

Research Paper

The effect of family environment on self-esteem of adolescents in relation to their socioeconomic status

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to find out the effect of family environment on self-esteem of adolescents in relation to their gender and socio-economic status. For this study the data was collected by using tools- Family Environment Scale (FES) by Sanjay Vohra and Coppersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) by Coppersmith. The main objective of this study was to find out the extent to which family environment of an individual affects his/her self-esteem. Socio-economic differences between this relationship were also studied. Total sample consisted of 108 class XI standard of the age group 15-17 years were taken from both private and government schools of Delhi on the basis of their parent's education and occupation. Data was analyzed by product-moment correlation coefficient method. The result of this study indicates that cohesion, expressiveness and independence dimensions of family environment have crucial impact on the adolescents' self-esteem. However, the organisation dimension did not seem to be related to self-esteem. The relationship of cohesion with self-esteem differed significantly with respect to socio-economic status of the participants. Socio-economic differences had also been obtained in the relationship of expressiveness and self-esteem.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Family Environment, Self-Esteem, Socio-Economic Status*

Adolescence, the transitional stage of development between childhood and adulthood, represents the period of time during which a person experiences a variety of biological changes and encounters a number of emotional issues. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescence covers the period of life between 10 and 20 years of age. Adolescence is often divided by psychologists into three distinct phases: early, mid, and late adolescence. The present study focuses on mid adolescence.

Adolescence can be a specifically turbulent as well as a dynamic period of one's life. During adolescence, striving for autonomy- a sense of oneself as a separate, self-governing individual becomes a salient task.

Psychologically, adolescence is such a vulnerable stage that boys/girls of this age are easily carried away by perceptions generated by lack of knowledge about a range of issues like that

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of studies, sex, society, married life, career, religion, politics, or any relevant subject. The social implications of adolescent problems are dependent upon social structure. In a country like India, where family ties are strong due to emotional, financial, religious attachments - the gravity of implications is less. But in individualistic societies, where family ties are shallow- the gravity of implications can be far more serious.

Adolescence can be fairly stressful time for parents, and for the family as a whole. Arguments between parents and children increase considerably during adolescence. One of the most important tasks of adolescence involves the renegotiation of the parent-child relationship to reflect the adolescents' growing independence.

Compared with parents, adolescents of all ages are generally less satisfied with the levels of adaptability in the family than the parents did. Conflict between parents often escalates during early adolescence, remains somewhat stable during high school years, and then lessens as the adolescent reaches 17 to 20 years of age. The everyday conflicts that characterize parent-adolescent relationships can serve a positive developmental function.

Effective communication is generally regarded as a central feature of good family functioning. This is particularly so when children reach adolescence and begin to establish a clearer sense of their own identity and their ability to make decisions for themselves. Families with better parent-adolescent communication tend to be closer and more flexible in their approaches to solving family problems.

Self-esteem is a term used in psychology to reflect a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own worth. Rosenberg (1965) gave a socio-cultural approach to self-esteem and she defined it as an attitude that we have towards ourselves. Self-Esteem has two parts: subjective expression and behavioral manifestation. The present study focuses on the subjective expression of self-esteem as reported by the participants themselves.

Evidence suggests that parental loving behaviors such as support, acceptance, approval, and nurturance build a child's self-esteem and sense of competence. Conversely, having parents who are repeatedly disapproving and insulting is also linked to low self-esteem. Adolescents subjected to such parenting need constant reassurance and may rely heavily on peers to affirm their self-worth.

Socio-Economic variations in family environment also effects self-esteem of adolescents. A priori assumption of most research on socio-economic status, family functioning, and human development is that social position influences families across time and that socio-economic disadvantage has negative consequences for adults and children. This underlying tenet represents an instance of the *social causation perspective*, which assumes that social conditions lead to variations in health and well-being. In a recent study DeGarmo and colleagues (1999) found that each socio-economic status indicator (income, education, & occupation) was associated with better parenting. The present study takes into account all of these three indicators to determine the socio-economic status of the participants. Each component of socio-economic status contributes towards effective family functioning for both parents and children. These indicators of social position are positively correlated. Research shows that socio-economic status is associated with a wide array of health, cognitive, and socio-emotional outcomes in children with effects beginning prior to birth and continuing into adult.

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Objectives of the study

1. To study how family environment affects self-esteem in adolescents.
2. To study the socio-economic differences in the relationship between family environment and self-esteem in adolescents.

Hypotheses of the study

- H₁. There will be a relationship between family environment and self-esteem in adolescents.
H₂. Degree of relationship between family environment and self-esteem would vary between the two socio-economic groups.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Sample of the present study consisted of 108 students studying in class XI who were in the age group of 15-17 years. To study the socio-economic trends prevailing in the relationship between the variables, two different kinds of schools in Delhi were identified- one government school and other is private school. A heterogeneous group of students was selected with students studying in various academic stream (Hindi/Sanskrit & Science/Commerce/Humanities).

Tools

Data was collected by applying psychological tools- Family Environment Scale (FES) by Sanjay Vohra and Coppersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) by Coppersmith.

Statistical Analysis

On the basis of scores obtained on the various subscales of FES, along with those obtained on the CSEI, means and standard deviations of the various measures were computed. In addition, correlations between these variables were also calculated using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient Method. Differences between the various correlations were also computed using the Fisher z transformation.

In the present study the researcher has set up a 0.05% level of significance for testing hypotheses.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 1 Means and Standard Deviations of Family Environment and Self-Esteem for the whole data

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviations
Cohesion	9.26	2.22
Expression	9.12	2.52
Independence	7.90	2.31
Organisation	8.55	2.78
Self-Esteem	53.90	16.31

Table 2 Means and Standard Deviations of Family Environment and Self-Esteem with respect to the two Socio-Economic groups

Variables	Mean		Standard Deviations	
	High SEG	Low SEG	High SEG	Low SEG
Cohesion	9.40	2.83	9.10	1.17
Expression	8.97	3.24	9.30	1.27
Independence	8.53	2.75	7.16	1.33
Organisation	8.12	2.98	9.04	2.45
Self-Esteem	55.88	19.36	51.60	11.49

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Table 3 *Correlation Coefficients for various dimensions of Family Environment and Self-Esteem*

Dimensions of Family Environment	Self-Esteem
Cohesion	0.302*
Expressiveness	0.267*
Independence	0.397*
Organisation	0.009

* Significance at $\alpha = .05$ level is 0.2 $n = 108$

Table 3 reveals that the correlations between cohesion and self-esteem ($r = 0.302$), expressiveness and self-esteem ($r = 0.267$), and independence and self-esteem ($r = 0.397$) were all significant for the whole sample under study. However, the table also shows the correlation between organisation and self-esteem ($r = 0.009$) was not significant.

Therefore, the hypothesis has been **accepted** for following data points:

- Cohesion and self-esteem
- Expressiveness and self-esteem
- Independence and self-esteem

And, the hypothesis has been **rejected** for organisation dimension of family environment and self-esteem.

Adolescents' self-esteem tends to be affected by the quality of family environment (Noller et al., 1992). Research shows that relationships with parents, teachers, and peers are the important sources of social support that contribute to adolescents' self-esteem (Harter, 1990; Savin-Williams & Demo, 1983). The present findings are in accordance with previous researches trying to correlate positive family environment with adolescent's self-esteem.

Cohesion dimension of family environment includes high familial support, amount of time spent together and attention paid on each other; and has been found to be significantly affecting the adolescents' level of self-esteem. Several researchers share the general hypothesis that parent adolescence interactions that encourage differentiation and also send a message of acceptance and connection should facilitate positive outcomes including healthy identity, perspective taking skills, ego development and self-esteem (Eccles, et al., 1991) Gentile et al. (2009) reported that the family can act as a source of support and help affirm a child's beliefs about his or her self-worth. Adolescents who have secure relationships with their parents have higher self-esteem and better emotional well-being (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Conversely, rejected adolescents who are withdrawn tend to be lonely, have low self-esteem, and suffer from depression (Rubin et al 1995).

Parker & Benson (2004) reported that a high level of attachment and expressiveness between parents and adolescents is the main factor that results in increased self-esteem, improved behavior, and better relationships.

The level of organisation in the environment did not seem to impact the self-esteem of the participants because the organisation dimension of family environment measures the emphasis laid on planning and following responsibilities, rules and regulations. And, as Burt et al., (1988) pointed that where adolescents perceived the family environment as conflictual and controlling; they were more likely to have low self-esteem and high levels of

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depression. However, a six-month follow-up showed that perceptions of conflict and control at the time of first administration were not related to self-esteem or depression at the later time.

It must be noted that the adolescents who perceived their family environment to be more independent had the highest levels on self-esteem, followed by cohesive, expressive and organized environment.

In the present study, the participants scored highest on the dimension of cohesion (mean = 9.26); followed by expressiveness (mean = 9.12), organisation (mean = 8.55) and independence (mean = 7.9). While the average score on self-esteem was 53.9. In the collectivistic, family-centered society of India, high degree of importance is laid on the importance of family togetherness and cohesion, emotional dependency and stricter hierarchical organization of its members by age, gender, and generational status (eg. Krishnan, 2004). Thereby, experiences of cohesion, expressiveness and organisation are bound to be high. But within such situations, adolescents are not allowed the kind of independence they would rather aspire for; leading to lower mean scores in independence dimension. However, as Erikson (1950) pointed out- the central task in adolescence is to explore independence and to develop a sense of self.

Table 4 Socio-Economic Differences in the correlations between Dimensions of Family Environment and Self-Esteem

Dimensions of Family Environment	Self-Esteem				
	Pearson's <i>r</i>		z-value		Critical Ratio (CR)
	High SEG (n ₁ = 58)	Low SEG (n ₂ = 50)	High SEG (n ₁ = 58)	Low SEG (n ₂ = 50)	
Cohesion	0.416*	-0.247	0.45	-0.26	3.55***
Expressiveness	0.353*	-0.069	0.37	-0.07	2.2***
Independence	0.44*	0.135	0.47	0.14	1.65
Organisation	0.069	-0.056	0.07	-0.06	0.65

* Significance of correlation at $\alpha = 0.05$ level is 0.273 for High SEG,

** Significance of correlation at $\alpha = 0.05$ level is 0.288 for Low SEG,

*** Significance of difference between the z-values at $\alpha = 0.05$ level is 1.96

Table 4 reveals that the correlation of cohesion (CR = 3.55; $r = 0.416$ & -0.247) and expressiveness (CR = 2.2; $r = 0.353$ & -0.069) with self-esteem differ significantly among the two socio-economic groups. Thus, the hypothesis can be **accepted** for the following data points:

- Cohesion and self-esteem
- Expressiveness and self-esteem

Since socio-economic differences are not statistically significant for the relationship of independence and self-esteem (CR = 1.65; $r = 0.44$ & 0.135), and that for organisation and self-esteem (CR = 0.65; $r = 0.069$ & -0.056); therefore, the hypothesis has been **rejected** for the following data points:

- Independence and self-esteem
- Organisation and self-esteem

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Table shows that cohesion ($r = 0.416$), and expressiveness ($r = 0.353$) are significantly related to self-esteem in the high socio-economic group. Bradley & Corwyn (2003) reported that parents higher in socio-economic status set higher developmental goals and use more warmth, explanations, inductive discipline and verbal praise which explains why adolescents from higher socio-economic status have higher levels of self-esteem as they perceive higher levels of cohesion and expressiveness within their families.

Also, there are moderate-to-high (but insignificant) amount of differences in the relationship of independence and organisation within one's family environment with his/her self-esteem levels between the two socio-economic groups. Eisenberg et al. (2005) and Bean et al. (2007) reported that in diverse ethnic groups, socio-economic status levels, and family structures; warm, supportive parent-adolescent ties that permit young people to explore ideas and social rules foster adolescent autonomy- predicting high self-reliance, effortful control, work-orientation, academic achievement, favorably high self-esteem, social competence, and ease of separating in transitions to college. This suggests a relationship between independence provided to adolescents within family being related to self-esteem positively; as has been found in the present study.

It should also be noticed that the relationship of all the four dimensions of family environment viz. cohesion ($r = -0.247$), expressiveness ($r = -0.069$), independence ($r = 0.135$) and organisation ($r = -0.056$) are not found to be significantly related to self-esteem in the low socio-economic group. Longitudinal research done by Wilkinson (1999) on health also indicates that living in a low socio-economic status environment over a prolonged period of time tends to lead to poorer relationships with family members and friends.

Lower scores on perceived levels of cohesion within the low socio-economic group (from table 2 -the mean score being 9.1 as compared to 9.4 for the high socio-economic group) can be a result of highly stressful life that parents from low socio-economic status families have to deal with. It should also be noted that in the present study, the average monthly family income of the high socio-economic group was Rs. 1, 21,850; whereas for the low socio-economic group it was merely Rs. 4, 818. And, as Berk (2010) pointed out economic insecurity makes for emotional insecurity. Economic strain is associated with more negative parent-adolescent relationships, including greater parent-adolescent conflict and more negative emotions, as well as harsher, punitive parenting.

Though the low socio-economic group scored higher on the dimension of expressiveness (mean = 9.3) than the high socio-economic group (mean = 8.97); there is enough evidence suggesting that the interactions within the families from low socio-economic strata of the society are more argumentative and hostile.

Lower socio-economic group participants scored lower on the dimension of independence (mean = 7.16) as compared to the high socio-economic group (mean = 8.53). However, they (mean = 9.04) scored higher on the organisation dimension of family environment than the high socio-economic group (mean = 8.12). This might be because in low socio-economic status households; commands, criticism and physical punishment all occur more often than in high socio-economic status households as reported by Bradley & Corwyn (2003) also. And, thus low socio-economic status children are at greater risk of developing emotional and social problems, such as poor conduct, peer difficulties and low self-esteem. The present study results predict that adolescents from the low socio-economic group have lower self-

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esteem (mean = 51.6) as against comparatively higher self-esteem levels of the high socio-economic group (mean = 55.88). The results are in agreement with the study done by Caples & Barrera (2006) found that parents who are coercive or psychologically controlling interfere with the development of autonomy in adolescents. All these tactics breed intense, emotionally negative exchanges between parents and adolescents in low socio-economic status households.

Moreover, as per the data collected for the present study, it has been found that the parents of the high socio-economic group participants were engaged in professional, skilled or business-oriented occupations, as compared to the parents from the low socio-economic group who are mainly engaged in low profile occupations including unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. For the older child, the father's occupation has a cultural significance in that it affects the child's social prestige.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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