

# Chapter 3

## Psychosomatic Symptoms in Children and Adolescents in the Digital Era: The Importance of Early Intervention

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter explores the prevalence and impact of psychosomatic symptoms in children and adolescents, emphasizing the crucial role of early intervention in mitigating their effects on overall well-being of youth. Drawing on recent evidence, the chapter aims to highlight the various psychosomatic symptoms observed in underage population and discusses the potential psychosocial consequences of untreated symptoms. Furthermore, it examines the importance of recognizing and addressing psychosomatic symptoms during the early stages of development and provides insights into effective intervention strategies. Lastly, it underscores the need for a holistic approach that promotes a non-binary perspective of the health of youth and involves collaboration among parents, educators, healthcare professionals, and mental health specialists.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The identification of psychosomatic phenomena involves recognizing that mental factors contribute to the symptomatology of a disease, despite the absence of any anatomical or physiological dysfunction or psychiatric signs. Although the concept of psychosomatics is relatively new, the understanding of the human species and disease as expressions of vital dynamism dates back centuries. Thus, the history of medicine encompasses the early roots of psychosomatic science. The ambiguity surrounding psychosomatics arises from the epistemological paradox of the human being's ontological unity and the dualism of its functions. To reconcile the mechanistic and moral-cultural models, the naturalistic approach emerged, aiming to resolve the longstanding soul-body dualism, leading to the development of modern psychosomatics.

Children and adolescents are in a critical stage of development, and psychosomatic factors can significantly influence their growth, behavior, and overall development. Early experiences and emotional well-being can have long-lasting effects on both mental and physical health. Children may not always have the vocabulary or emotional awareness to express their feelings verbally. Instead, they may manifest psychological distress through physical symptoms such as stomachaches, headaches, or changes in eating and sleeping patterns (Leonidou et al., 2019). Understanding these connections is vital for caregivers and healthcare professionals. Therefore, there has been a growing focus on adolescent mental health and well-being in many countries, with mental health problems now considered by the World Health Organization (2014) to be a major disease burden among adolescents. There is increasing concern that the current adolescent population is more at risk from mental health problems than previous generations. The potential increasing risk of mental health problems is problematic because these issues are universally recognized as having a detrimental effect on the well-being, development, academic performance, and social capital of adolescents (Li D et al., 2021).

Firstly, there is a need to address the definition of psychosomatic symptoms. These symptoms refer to physical manifestations of psychological distress and are increasingly recognized as a significant concern in children and adolescents (Vesterling et al., 2023). When the term “psychosomatic” is used, it indicates the undeniable relationship and interaction between the psychosocial and biological factors that contribute to the existence of psychosomatic health or the manifestation of a related disorder. The term “psychogenic” indicates that the source of a symptom is psychological. The term “psychosomatic disorder” indicates that psychological factors have a role in the occurrence of diseases. This term refers to physical disorders, which are caused or aggravated by psychological factors (Leonidou et al., 2019). Psychosomatic medicine is a relatively recent interdisciplinary field, which

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