

Status of Family Functioning of Adolescents in Diverse Ecological Regions

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ABSTRACT Family as an integral part of everyone's life could play a crucial role in establishing and providing a protective base for development of mental psyche especially to adolescents. However, how a family function is, to a greater extent, determined by its ecological regions. The present study establishes the status of family functioning of adolescents residing in varied residential areas. A total of 160 adolescents (80 boys and 80 girls) studying in class X and XII from CBSE affiliated schools and their parents (160 mothers and 160 fathers) was the sample for the present study. The comparative data was assembled from two cities of Haryana namely Hisar/non-NCR and Gurgaon/NCR. Findings divulged that adolescents residing in NCR had comparatively unbalanced family functioning which calls for strengthening of familial ties for better adolescent prospects and psyche.

INTRODUCTION

Family is an integral part of an individual's life, especially at crucial adolescent stage. The ecological model draws attention to the importance of familial influences on adolescent development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Strong families are essential to positive development implications for life-long functioning (Fiese and Winter 2010). Family functioning is an important aspect of family environment that affects children's physical, social and emotional health. There is a relationship between poor family functioning and children's physical symptoms, anxiety, sleep disturbances, depression and impaired social functioning (Zade 2009). Family problems can lead to failure in school and education, social disintegration and alienation, alcohol and drug use (Walker and Sheferd 2006).

Johnson et al. (2001) analyzed responses from 124 late adolescents which revealed that feelings of loneliness were related to perceived levels of inter-parental conflict for males and females and decreased family cohesion for females. The findings in the present study showed deteriorated family systems may provide contexts that are associated with adolescents' feelings of loneliness as well as their ability to engage in

social interactions outside the family system. It was concluded that decreased family cohesion and increased inter-parental conflict can inadvertently provide family environments that are associated with increased feelings of loneliness, which may be associated with problems in adolescents' social interactions (that is, social anxiety and social avoidance).

Lagana (2004) compared adolescents on a continuum of risk of school dropout: adolescents in the mainstream program (low risk); in an at-risk program (medium risk); and in an alternative evening program for dropouts (high risk). Results indicated that family cohesion, adult support, and peer support were predictors of group membership.

Jeynes (2005) assessed the effect of three aspects of parental involvement and family structure on the academic achievement of the children. The results indicated that family structure was the single greatest predictor of academic achievement. The extent to which parents discussed school issues and attended school functions also had a positive impact on adolescent academic achievement.

Reinherz et. al. (2007) focused on the relationship between family factors, from childhood (age 9) to mid-adolescence (age 15) and important areas of late adolescent functioning (age 18). Findings divulged family factors from as early as age 9 were found to be significant predictors of age 18 functioning. It was found that having a family member available for advice and having a family confidant, positively predicted achiev-

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ing scholastic honors and awards and reduced risk for failing courses, dropping out of high school, being suspended or expelled from high school, alcohol abuse dependence, drug abuse dependence, thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts, delinquent and aggressive (externalizing) behavior.

Pegah (2012) aimed to study perceived family environment and positive mental states viz. happiness, optimism and hope among the adolescents of two different cultures, Iran and India. The total sample comprised 400 adolescents aged 16-19 from Iran and India; out of which, half were males and half were female. Results clearly show that the family environment dimensions viz. relationship, personal growth (goal oriented), and system maintenance were correlated with positive mental states viz. happiness, optimism and hope among the adolescents of the two cultures.

In today's scenario where familial structure, routine, beliefs and values have undergone a drastic transformation and, therefore, it becomes all the more imperative to exactly be acquainted with after effects of these changes on the status of family functioning especially of the most vulnerable age group- the adolescents.

Objectives of the Study

To assess the status of family functioning of adolescents.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An ex-post facto research design was used with an investigative effort to explore family functioning of adolescents residing in different ecological areas.

Locale of Study

To have a comparative data, two cities of Haryana namely Hisar/Non-NCR (moderately developed) and Gurgaon/NCR (highly developed) were purposively selected.

Sample

A total of 160 adolescents (80 boys and 80 girls) studying in class X and XI from CBSE

affiliated schools and their parents (160 mothers and 160 fathers) was the sample for the present study. Thus, 80 adolescents (40 boys and 40 girls) and their parents (80 mothers and 80 fathers) were selected from Hisar city. Equal number of adolescents and their parents represented the sample for Gurgaon city.

Tools Employed

Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES IV) developed by Olson (2009) was exercised to measure the family functioning of adolescents residing in varied ecological areas. Family functioning was measured in terms of cohesion, flexibility, disengagement, enmeshment, rigidity and chaos subsisting within the family.

Statistical Analysis

Qualitative data obtained from the measures were quantified and analyzed using the statistical package for the social science (SPSS for windows). An alpha level of .05 was used as the level for significance in all the statistical tests. Statistical tools applied were frequency, mean, standard deviation, z test, ANOVA and coefficient of correlation.

Procedure of Data Collection

First schools affiliated to C.B.S.E. were selected and then adolescents studying in class Xth and XIth falling in the age group 14 yrs to 17 yrs of age, having both parent alive and at least one sibling were selected. Parents of the selected adolescents were then contacted and date and time of visits were fixed as per their convenience. Home visits were conducted to collect data on selected variables from parents.

RESULTS

Family Functioning Status as Per Residential Area

Table 1 presents area wise distribution of families for the family functioning status. Data revealed that regarding balanced aspects of family functioning that is cohesion and flexibility, more than half of families had average level family functioning as overall figures shows 58.13

per cent of parents reported their families being connected as well as flexible. Moving to unbalanced aspects of family functioning, it was observed that approximately similar percentage of parents reported moderate level of family enmeshment (51.26%) and rigidity (51.28%). When overall data was considered, moreover, 48.75 per cent parents reported their families as moderately disengaged and chaotic (36.25%).

Region-wise comparison reflects that 65.00 per cent of NCR families were connected as well as flexible to an average level whilst, 38.25 per cent of non-NCR families were very connected and very flexible (37.50%), indicating that families of non-NCR had relatively higher level of balanced family functioning than NCR families.

When data concerning unbalanced aspects of family functioning were accounted as per residential area, it was noticed that 18.75 per cent non-NCR families and only five per cent NCR families had very low family disengagement, whereas, very high family disengagement was reported by 15.00 per cent of NCR families against only skimpy percentage (06.25%) of non-NCR families. As far as enmeshment family aspect is concerned, 18.75 per cent non-NCR families reported very low enmeshment within the family, whereas, scanty percentage (06.25%) of NCR families reported for the same. It is noteworthy that, 16.25 per cent of non-NCR families quoted very high family enmeshment but there were negligible percent of non-NCR families (03.75%)

Table 1: Family functioning status as per residential area

S. No.	Residential area family functioning	NCR (n = 80)	Non-NCR (n = 80)	Total(n=160)
<i>I</i>	<i>Balanced Aspects</i>			
1	<i>Cohesion</i>			
	Somewhat connected	17 (21.25)	08 (10.00)	25 (15.62)
	Connected	52 (65.00)	41 (51.25)	93 (58.13)
	Very connected	11 (13.75)	31 (38.25)	42 (26.25)
2	<i>Flexibility</i>			
	Somewhat flexible	19 (23.75)	09 (11.25)	28 (17.50)
	Flexible	52 (65.00)	41 (51.25)	93 (58.13)
	Very flexible	09 (11.25)	30 (37.50)	39 (24.37)
<i>II</i>	<i>Unbalanced Aspects</i>			
1	<i>Disengaged</i>			
	Very low	04 (05.00)	15 (18.75)	19 (11.87)
	Low	09 (11.25)	12 (15.00)	21 (13.12)
	Moderate	41 (51.25)	37 (46.25)	78 (48.75)
	High	14 (17.50)	11 (13.75)	25 (15.64)
	Very high	12 (15.00)	05 (06.25)	17 (10.62)
2	<i>Enmeshed</i>			
	Very low	05 (06.25)	15 (18.75)	20 (12.50)
	Low	08 (10.00)	13 (16.25)	21 (13.12)
	Moderate	41 (51.25)	41 (51.25)	82 (51.26)
	High	13 (16.25)	08 (10.00)	21 (13.12)
	Very high	13 (16.25)	03 (03.75)	16 (10.00)
3	<i>Rigid</i>			
	Very low	10 (12.50)	14 (17.50)	24 (15.00)
	Low	11 (13.75)	11 (13.75)	22 (13.75)
	Moderate	35 (43.75)	48 (60.00)	83 (51.88)
	High	19 (23.75)	05 (06.25)	24 (15.00)
	Very high	05 (06.25)	02 (02.50)	07 (04.37)
4	<i>Chaotic</i>			
	Very low	10 (12.50)	23 (28.75)	33 (20.63)
	Low	17 (21.25)	16 (20.00)	33 (20.63)
	Moderate	28 (35.00)	30 (37.50)	58 (36.25)
	High	12 (15.00)	07 (08.75)	19 (11.87)
	Very high	12 (15.00)	05 (03.75)	17 (10.62)
<i>III</i>	<i>Total Family Functioning</i>			
	Balanced family	45 (56.36)	61 (76.20)	106 (66.25)
	Unbalanced family	35 (43.80)	19 (23.80)	54 (33.75)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

Table 2: Comparison of family functioning status as per residential area

S. No.	Residential area family functioning	NCR (n = 80)	Non-NCR (n = 80)	Total(n=160)
I	<i>Balanced Aspects</i>			
1	Cohesion	22.30±5.50	26.36±4.75	4.99*
2	Flexibility	22.57±5.10	25.52±4.61	3.83*
II	<i>Unbalanced Aspects</i>			
1	Disengaged	24.53±4.47	21.87±5.67	3.29*
2	Enmeshed	24.56±4.55	21.86±5.43	3.40*
3	Rigid	24.12±4.52	22.01±4.26	3.04*
4	Chaotic	23.88±5.76	20.46±15.46	3.85*
III	<i>Total Family Functioning</i>	0.98±0.37	1.32±0.54	4.57*

* Significant at 5% level

reporting very high enmeshment within the family.

Regarding family rigidity, Table 3 projects high family rigidity in 23.75 per cent NCR families in contrast to meager percentage (06.25%) of non-NCR families. The data pertaining to chaos showed that nearly half of families of non-NCR (48.75%) had low to very low family chaos and a negligible percentage (03.75%) of parents reported very high family chaos in the same region. On the other side, in NCR families, high to very high family chaos was reported in exactly 30 per cent families. In crux, it can be highlighted regarding unbalanced aspects of family functioning that the families of NCR were more disengaged, enmeshed, rigid and chaotic as the percentage was relatively higher, in high to very high categories, on all these aspects against non-NCR families. Finally, regarding total family functioning it was revealed that 76.20 per cent of non-NCR families fall under balanced family whilst, relatively less that is, 56.36 per cent of NCR families emerged as having balanced fami-

ly functioning. Comparatively the number of unbalanced families was higher in NCR (43.84%) than in non-NCR (23.80%).

From the above details, it can be concluded that the unbalanced family functioning via unbalanced levels was more prevalent in NCR families, whereas, non-NCR families had comparatively better family functioning.

Comparison of Family Functioning Status as Per Residential Area

Data regarding area wise comparison of families for family functioning status is displayed in Table 2. Significant differences were found in family functioning of non-NCR and NCR families on the sub-aspects that is, cohesion ($z=4.99$, $p<0.05$), flexibility ($z=3.83$, $p<0.05$), disengaged ($z=3.29$, $p<0.05$), enmeshed ($z=3.40$, $p<0.05$), rigid ($z=3.04$, $p<0.05$), chaotic ($z=3.85$, $p<0.05$) and total family functioning ($z=4.57$, $p<0.05$).

The mean scores of balanced aspects of family functioning that is cohesion and flexibility

Table 3: Inter-correlation among different aspects of family functioning

S. No.	Family functioning	Cohesion	Flexibility	Disengaged	Enmeshed	Rigid	Chaotic	Total family functioning
I	<i>Balanced Aspects</i>							
1	Cohesion	1.00	0.89*	-0.63*	-0.64*	-0.67*	-0.50*	0.81*
2	Flexibility	-	1.00	-0.68*	-0.68*	-0.71*	-0.47*	0.82*
II	<i>Unbalanced Aspects</i>							
1	Disengaged	-	-	1.00	0.98*	0.73*	0.55*	-0.86*
2	Enmeshed	-	-	-	1.00	0.73*	0.54*	-0.85*
3	Rigid	-	-	-	-	1.00	0.49*	-0.80*
4	Chaotic	-	-	-	-	-	1.00	-0.69**
III	<i>Total Family Functioning</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.00

* Significant at 5% level

($M=26.36$; $M=25.52$, respectively) were higher for non-NCR families in comparison to NCR families ($M=22.30$, $M=22.58$, respectively), reflecting more cohesion and flexibility prevalent in non-NCR families. In contrast the mean scores of unbalanced aspects of family functioning that is, disengaged, enmeshed, rigid and chaotic were higher for families of NCR ($M=24.53$, 24.56 , 24.12 and 23.88 , respectively) against non-NCR families ($M=21.87$, 21.86 , 22.01 and 20.46 respectively), indicating more dysfunctional structure and relationships in NCR families. Finally, significant differences were also seen in total family functioning ($z=4.57$, $p<0.05$). The families of non-NCR comparatively had significantly better family functioning ($M=1.32$) than that of NCR families ($M=0.98$).

Thus, it is concluded that NCR families' had comparatively poor family functioning than non-NCR families' which calls for strengthening of family functioning for a better life in NCR regions.

Inter-correlation among Different Aspects of Family Functioning

Result of inter-correlation studied among family functioning aspects is displayed in Table 3. A close inspection of the correlation coefficients indicated that the balanced aspects of family functioning that is, cohesion and flexibility were positively significantly correlated with each other ($r=0.89$, $p<0.05$). This reveals that more the bonding among family members more flexible were the relations between them and this paves the way to balanced family life. On the other side, cohesion and unbalanced areas of family functioning that is, disengaged, enmeshed, rigid and chaotic were negatively significantly correlated ($r=-0.63$, -0.64 , -0.67 and -0.50 , $p<0.05$, respectively), indicating that as the level of cohesion among family members increases the unbalanced aspects (disengagement, enmeshment, rigidity and chaos) within the family decrease. The total family functioning had positive and significant correlation with cohesion ($r=0.81$, $p<0.05$), revealing that as the cohesion within family expands; the total family functioning expands too. These results clearly exhibits that cohesion is an essential element for healthy family functioning.

Table 3 further reveals the same pattern of significantly negative correlations between flex-

ibility and unbalanced areas of family functioning that is, disengaged, enmeshed, rigid and chaotic ($r=-0.68$, -0.68 , -0.71 and -0.47 , $p<0.05$), highlighting that as family flexibility turned up within the family, the negative or unbalanced components of family functioning turned down. This means flexibility within the family must be retained for better family prospects. When correlation was observed between flexibility and total family functioning, both were positively as well as significantly correlated ($r=0.82$, $p<0.05$), reflecting that family flexibility improves the total family functioning.

Data regarding the correlation of disengaged aspect of family functioning with rest of the unbalanced aspects identified positive and significant correlation, for disengaged with enmeshed ($r=0.98$, $p<0.05$), rigid ($r=0.73$, $p<0.05$) and chaotic aspect ($r=0.55$, $p<0.05$). This unfolds that a surge in disengaged aspect of family functioning resulted in the intensification of enmeshed, rigid and chaotic aspects. Besides, disengaged aspect of family functioning was significantly negatively correlated ($r=-0.86$, $p<0.05$) with total family functioning, indicating that family functioning qualitatively deteriorates with an elevation in disengaged aspect of family functioning. Positive and significant correlation coefficients of enmeshed aspect were found with rigid ($r=0.73$, $p<0.05$) and chaotic aspects of family functioning ($r=0.54$, $p<0.05$), but significantly negative correlation of enmeshed aspect with total family functioning was found ($r=-0.80$, $p<0.05$), revealing that rise in enmeshed aspect of family functioning lead to rise in rigid and chaotic aspects of family functioning too. But other way, as enmeshment within the family extended total family functioning condensed.

Further, rigid aspect of the family functioning was noticed to be positively significantly correlated with chaotic aspect ($r=0.49$, $p<0.05$) but negatively significantly correlated with total family functioning ($r=-0.80$, $p<0.05$). Similarly, chaotic aspect too was discovered to have negative and significant relationship ($r=-0.69$, $p<0.05$) with total family functioning. This show growth in rigid aspect resulted in growth in family chaos but retardation in total family functioning.

DISCUSSION

Results pertaining to family functioning disclosed that non-NCR families had better status

of family functioning than NCR as they were more cohesive and flexible. Family functioning was more unbalanced or dysfunctional in NCR as they were relatively more disengaged, enmeshed, rigid and chaotic. The plausible reason attributed to such findings lies behind the bars of different ecological environment flourishing in these two different residential areas that is in NCR, parents in majority were involved in private services, as a result, they had insufficient time to spend, communicate and to live with their family which is responsible for the loosening of bonds within family members. Since, parents were not securely employed; they were more attentive to raise their career graph, ignoring their family equation. Besides, children were engrossed with their back to back tuition classes, electronic gadgets, net surfing and home assignments. They hardly had any fruitful conversation with their family members. In addition, weekend parties and new film releases overtook the weekend time when family members could have sat together and peeped in one-another's lives. The adverse outcome of all this resulted in family disruption that is disengagement, enmeshment, rigidity and chaos within the family. In contrast, though in non-NCR, in majority of the families both, mother and father, were employed yet they were not tied into 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. office hours, children's mother was available to them when they come home after their school or tuition hours to ask how the day was, moreover, the culture of weekend parties, watching weekend movies, access to new electronic gadgets and 24 hours net surfing, chatting and sending text messages now and then to peers was less prevalent as parents were available to keep an eye over them. Several studies have been conducted on family functioning in terms of cohesion (to some extent flexibility) and its impact upon the adolescents but, the unbalanced aspects of family functioning (disengagement, enmeshment, rigidity and chaos) are not talked directly in length and breadth. In addition, the attributing reasons behind growing family dysfunctioning or loosening family bonds due to familial reasons in present scenario is yet to be explored. Present investigation is a minute effort in this direction.

Researchers have contributed a lot specifying the significance of family functioning, alternative models conceptualize cohesion solely as a protective factor and a global indicator of fam-

ily support that is positively and linearly related to family functioning (Farrell and Barnes 1993). The answer of query whether family cohesion increases, decreases, or remains constant during early to middle adolescence; the findings of Baer (2002) suggest that there are small but statistically significant differences in family cohesion of adolescents from 6th through 10th grade. This decrease in family cohesion could be interpreted as small perturbations signalling shifts in family relationships as a function of adolescent development. Similar findings have been reported in studies of family cohesion by Conger and Ge (1999).

CONCLUSION

Sound family functioning is of paramount importance during transitional phase of adolescence. Adolescents live longer in their families and family plays a filter role in maintaining fair balance in the adolescents' life of turmoil and changes. Therefore, it is important to take into account the influence of level of their family functioning on the lives of adolescents. High family functioning and the resulting familial factors like good family climate can make the adolescence phase of "stress and strain" more comfortable. As we are moving into the future, new advances in the field of technology, advanced modern life styles, and less family time, have ushered in a world where there is increase in individualistic nature and an urge to achieve more and more in a short span of time. In the process, the focus on well-being of children is getting unintentionally neglected. Parents and teachers face a tough time guiding the youth in a positive direction. In such a scenario there is an urgent need to address this rising issue of transforming family functioning and adolescents to create harmony, peace and well-being in the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the study revealed that in NCR unbalanced aspects of the family functioning were dominant, hampering the family system, thus, families should be made aware through campaigns, workshops and literature, of the fact that how balanced and unbalanced aspects of family functioning can portray an important effect on their growing adolescents psyche.

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