

## Prospects for adolescents and young people in a world in turmoil

The planet is experiencing a critical moment with wars, profound social and economic inequality, the rise of the global far right, the questioning of democratic regimes, while recovering from the pandemic that contributed to the spread of serious attacks on science. We are witnessing the unfolding of modern times with the worsening of social and institutional relations and community ties, a precarious job market and the rapid development of a new digital world<sup>1</sup>. In this context, there are 8.045 billion people, of which 24% are adolescents and young people aged 10 to 24. In Brazil, 22% of the population is in this age bracket and in countries with less economic development, currently standing at 31%<sup>2</sup>.

Adolescents and young people have, in essence, the potential to create and transform themselves at every moment of development, permeating the environment in which they live with energy and hope. However, there are several types of adolescents and youths, with different experiences, dreams, difficulties, limitations, and possibilities, depending on the level of education, social and economic status and belonging to hegemonic or minority groups. They are often stigmatized by gender, color/race, among other characteristics in which weaknesses are intersectional. A significant group of Brazilian adolescents and young people are deprived of many rights: quality education, work, mobility, culture, leisure and public safety.

The broad spectrum of issues that affect adolescents and young people has been a source of concern for the scientific community and is reflected in the articles in this thematic issue, which include body image and its influence on physical and mental health and healthcare. It also includes digital abuse, gender violence, bullying, low quality of life at school, high prevalence of consumption of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs, and the invisibility of this age group in the process of formulating mental health policy. Brazilian social inequity that affects health is also highlighted, for example, in terms of inequality in growth – height, weight and body mass index – in relation to global standards, between Brazilian regions, including indigenous peoples; the unequal spatial-temporal clusters of high risk of infant and youth mortality in the State of Mato Grosso; and the unequal distribution of COVID mortality, especially affecting children and adolescents in the North and Northeast of the country and in areas distant from the capitals.

Innovative topics are opening up new avenues for prevention and treatment of diseases and health problems, such as research into biomarkers that can indicate specific treatments for diseases such as cancer, for individual attributes such as resilience or for trauma and violence. An example of the harmful effects of segregation is highlighted in a study on manifestations of structural racism in the United States among schoolchildren aged nine to 15; blacks who attended highly disadvantaged, segregated elementary schools experienced increases in the speed of epigenetic aging; among blacks in integrated and moderately disadvantaged schools, a delay in epigenetic aging was observed. School contexts were not associated with changes in the epigenetic age acceleration of young white people who attended integrated/unequal or predominantly white/privileged schools<sup>3</sup>.

The appreciation of the fact that there are different types of adolescents and young people should lead to the development of preventive actions, care, attention, treatment, and research. Old and new issues need to be addressed, especially in light of the resurgence of conservatism and autocracy in many current governments, which are dispersing the winds of freedom that circulated in the final years of the 20th century.

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## References

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