnoses. It calls for a deeper understanding of the young people behind their struggles, their fears, hopes, and desire for compassion. This caring approach is vital for improving care, policies, and community support that fosters resilience and hope.

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