

An analysis of obedience among adolescents in Chennai, South India

Niraimathi Kesavan^{1*}, K. Malathi²

ABSTRACT

With an increase in exposure to modern cultures, and a desire to develop an identity independent of their family, teenagers in the current generation demonstrate greater disobedience towards figures of authority, due to which they are less adherent to instructions given. A study was carried out on 380 adolescent boys (n=194) and girls (n=186), across schools in Chennai with the aim of understanding the obedience behaviors among them. The study involved administering a checklist consisting of 10 statements pertinent to obedience that the adolescents were to score themselves on, and a form to acquire their socio-demographic details. From analysis of the results, the mean score of obedience was 26.04 (SD \pm 3.39) among the participants for the statements, with individual scores ranging from 8-34 demonstrating that disobedience was observed. The inferential analysis showed no significant difference in obedience based on gender, working status of the mother, family type, and number of siblings.

Keywords: *Adolescence, Joint Family, Nuclear Family, Obedience*

Behaviors demonstrated by individuals as a compliant response to instructions and directions given mainly by figures of authority are termed as obedience (“Obedience – APA Dictionary of Psychology,” n.d.). In terms of obedience, it is supposed that the individual would not have demonstrated the behavior or action if they had not been prompted and instructed by the authority figures, with Stanley Milgram’s study on obedience illustrating how participants demonstrated greater adherence to instructions provided by authority figures (Milgram, 1963). Obedience in individuals is observed to gradually reduce as they enter their adolescent years (Kalb & Loeber, 2003), as this marks the tumultuous period of time during which adolescents seek to determine their own identity and goals independent of their family and peers, prompting the tendency to behave on their own terms and values.

Essentially, the increase in disobedient behaviors can be attributed to teenagers working through the conflict of identity vs. role confusion, which prompts the need to explore opportunities, commitments, and roles that are available to the individual with the intent of

¹Director - Fenivi Research Solutions, Chennai, South India

²Counselling Psychologist, Chennai, South India

*Responding Author

Received: August 29, 2020; Revision Received: September 22, 2020; Accepted: September 27, 2020

An analysis of obedience among adolescents in Chennai, South India

developing their identity and asserting independence through the roles that they commit to (McLeod, 2008). A desire to be independent and find their own identity accounts for the demonstration of behaviors that elders such as parents and teachers may consider to be disobedient in the case that the instructions and advice given by them are not accordant with the actions of the teenager. Adolescence is also the period when individuals are susceptible to peer pressure, due to which the acquisition of deviant and disobedient behaviors is furthered (Brown, 2013).

In addition, a study in Iran suggested the cultural background of families to influence obedience in adolescents as the study demonstrated that traditional families tend to have more conflicts with their teenagers who desire to follow modern culture (Valizadeh, Zamanzadeh, Rassouli, & Rahkar Farshi, 2018). Figures of authority in the teenager's life often experienced the inability to handle them due to their disobedience (Valizadeh et al., 2018).

Considering that teenagers in India are also beginning to adopt modern customs different to those of their parents, it is hypothesized that disobedience is also more pronounced in India, due to which the current study evaluated the obedience behavior and the influence of socio-demographic factors on the obedience behavior of adolescents in Tamil Nadu, India.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design, cross-sectional in nature was adopted for the study to gain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon of obedience prevalent among adolescents. The current study employed a self-report method as the participants were asked to evaluate themselves and respond on their own to the obedience checklist and socio-demographic form given to them in the form of a questionnaire.

The schools across Chennai, Tamil Nadu in the country of India were selected on the basis of convenience sampling. Using random sampling method, a total of 380 participants within the adolescent age range of 12-16 years were gathered for the study, out of which 194 were male participants, and 186 were female participants.

After the students provided their informed written consent, they were given a questionnaire. It consisted of a form that required them to provide their socio-demographic information such as their name, grade, age, occupation of their parents, birth order, and the income of their parents. A tool consisting of a series of 10 questions used to measure the obedience in individuals that was obtained online ("Ten Ways To Test Your Obedience | The Character Journal," n.d.) was provided to the participants, and required them to score themselves based on the following: 'most of the time', 'sometimes', 'rarely', or 'never'. The positive statements (statements 2, 3, 6, 9, 10) were scored on the basis of 4, 3, 2, 1, and the negative statements (1, 4, 5, 7, 8) were scored on the basis of 1, 2, 3, 4, with both sequence of scores being in accordance with the mentioned sequence of options (**refer Table 2**). A greater sum of scores therefore indicated less obedience.

The data was collected in September 2019. Permission was obtained from the Head of the institutions to conduct the study among the adolescent students. The students were approached during the activity session and selected participants were given the questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected back after self-reporting, after which they were checked for missing information. For analysis of the data, data was extracted, coded, and tabulated by using Microsoft Excel, and the statistical analyses was done using SPSS

An analysis of obedience among adolescents in Chennai, South India

Version 20. The frequencies and percentages were computed to understand the distribution of personal factors and the obedience behavior, and the inferential analyses included the t-test and one-way analysis of variance to compare the mean scores of obedience with respect to gender, family type, working status of parents, and the number of siblings they had.

RESULTS

The average age of the participants was 13.59 years. **Table 1** demonstrates the characteristics of the sample of participants in our study. 60.5% of the participants lived in a nuclear family, and 26.8% lived in a joint family. Being a businessman (41.3%) was observed to be the predominant occupation for fathers, and a homemaker (66.3%) being the commonly observed among mothers.

Table No. 1: Socio-demographic Details of the Participants

Characteristics		n (%)
Age	12	31 (8.2)
	13	137 (36.1)
	14	173 (45.5)
	15	36 (9.5)
	16	3 (0.8)
Sex	Male	194 (51.1)
	Female	186 (48.9)
Class	VIII	209 (55.0)
	IX	150 (39.5)
	X	20 (5.3)
Number of Siblings	None	111 (29.2)
	1	76 (20)
	2	161 (42.4)
	3	32 (8.4)
Father's Occupation	Business	157 (41.3)
	Professional	24 (6.3)
	Daily wages	87 (22.9)
	Service provider	21 (5.5)
	Technician	31 (8.2)
Mother's Occupation	Business	15 (3.9)
	Professional	44 (11.6)
	Daily wages	4 (1.1)
	Homemaker	252 (66.3)
Family Type	Nuclear	230 (60.5)
	Joint	102 (26.8)

As per the responses of the participants to the obedience tool in **Table 2**, when the participants made a request that was rejected, 27.4% sought clarification and reasoning most of the time for why their request was not accepted, and 46.6% asked for reasoning sometimes. Half of the participants (49.7%) reported never being obedient when work was given to them. In the checklist, when participants were asked if they remained fixated on getting their way, or what they wanted, 24.2% responded with most of the time, 26.1% responded with sometimes, and 31.3% responded with never. When given instructions and directions by authority, only 14.2% of participants claimed to accept the instruction most of the time, while 39.2% and 24.2% claimed to rarely or never accept the instructions. In the case that instructions were given, the majority of participants claimed that they rarely or never responded to the instructions.

An analysis of obedience among adolescents in Chennai, South India

Table 2: Responses to Statements on Obedience Behavior of the participants

Statements	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	n (%)			
Asking for reasons why a request they make is turned down	104 (27.4)	177 (46.6)	68 (17.9)	31 (8.2)
Responding to instructions	76 (20)	95 (25)	109 (28.7)	100 (26.3)
Rate of acceptance when instructions are given	54 (14.2)	85 (22.4)	149 (39.2)	92 (24.2)
Reasons for not following out the instructions	58 (15.3)	77 (20.3)	130 (34.2)	115 (30.3)
Being reminded to do little task	112 (29.5)	146 (38.4)	69 (18.2)	53 (13.9)
Redoing work that was wrongly done earlier	100 (26.3)	123 (32.4)	82 (21.6)	75 (19.7)
Dislikes given work	60 (15.8)	88 (23.2)	103 (27.1)	129 (33.9)
Being fixed on what they want	92 (24.2)	99 (26.1)	70 (18.4)	119 (31.3)
Planning recreation after finishing the work	56 (14.7)	82 (21.6)	152 (40)	90 (23.7)
Being obedient when given work	16 (4.2)	36 (9.5)	139 (36.6)	189 (49.7)

In the context of the scores for the obedience tool used, 4 was considered to be the minimum score, and 40 was considered to be the maximum score, with the results of our study showing that the scores were within the range of 8 to 34. Based on the percentiles, higher obedience scores signified less obedience as the ranges were set such that a score below 24 indicated high obedience, a score within the range of 24-28 indicated moderate obedience, and a score above 28 indicated low obedience. The mean score of obedience was 26.04 (SD \pm 3.39).

Table No. 3: Mean Scores of Obedience based on Personal Details of the Adolescents

Personal details	N=380	Mean	\pm SD	'p' value
Gender*				
Male	194	26.05	\pm 3.287	.980
Female	186	26.06	\pm 3.513	
Number of siblings*				
No sibling	111	26.43	\pm 3.402	
1	76	25.71	\pm 3.191	.428
2	161	26.01	\pm 3.388	
More than 2 siblings	32	25.59	\pm 3.758	
Working status of Mother*				
Not working	317	26.01	\pm 3.435	.724
Working	63	26.17	\pm 3.145	
Family type*				
Nuclear	230	26.34	\pm 3.032	.802
Extended nuclear	102	25.64	\pm 4.051	

* - 't' test; # - One-way Analysis of variance

Table 3 shows the results following statistical analyses of the data, and illustrates that there is no statistical significance in obedient inclinations based on the personal details as the p-values are greater than 0.5 and closer to one.

DISCUSSION

Through carrying out this study, the results depicted a pattern of disobedience to be present, and that the nuclear family structure, as well as the occupation held by the parents contributed to the disobedient behaviors. The primary strength of the study is that it is the first study on obedience that has taken place in Tamil Nadu, India, as studies carried out on obedience in and out of India are limited, demonstrating the significance of our study.

A qualitative content analysis conducted in Iran confirms our findings of lower obedient inclinations in the teenage years, as the parents of adolescents in the study reported that they found it difficult to control their teenage children because of their continuous non-compliant behaviors, which furthered conflict between parent and the teenager, and also reported that their teenagers did not have beliefs, values, and behaviors that were in accordance with their own beliefs and expectations, advancing the conflict in their relationship, and demonstrating that conflict and disobedience is more likely to occur when there is a mismatch between the values and culture of the parents and teenager (Valizadeh et al., 2018). Further analysis of the distinction in social values between children and parents in nuclear and joint families has demonstrated that parents and children in joint families have essentially the same social values, whereas there is a difference in values held between parents and children in nuclear families (Bahadur & Dhawan, 2008).

Our results illustrated a greater mean value for obedience in nuclear families than joint families, insinuating that there is less obedience in nuclear families as the majority (n=230) of participants in our study were from nuclear families. Consistent with our findings, an analysis of school students in the Pantnagar region located in Uttarakhand, India demonstrated that participants who lived in a joint family setting had greater emotional maturity when compared to those that resided in nuclear families (Singh, Pant, & Valentina, 2014). A study evaluating distinctions in families that live in a joint and nuclear setting also demonstrated that the child-parent relationship contentedness is lesser in nuclear families than in joint families (Bansal, Dixit, Shivram, Pandey Dhruvendra, & Sarosh, 2014). Individuals in nuclear families tend to have liberal values and have greater freedom when compared to those in joint families, as individuals in joint families are more considerate of cultural and familial norms, and respect towards authority due to living with multiple generations of elders.

Our study entailed statistical non-significance between male and female adolescents in their obedience behavior. However, moderate obedient tendencies among participants is in accordance with a study conducted using the test of obedience as per Stanley Milgram, confirms our results in that there is no significant statistical association between gender or age of participants and their obedience, but that females tend to be more obedient when compared to males (Shanab & Yahya, 1977). Research suggests that when mothers discipline their kids, the kids were more inclined to respond in an aggressive and disobedient manner than if the fathers disciplined them (Hart et al., 1992), with this finding supporting the moderate obedient tendencies in our study, as following analysis of the occupations of the parents in our study, the majority of participants (n=317) lived in a family where only the father worked, and the mother was a homemaker, suggesting that the disciplinary actions are mostly carried out by the maternal figure.

When considering the number of siblings, most participants (n=161) had two siblings, and a lack of statistical significance between number of siblings and obedience was observed.

An analysis of obedience among adolescents in Chennai, South India

Research however demonstrates that first-born children were more inclined to be obedient than siblings that are later born (Eckstein & Kaufman, 2012).

It is possible that previously conducted research is not in accordance with the results of our study, because our study only assessed the obedience of the participants at one point of time, due to which their obedience cannot be understood in relation to their obedient tendencies prior to, or after this point of time, causing a limitation in accurately concluding whether there are alterations in their obedience. The present study also evaluated a smaller number of participants (n=380), due to which the sample is inclined to be less representative of the overall population, and yielding results that are not consistent with previously conducted researches. The tool used to measure obedience in participants was also highly subjective, due to which there is a need for an objective tool that is able to accurately portray obedience in participants.

In terms of future direction for this research, a larger sample of participants that are diverse and representative of the target population can be acquired, and a longitudinal design can be implemented to determine whether their obedient tendencies vary as they progress in their life, as this will provide information regarding whether disobedience increases specifically during the adolescent years.

CONCLUSION

In brief, adolescents show moderate disobedient tendencies due to which parents and figures of authority can understand the changes that adolescence brings for individuals, and the conflict that is undergone during this phase to effectively support and provide the needed resources to facilitate adolescents in finding their identity and roles in society. Further research can be conducted to better understand reasons that influence and cause disobedient tendencies in adolescents, and possible interventions that can lessen the occurrence of disobedience in the adolescent years.

REFERENCES

- Bahadur, A., & Dhawan, N. (2008). Social Value of Parents and Children in Joint and Nuclear Families. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, 34(Special issue), 74–80. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/34441462/Social_Value_of_Parents_and_Children_in_Joint_and_Nuclear_Families
- Bansal, S. ., Dixit, S., Shivram, G., Pandey Dhruvendra, & Sarosh, S. (2014). A Study to compare various aspects of members of Joint and Nuclear Family. *JOURNAL OF EVOLUTION OF MEDICAL AND DENTAL SCIENCES*, 3(3), 641–648. Retrieved from https://jemds.com/latest-articles.php?at_id=2997
- Brown, B. B. (2013). Adolescents' Relationships with Peers. In *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology: Second Edition* (pp. 363–394). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780471726746.ch12>
- Eckstein, D., & Kaufman, J. a. (2012). The role of birth order in Personality: An enduring intellectual legacy of Alfred Adler. Retrieved August 6, 2020, from The Journal of Individual Psychology website: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282442353_The_Role_of_Birth_Order_in_Personality_An_Enduring_Intellectual_Legacy_of_Alfred_Adler
- Kalb, L. M., & Loeber, R. (2003, March 1). Child disobedience and noncompliance: A review. *Pediatrics*, Vol. 111, pp. 641–652. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.111.3.641>
- Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioral Study of obedience. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67(4), 371–378. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0040525>
- obedience – APA Dictionary of Psychology. (n.d.). Retrieved July 18, 2020, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/obedience>

An analysis of obedience among adolescents in Chennai, South India

- Saul McLeod. (2008). Erik Erikson | Psychosocial Stages | Simply Psychology. Retrieved July 18, 2020, from Simply Psychology website: <http://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html>
- Shanab, M. E., & Yahya, K. A. (1977). A behavioral study of obedience in children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35(7), 530–536. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.35.7.530>
- Singh, R., Pant, K., & Valentina, L. (2014). Impact analysis: Family structure on social and emotional maturity of adolescents. *Anthropologist*, 17(2), 359–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09720073.2014.11891445>
- Ten Ways To Test Your Obedience | The Character Journal. (n.d.). Retrieved August 6, 2020, from <https://www.characterjournal.com/ten-ways-to-test-your-obedience/>
- Valizadeh, L., Zamanzadeh, V., Rassouli, M., & Rahkar Farshi, M. (2018). Concerns of Parents with or Raising Adolescent Children: a Qualitative Study of Iranian Families. *Journal of Caring Sciences*, 7(1), 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.15171/jcs.2018.005>

Acknowledgments

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Kesavan N. & K. Malathi (2020). An analysis of obedience among adolescents in Chennai, South India. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(3), 1714-1720. DIP:18.01.175/20200803, DOI:10.25215/0803.175