

# Dimensions of Successful Young Adult Development

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## KEYWORDS

young adult development, positive youth development, developmental relationships, developmental psychology

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

### DESCRIPTION

In this article, the authors review the theoretical and empirical youth development literature and offer a framework of eight core dimensions of successful young adulthood (defined roughly as 18-25). They also discuss developmental relationships and opportunities that young people need during adolescence in order to ensure ongoing well-being and a successful transition to young adulthood.

The purpose of the article is to a) contribute to the description of and consensus on the dimensions of successful young adult development, and b) establish the groundwork in order for future research to validate the dimensions and associated indicators.

### METHODOLOGY

The researchers from the Search Institute (SI) and the Social Development Research Group (SDRG) at the University of Washington conducted extensive reviews of young adulthood theoretical and empirical literature, focusing on indicators of young adulthood deemed to be valid for various life paths.

The main limitation is that the lens the authors used to examine young adult development is rooted in the mainstream culture of the United States, and is thus not generalizable to everyone. However, the authors state that by aligning their work with the Self-Determination Theory they have made the dimensions general enough to accommodate cultural and individual variation.

### KEY FINDINGS

Based on their review of relevant literature, the researchers argue that social institutions like family, schools, and youth organizations are not adequately preparing youth for life after high school. Only a minority of youth enjoy a high level of developmental relationships and adequate supports. This fosters developmental vulnerability among youth, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The researchers offer eight dimensions of young adult

success and suggest that they may all be connected so that they are both causes and outcomes of each other. The researchers also position healthy family and social relationships as a crucial set of experiences that promote the other dimensions of success.

The eight dimensions of young adult success are as follows:

**Physical Health** | Successful Young Adults (SYAs) have the skills to practice healthy behaviours required to maintain a healthy lifestyle. They are not necessarily risk-free, but they can manage and minimize health risks. This includes avoiding binge drinking, smoking, drugs, and violent behaviour. Successful young adults also maintain a healthy diet, stay fit, practice safe sex, and seek preventive health care.

**Psychological and Emotional Well-Being** | SYAs are generally happy, resilient, confident, prosocial, have adequate self-efficacy, a positive outlook, and are developing a sense of purpose. They are able to alter their life path if they are not satisfied with how things are going.

**Life Skills** | SYAs have a variety of cognitive, social, and emotional skills to successfully navigate their environment. They possess self-regulation skills and can make meaning from personal experiences. They also exhibit strong interpersonal skills, make independent decisions, consult with others who are important in their lives, and adapt to opportunities and challenges.

**Ethical Behaviour** | SYAs demonstrate values such as honesty, integrity, and caring for others. They follow laws and common social norms, and they take responsibility for themselves.

**Healthy Family and Social Relationships** | SYAs are able to successfully establish and maintain social relations, share intimacy, be a loving and effective family member, and have people in their lives who support them. SYAs are satisfied with their networks of friends, have high-quality romantic relationships, and frequently interact with their parents, partners, and peers. They are also connected with others through common interests.

**Educational Attainment** | SYAs possess post-secondary credentials that are appropriate for their work and personal goals and aspirations. An important indicator is whether someone has earned their high school degree or General Education Development (GED) credential. GED does not typically generate the same economic benefits as a high school diploma.

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## ABOUT THIS SUMMARY

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This article contributes to our understanding of successful young adult development by proposing eight core dimensions of development, based on reviews of theoretical and empirical literature.

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**Constructive Educational and Occupational Engagement** | SYAs invest their time in activities which lead to future adult achievements, such as work, study, self-directed learning, or raising a family.

**Civic Engagement** | SYAs give back to the community by contributing to improvements in the social, political, or physical welfare of society. Behavioural indicators include volunteering, donating to charity, voting, and environmental action.

### WHY THIS MATTERS

The framework proposed by this article is an important contribution to our understanding of what constitutes the key elements of successful young adulthood. Though it is more theoretical than practical in nature, this article can be used to inform measurement of adolescent and young adult development. Additionally, the information described in this framework can help direct positive youth development policies and programs in order to better prepare adolescents for the transition to young adulthood. It also provides a conceptual framework for establishing earlier developmental indicators of progress towards the eight outcomes.

### RECAP

The authors present a framework of the dimensions of successful young adult development, with eight elements from social, psychological, behavioural, educational, occupational, health, ethical, and civic domains. They suggest that most youth are not prepared to transition successfully to young adulthood and that there is a critical gap in the level of support that youth require to make this transition. The authors also suggest that developmental relationships can help address this gap.

### APA CITATION

Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., Oesterle, S., Hill, K. G., Hawkins, J. D., & Pashak, T. J. (2016). The dimensions of successful young adult development: A conceptual and measurement framework. *Applied Developmental Science*, 20(3), 150-174.

