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Family Environment and Mental Well-Being among Adolescents

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Abstract:

The quality of relationships with parents is a major determining factor of mental well-being in adolescents. Several studies have shown that stress in family has the strongest negative impact on an adolescent's mental well-being. Therefore, the family plays a major role where adolescent health is concerned. The present study focuses on the influence of family environment on the mental well-being of adolescents. This study also aims at determining whether the family environment brings about any variations in the mental well-being of adolescent boys and girls. A purposive sampling method was used to select 77 boys and 76 girls between the age group of 13-18 years from schools and colleges of Metropolitan City of Hyderabad. Family Environment Scale by Dr. Harpreet Bhatia and Dr. N. K. Chadda, 1993, and The Warwick-Edinburg Mental Well-Being Scale by researchers at University of Warwick and Edinburg, 2006, were employed for the collection of data. The Family Environment Scale measures the three dimensions of relationship dimensions, personal growth and system maintenance. The results show statistical significance in terms of correlation between family environment and mental well-being in adolescents.

1. Introduction

A family system is a social and/or biological construction made up of a set of people related by blood or intention. The family is a primary socialization context and is, therefore, considered to be a very important factor influencing child development (Ozcinar 2006). Family is the basic social unit of society; it is in the family that we first learn to share, love, help and play. The basic principle behind families is that they effectively prepare family members to be the contributing members of society and be strong. The family environment encountered in day-to-day life by the children has an impact on their overall behavior and attitude. Parents shape the lives of their children from birth through adulthood both by action and by example. In adolescence, the influence of friends and peers takes on greater importance and the continued significance of parents in shaping the behaviors and choices of teens as they face the challenges of growing up is clearly demonstrated by research. Good parenting skills, close parent/adolescent relationships, shared family activities and positive parent role modeling all have well-documented effects on adolescent health and development.

Well-being can be defined as the satisfactory state that someone or something should be in, that involves being happy, healthy, and safe, and having enough money. Mental well-being is a relatively complex notion with a variety of components contributing it. As stated by Ryff, (1989) Psychological or mental well-being usually results out of life satisfaction, control of self and events, social involvement, self-esteem, mental balance, sociability, happiness and positive affect. The people having the ability to self-actualize, be able to identify with others, be self-determining, be flexible in various environmental settings, have direction and purpose in their lives and who continue to develop their potential, will be state of good mental well-being, while adolescents who struggle in these areas will be in a state of low mental well-being (Ryff, 1989).

There are a variety factors that can contribute to either an increase or decrease in an adolescent's level of mental psychological being according to various studies. Several studies have shown that the quality of relationships within families, especially between parents, is a major determining factor of mental well-being in adolescents (e.g. Shek, 1997; Sastre and Ferriere, 2000; Van Wel, Linssen and Ruud, 2000). In particular, Shek's (1997) study found that the rating of family functioning was significantly related to measures of school adjustment, well-being and problem behaviour. His findings suggest an "intimate link between psychosocial adjustment and the family functioning, of Chinese adolescents particularly in the field of positive mental health".

Siddique and D'Arcy, 1984 found that stress in family, school and peer situations, were all related to mental well-being. Furthermore, they found that stress in family had the strongest negative impact on an adolescent's mental well-being. A survey conducted by Siddique and

D'Arcy, 1984 revealed that in terms of adolescents' mental well-being, the quality of family relationships, a positive evaluation of school environment, a satisfactory peer group life, and their locus of control orientations all had a positive influence on their mental well-being.

Family environment can have a negative as well as a positive impact on the mental well-being of and adolescent. According to the findings of Lars Tramilton (2010), the University of Arkansas suggests that a crucial element of a positive family is a strong sense of commitment to one another. Open and accepting atmospheres are among the core aspects of strong families. In a secure and safe

family, no one discredits or looks down upon one another. Trust is one of the most vital components of a positive family. The parents have a bond of trust which they pass it down to their off springs. Strong communication is the framework for successful family environments.

According to Leo R. Sandy of Plymouth State University in New Hampshire (April, 2007), family members need to be able to communicate and express their feelings freely and also need to possess strong active listening skills. All families have challenges and weaknesses, but only few families use key strengths to grow and prosper. Research regarding level of family conflict suggests that a conflictual family environment is associated with adolescents' insecurity and psychological distress, as well as aggressive behaviour and conduct disorder (Wissink et al., 2006). An environment filled with sadness and negativity can seriously affect a child's behaviors. An atmosphere that constantly focuses on the bad things in life can quickly change the child's natural tendencies for positivity to negativity. A study named "Environment and Behavior", published in 1999 affirms the belief that environments considered negative by the child do indeed cause emotional distress.

All families have room for improvement. All families do have some strength. We can make our family even stronger by adding strengths to those we already have. Family environment continues to be of crucial importance throughout adolescence and young adulthood (Van Wel 2000). Family cohesion and supportive relationships between family members are associated with adolescent psychological adaptation and lower depression (Herman et al. 2007). According to a research conducted by National Adolescent Health Information Centre (NAHIC) 2006- children experience many physical and emotional changes during adolescence, healthy open communication, close relationships and perceived parental support play a very crucial and significant role. For example, research shows teens who have positive relationships with their parents are less likely to engage in various risk behaviors, including smoking, fighting, and drinking. They are also less likely to report symptoms of depression and more likely to report high levels of perceived well-being. An overly restrictive environment can restrict a child back from being who he originally is, thereby resulting in disruptive or emotional behavioral outbursts. Prohibiting/ restricting a child means that he must conform or live up to a certain set of standards or norms, which can result in depression, anxiety and, later on, defiance.

Behavioral problems tend to be profound in children who are born and brought up in a chaotic household. Similar results occur if the child is enrolled in a school that lacks routine or scheduled activities. Regular routines that of mealtime, chores and organized activities help children have steady and appropriate behavior. A clean environment with proper space and structure also helps to foster positive behaviors while the chaos of a dirty home or classroom can alter their actions which spring out from the root cause of the affected health of children.

Adolescents who report difficulty talking with their parents are more likely to have problems with binge drinking, drink alcohol frequently, smoke, and feel unhappy (especially girls). The report also suggested that- Over three-quarters of all parents report very close relationships with their adolescent children. Most parents report having very close relationships with their adolescents, though there are some differences by type of family and the age of the child. In 2003, over three-quarters of parents (generally mothers) reported having very close relationships with their adolescents ages 12 to 17 (79%) (NAHIC, 2006).

With fathers, parent-child communication problems are even more common, where 53% of females and 42% (NAHIC, 2006) of males reporting that it is either difficult or very difficult for them to discuss issues that really bother them with their fathers. This can also be in relation to a similar study conducted by Australian Psychological Society 1999 on "the relationship between perceived family environment and mental well-being" wherein the findings also pointed out to the father's well-being as a significant correlate of adolescent well-being, thereby highlighting a need to include information about fathers in any future related research. According to a research conducted by Galea, (2010)- family environment contributed positively, although limited, to cognitive well-being and after controlling for child abuse history. The significant role that family environment plays in children's holistic development is replicated by this classic research study. Therefore, providing strong parenting skills, close relationships, good communication, and modeling positive behavior for developing adolescents; family environment can be a strong source of support. When these supports are lacking, or when negative adult behaviors such as smoking and heavy drinking are present, it can also result in a problematic environment. Therefore, where adolescent health is concerned, clearly the family and parents matter.

The present study focuses on the impact of family environment on the mental well-being of both adolescent boys and girls aged between 13-18 years

1.1. Objectives

- To find out whether there is a relationship between family environment and mental well-being.
- To find out the difference in the family environment as perceived by adolescent boys and girls
- To find out the difference in the mental well-being of adolescent boys and girls

1.2. Hypothesis

- There will be a relationship between family environment and mental well-being
- There will be a difference in the family environment as perceived by adolescent boys and girls
- There will be a difference in the mental well-being of adolescent boys and girls

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The sample consists of 153 adolescent boys (77) and girls (76) aged between 18-25 years. The sample technique used to employ the members of the sample group is of convenience sampling which is a non-probability sampling technique. The following is the

inclusion and exclusion criteria

2.1.1. Inclusion Criteria

- Adolescents between the age group of 13-18 years were included.
- Adolescents who were living with their families were selected.
- Adolescents from nuclear families were included.

2.1.2. Exclusion Criteria

- Adolescents below the age of 13 years and above the age of 18 years were not included.
- Those who have psychotic disorders were not included.
- Adolescents living with divorced parents were not included

2.2. Instruments

Family Environment Scale was developed by Bhatia and Chadda (1993). This scale is an adapted version based on the scale developed by Moss (1974). The scale feature 69 items. For each item, the respondent selects on a five-point scale ranging from- 'Strongly Agree' (4), 'Agree' (3), 'Neutral' (2), 'Disagree' (1), 'Strongly Disagree' (0). The items are related to 3 dimensions i.e. relationship dimensions, personal growth dimensions and system maintenance dimensions which are sub-divided into- cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, acceptance and caring, independence, active-recreational orientation, organization and control. The Overall Test Reliability Coefficient is 0.95

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) is used to measure the mental well-being of the sample groups. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was developed by researchers at Warwick and Edinburgh Universities (2006). The scale features 14 items of positively worded statements. For each item, the respondent selects on a five-point scale ranging from- 'None of the time' (1), 'Rarely' (2), 'Some of the time' (3), 'Often' (4), 'All of the time' (5). The test retest reliability is 0.83 and the validity is 0.89.

2.3. Procedure

The test was administered on a one to one basis. Each participant was approached individually and was briefed about the purpose of the study. The consent was taken before commencement and the participant was allowed to withdraw from the study whenever he/she pleased. Instructions on the paper were read out by the researcher in order to clear all doubts. The questionnaire was given and the subject was asked to answer the questionnaire carefully based on personal experience. The participant was asked to work through the items as accurately as possible, indicating a tick mark against the appropriate answer. All doubts and any kind of ambiguity that arose in the participant's mind were clarified. After the test was administered, the researcher expressed her gratitude to the participant for his/her cooperation. Later, the questionnaire was collected and statistically using Pearson's correlation and t-ratio.

3. Results

Family-Environment	Psychological Wellbeing
Cohesion	0.41**
Expressiveness	0.48**
Conflict	-0.50**
Acceptance and Caring	0.37**
Independence	0.50**
Active-Recreational Orientation	0.45**
Organization	0.20*
Control	-0.30**

Table 1: Correlation (r) family environment and it dimensions and psychological well-being(N=153)

Note: *0.05, **0.01

Table 1 shows the correlation between family environment and psychological well-being in adolescents. The results of table -1 showed that there was a significant positive correlation between family environment and the dimensions of psychological well-being viz. cohesion ($p \geq 0.01$), expressiveness ($p \geq 0.01$), acceptance and caring ($p \geq 0.01$), independence, active-recreational orientation ($p \geq 0.01$), organization ($p \geq 0.05$). The table also showed a significant negative correlation between family environment and the dimensions' conflict ($p \geq 0.1$) and control ($p \geq 0.1$).

Variable	Adolescent boys		Adolescent girls		T
	M	SD	M	SD	
Well-being	52.26	8.56	49.11	8.88	1.40
Family Environment					
Cohesion	55.23	7.77	55.21	8.14	1.27
Expressiveness	33.38	4.78	32.54	6.32	0.91
Conflict	45.71	6.57	43.26	7.76	1.16
Acceptance and Caring	48.06	6.95	46.71	7.15	1.07
Independence	31.90	4.79	31.12	5.99	0.88
Active-Recreational Orientation	33.09	4.62	32.68	4.96	0.77
Organization	8.922	1.40	8.76	1.44	0.23
Control	16.03	2.26	15.37	2.83	0.41

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and t values of well-being and family environment among adolescent boys (N=77) and girls (N=76)

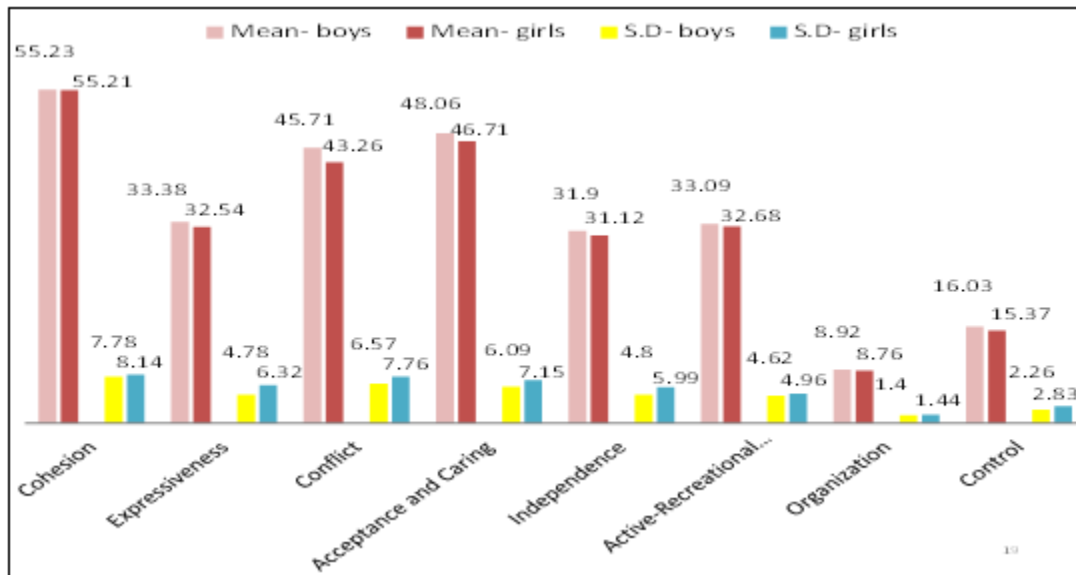


Figure 1: Means, Standard Deviations and t values of well-being and family environment among adolescent boys (N=77) and girls (N=76)

Table 2- shows the means, standard deviations differences and t-values between boys and girls on family environment and its dimensions and well-being. The results from Table-2 show that the mean difference between boys and girls on the sub-scale of family environment viz a viz. cohesion: M= 55.23, M= 55.2, expressiveness: M= 33.38, M= 32.54 conflict: M= 45.72, M= 43.26, acceptance and caring: M= 48.06, M= 46.71, independence: M= 31.896, M= 31.12 active-recreational orientation: M= 33.0909, M= 32.68, organization: M= 8.922, M= 8.76, control: M= 16.026, M= 15.368. Looking into the mean it may be observed that there is no significant difference between boys and girls on the subscales of family environment.

4. Discussion

The present study showed a significant relationship between family environment and mental well-being in adolescents, bringing out an important aspect that family environment plays a vital role on adolescent wellbeing. The empirical data supports the notion that the nature of the family environment (e.g., level of cohesion, degree of conflict, and organization) is strongly associated with adolescent mental health (Shulman, 1987; Siddique and D’Arcy, 1984). The study brings into light that a warm and supportive family environment, with high levels of organization, cohesion, and expressiveness, can mitigate the stress among adolescents and enhance a positive mental state (Shivane, 2011). However, there is no significance difference in the perceived family environment and mental well-being between adolescent boys and girls, stating that adolescents perceive the family environment alike. The use of the sample which is similar in socio-economic status and background could also be a reason. Further cross-cultural or cross-sectional research on this study may result in the significant difference between adolescent boys and girls. The present study becomes important in the light of increasing number of children attempting suicide and leaving their homes early or becoming addicts. The findings of this present study will be helpful for parents, teachers and other professionals to understand the role family environment plays in the development

of psychological problems in children so that they can modify their behavior. The results will provide guideline for the state and national program aimed at developing child mental health

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