

Preface

The book you hold in your hands is quite unique in numerous respects. While the behavioral change theories and models presented in it have been utilized by social science researchers for several decades, the findings of their application, specifically to adolescents, have been systematically collected and are being reported here for the first time. This book also represents the first attempt to incorporate a developmental perspective in the conceptual analysis of these classical theoretical constructs when applied to various stages of adolescence. Such a perspective will enable planners and developers of health promotion interventions to identify and address differences in behavioral and socio-emotional capabilities between 13-year-olds and 18-year-olds, for example, and then design programs that effectively respond to the specific needs and wants of each developmental stage.

Cultural, ethnic, and gender differences are also given special consideration, as are the role of poverty and the ability of some adolescents to secure physical and emotional well-being despite circumstances of adversity. In addition, much of the information included in this book regarding critical developmental distinctions between the preadolescent and early adolescent stages, while gleaned by clinicians through years of experience working with these age groups, has been compiled and is being presented here for the first time, with a particular focus on its implications for public health interventions.

This book also breaks new ground in explaining why some health promotion interventions aimed at positive adolescent behavior change produce the desired results, while others fail. The thoroughness of the analysis extends to the diversity of geographical settings that provide a backdrop for the studies cited: from Africa to the United States, Canada to Jamaica, Brazil to the Netherlands, El Salvador to Japan, and India to Mexico, to name only a few. My specific desire is that the experiences of the global research community presented here will find fertile ground among a variety of publics throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. This audience would include local health promoters,

designers of community health promotion programs, health professionals, the academic and research community, ministries of public health and of youth affairs, those who study and those who create mass media trends, parents and teachers, school counselors, and all others who play a significant role in adolescents' lives.

By working together across a variety of levels—interpersonal, community, and policy—these groups, and their counterparts in countries across the world, hold tremendous potential to encourage the adoption of health-promoting lifestyles among adolescents. One of this book's central lessons is that the cornerstone for success in instilling lifelong healthy behaviors is early intervention, beginning in the preadolescent years, before health-compromising behaviors have taken deep root. This lesson forms the underpinning of the Youth: Choices and Change Model created by PAHO and also being presented for the first time here. By following the steps proposed, developers of adolescent health programs can help young people master the developmental goals appropriate for their age group, strengthen their ability to make conscious decisions for health, and achieve their self-set goals for the future.

Young people, particularly those in the 15-to-24 age group, figure prominently in four of the Millennium Development Goals adopted by member countries of the United Nations in 2000. Nearly one in every three persons in Latin America and the Caribbean today is between 10 and 24 years of age. Therefore, actions for the empowerment of tomorrow's generation—such as ensuring universal education and gender equality, and improving HIV/AIDS prevention strategies and socioeconomic opportunities for youth as they commence their economically productive years—can play a pivotal role in the achievement of the umbrella goal of extreme poverty reduction by the year 2015.

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