

Comparative Study

Role of Family Structure on Mental Health of Adolescents: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents is a period during which mental, physical, social abilities and potentials are developed, during this time parental presence, guidance and family environment plays a crucial role in guiding the child to understand himself/herself, accept the changes taking place within and outside the body and develop healthy body and mind. **Objective:** The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of family structure on Mental Health of adolescents. Joint and nuclear family structure are investigated in this research work. **Method:** Data for the present study was collected through Random Sampling Method from 400 male and female adolescent students studying in different schools of Lucknow City. Adolescents with Age range of 13-18 years were administered with Mental Health Inventory by Dr. Jagdish and Dr. A.K. Srivastava (1983) to investigate mental health and Personal Data Sheet to investigate family structure. **Results:** Significant differences on the mental health of adolescents from different family structure were observed. Adolescents from joint family had higher mental health than nuclear family adolescents. Gender differences were also observed on mental health, results showed that female adolescents had better mental health than male adolescents. Thus, it can be concluded that family structure is related to love, care, support and affection towards the child and its members. It acts as a mode of catharsis and emotional ventilation for the adolescents and parents. Expression of emotions, sharing of experiences and feelings is very important because piling up of emotions and experiences may lead to mental disturbances and distorted brain functioning. Thus, family is a significant part of an individual's life and his overall development.

Keywords: Adolescents, Mental Health, Joint Family and Nuclear Family.

Adolescence is an age of novel situations and confusion that every individual experiences on his pathway of life stages. It is rightly said that a child in his early years learns to adjust to himself, new situations and discovers his own personality, also adjusts to his family, later in his middle childhood he learns to adjust with the society. These adjustments are very crucial and difficult but with the assistance of family and society they can be made easy and smooth. Adolescence is defined as recapitulation stage of life. Individual body encounters many changes related to his physical, mental, emotional as well as social aspects during his transition period from childhood to adolescences.

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Role of Family Structure on Mental Health of Adolescents: A Comparative Study

Every aspect whether spiritual, moral, cognitive, mental of adolescence life comes across revolutionary development and adjustment are made accordingly. These adjustments are significant part of life and are made to build harmony and balance with the body, self and the surroundings.

Meaning of Adolescence

According to psychologist an individual is addressed as adolescent when he is in his transition period, that is from child to adult and it is characterized by several innovations and modifications. It is a period from immaturity to maturity, child to adult and is often tagged as phase of stress and turmoil.

At this span a child may encounter several discoveries related to his own self, his interest, likes- dislikes, and these discoveries may result in creating imbalance in parent-child relationship because of the development of self-governing tendencies and independent attitude. The adolescent's pursuit for identity is not limited to his own self but for the acknowledgement from the family and the society.

Family as a Support During Adolescence Period

Adolescent in his period of changes and transitions requires guidance and support for his efforts and behavior from the family, friends, teachers and society. Parents are top position holders when it comes to support and guidance followed by family members and friends. Smooth transition from childhood to adulthood is a reflection of the relationship especially between parents- child and his environment. The changes that are experienced by the child create confusion and inferiority about his looks and appearances and lead to development of inferiority complexes and conflicts. These conflicts can only be resolved by showering affection, building positive relationship, understanding and constant support by the caregivers (parents). Parents- child relationship plays important role in helping the child to discuss the changes and feeling he is facing, parents adopt different styles and techniques to deal and nurture their offspring. These styles later define the adjustment, mental health, attitude, and personality of the child. For instance, uninvolved parents who are unaware of the happenings and events of their adolescent's life may lead to conflicts, behavioral deformity, adjustment issues and other mental health problems cause by lack of affection, involvement and attachment with their child.

Family environment and surroundings are significant in defining the thoughts, belief, values and mental health of the individual. Family is the first school of the child it is said because he learns from imitating the behavior of the family members and elders; they act as models and idol for the child. Thus, an individual's behavior is the display of his parenting and upbringing.

Interaction between parents and adolescents helps in inculcating confidence, self-worth and other psycho socials attributes. Appropriate balance of regulation and freedom encourages and promotes healthy relationship with self, family and the environment; this will also initiate autonomy and independent attitude within the child. Excessive control and rules on the other hand are fruitful in creating aggression, stress, violent behavior and mental illness. As parents, teachers and elders we should not forget that adolescent is neither a child nor an adult. Thus, we should not omit the fact that they require time and space to deal with the expectations and challenges.

Role of Family Structure on Mental Health of Adolescents: A Comparative Study

Family is a group of two or more people living together connected by birth, adoption or marriage. A family is responsible for the fulfillment of the basic needs which may not only be biological but also psychological and social of its members. Family environment, structure and beliefs are significant in shaping up the personality, character and other psychological aspects of the individual. Families are providers of love, affection, care, knowledge, rituals, traditions and principles to the offspring. One generation passes methods, techniques and ideologies to other generations and so on. Every member in the family plays a significant role and is respected by other members. Emotional bond and attachment is shared within the family members and defines their mental and emotional conditions.

Family structure was associated with two married adults raising their offspring in the past however this pattern has drastically changed over time. The basic setting has diversified and created a new meaning to family structure. There are different types of family structure prevailing now they are; nuclear family, single parent family, extended family, step family, childless family, joint family and same sex family.

Joint family setting was the most common family setting or structure in Indian society but with modernization and rapidly changing trends, changes in family structure is also visible. Nuclear family and single parent family is the latest trend of the society. Any type of family structure is acceptable if they are able to provide with emotional, financial support and existence of love, affection and care is present for the child and its members. As long as the members of the family are connected with each other through love and respect every setting is appreciated. Sense of belongingness, support system, psychological health benefits, and provider of basic requirements are the benefits gained through family settings. Disruptions in family may lead to adverse effect on mental health of both the child as well as his parents. Disruptions may be caused by conflicts between family members or among parents, emotional or financial crisis or death of a parent and abuse of the child or the caregiver (Amato,1993,2005; Carlson and Corcoran 2001).

Family is defined as a group of two or more individuals that are related to each other by blood, adoption, or marriage. It is a social unit of individual being. Family is a form of togetherness which provides support both emotional and financial, relationship both emotional and physical to its members. There are many reasons causing changes in the family structure, they are as follows,

- Conflicts between members of the family may disrupt and break the family from joint to nuclear structure.
- Educational requirement of the child de-attaches one set of family with other.
- Job opportunities in different cities and countries make an impact on the family.
- Lack of respect and understanding between generations also causes distortion in family size.
- Financial constraints also lead to changes in family size.

Characteristics of a Family

The basic characteristics of a family are as follows:

- **Shared Habitation** – members are married and live together under one roof.
- **Financial Provision** – financial support and duties are performed to fulfill the basic requirements of the member residing together. Property, assets, resources and possessions are shared between members (Manning and Brown, 2006).

Role of Family Structure on Mental Health of Adolescents: A Comparative Study

- **Affection and Bond** – emotional relationship of affection, attachment and care is present. Health care related check-ups and responsibilities are fulfilled. (Simpson et al., 1997)
- **Socialization of members** – all members are taught social norms, cultural values, tradition, morals and knowledge. This help in development of personality and character of the children. (Hewlett, 2000)

Types of Family

- **Nuclear family** – it is defined as a family group consisting of parents and their children residing together, sharing unconditional love, healthy attachment patterns, values and healthy environment that enhances growth and development.
- **Joint or extended family**- it is a group of individuals living together comprising of parents, children, grandparents, aunt and uncles and cousins. Sharing bond of attachment, care and respect, Inculcating values, morals, traditions from generation to generation is a major characteristic of joint family.

Health

Health is the most important aspect of human being. It is defined as soil from which the finest flower grows. According to WHO, “health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well- being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Further WHO made some clarifications: “A resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resource as well as physical capacities.” This means that it is not restricted to only self rather it is a wider aspect of individual’s functioning of living a healthy, meaningful and purposeful life. According to The Lancet, 2009, health is defined as the ability of a body to adapt to new threats and infirmities.

Types of health

Basically, there are two types of health described they are mental and physical. However spiritual health, emotional health and financial health cannot be left untouched because they are also contributors to overall health.

1. **Physical health:** Human being is defined physically healthy who has a body with proper functioning of all its part. Absence of any disease, ailment is one of the aspects contributing to physical health. Healthy lifestyles, proper diet may benefit physical health.
2. **Mental health:** Mental health is a psychological aspect which is described as person’s emotional, psychological, and social well – being. It is an individual’s perception of their experiences of life and its impact on them. It is an ability to cope and make adjustment with life stressors and create a balance between his desires and aspirations. According to Bhatia 1982, mental health is the ability to balance feelings, desires, ambitions and ideals in one’s daily living. It means the ability to face and accept the realities of life. Both physical and mental health are connected to each other, any hindrance in one causedisturbance on the other. E.g., diagnosis of any medical disease, depression can affect body weight, body functioning towards regular tasks.

Mental health is defined as person’s ability to make positive self-evaluation, to perceive the reality, to integrate the personality, autonomy, group-oriented attitudes and environmental mastery. These are also the dimensions included and investigated in the mental health inventory.

METHODOLOGY

Samples of 400 adolescents were included in the study within age range of 13 – 18 years. The purpose of the study is to examine the mental health of the adolescents belonging to different family structure type. Nuclear and joint structure family types are considered for the research. It is an exploratory research.

Instruments

Mental health inventory (MHI)

Mental health inventory designed by Dr. Jagdish and Dr. A.K. Srivastava is considered to measure mental health (positive) of normal individuals. This inventory includes 6 dimensions they are as follows: 1. Positive Self-Evaluation, 2. Perception of Reality, 3. Integration of Personality, 4. Autonomy, 5. Group Oriented Attitudes, 6. Environmental Mastery. It includes total 56 items with 32 false keyed (negative) and 24 true keyed (positive). Reliability for each dimension, 0.75 for positive self-evaluation, 0.71 for perception of reality, 0.72 for integration of personality, 0.72 for autonomy, 0.74 for group-oriented attitudes, 0.71 for environmental mastery and 0.73 for overall mental health. Construct validity was found to be 0.54 for the inventory.

Procedure

Data was collected from the sample after establishing rapport with the students. Proper instructions were given to the participants for better understanding of the inventory. SPSS latest version was considered for the analysis of the data.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows Mean, S.D of mental health based on family structure type of adolescents.

| S. N | Dimension Of Mental Health | Family Structure | N | Mean | S.D | t |
|------|-----------------------------|------------------|-----|--------|-------|-------|
| 1. | Overall Mental Health (OMH) | NUCLEAR | 244 | 138.95 | 14.47 | 1.84* |
| | | JOINT | 156 | 149.44 | 18.53 | |

**Significant at 0.05 level*

The above table 1 shows overall mental health of adolescents from nuclear and joint family structure. The results depict that mean score of joint family adolescents is higher to nuclear family adolescents and on application of t test it is observed that there is a significant difference in mental health between joint and nuclear family adolescents. Thus, it can be concluded that joint family adolescents had better mental health as compared to nuclear family adolescents.

Table 2 shows Mean, S.D of dimensions of mental health based on family structure of adolescents. (N=400, Nuclear =244 and Joint= 156)

| S. No | Dimension of Mental Health | Family Structure | Mean | S.D | t |
|-------|---------------------------------|------------------|-------|------|-------|
| 1. | Positive Self-Evaluation (PSE) | Nuclear | 29.59 | 7.08 | 1.23* |
| | | JOINT | 30.89 | 5.52 | |
| 2. | Perception of Reality (PR) | Nuclear | 38.26 | 6.29 | 2.19* |
| | | JOINT | 36.78 | 7.08 | |
| 3. | Integration of Personality (IP) | Nuclear | 31.69 | 5.53 | 1.64* |
| | | JOINT | 32.20 | 5.06 | |
| 4. | Autonomy (A) | Nuclear | 29.19 | 7.18 | |

Role of Family Structure on Mental Health of Adolescents: A Comparative Study

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|----|---------------------------------------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| | | JOINT | 35.26 | 8.54 | 1.80* |
| 5. | Group Oriented Attitudes (GOA) | Nuclear | 36.62 | 5.07 | 1.94* |
| | | JOINT | 34.58 | 6.34 | |
| 6. | Environmental Mastery (EM) | Nuclear | 28.27 | 5.26 | .064 |
| | | JOINT | 27.64 | 6.04 | |

**Significant at 0.05 level*

The above table 2 shows Mean, S.D of mental health based on family structure of adolescents. Dimension wise calculation of mental health depict that mean of positive self-evaluation is higher in joint family adolescents as compared to their counterparts and t test score display positive significant difference at 0.05 level. Dimension 2 that is perception of reality depicts that mean of perception of reality is higher in nuclear family adolescents as compared to joint family individual and t test score display positive significant difference at 0.05 level. Third dimension integration of personality depicts that mean of joint family adolescents is higher as compared to nuclear family and t test score show positive significant difference at 0.05 level. Fourth dimension autonomy display high mean of joint family as compared to nuclear family adolescent but t-test score showed no significant difference. Fifth dimension group-oriented attitudes showed mean of nuclear family to be higher than joint family adolescents and t test score showed positive significant difference at 0.05 level. Sixth dimension of mental health showed mean of environmental mastery of nuclear family higher than joint family adolescents, t test score showed no significant difference.

Thus, it can be concluded that positive self-evaluation, integration of personality, autonomy is higher in joint family adolescents and perception of reality, group-oriented attitude is higher in nuclear family adolescents. Significant difference in mental health can be seen in adolescents belonging to different family structures.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study confirm the role of family structure on mental health of the adolescents. Overall mental health showed joint family as enhancer. Dimension wise calculation of mental health showed that out of the six dimensions adolescents from joint family performed better than nuclear family. Table- 1 shows overall mental health mean and S.D of joint and nuclear family adolescents, mean of nuclear family = 29.59, S.D = 7.08 and mean of joint family =30.89, S.D = 5.52, t test score = 1.23* significant at 0.05 level. It can be concluded that joint family structure provides more affection, thought ventilation and availability of family members for expression and sharing as compared to nuclear family structure where there is less availability of someone with whom one can share his thoughts, feelings and emotional fluctuations. But on dimension wise analysis shows that perception of reality and group-oriented attitude to be higher in adolescents in nuclear family adolescents. Thus, it can be said that nuclear family adolescents have better perception of the reality that is, they are capable enough to differentiate between fantasy and reality, alluring items and useful possession.

These results are supported by the previous studies conducted by researcher. Few of the researchers in support are, the children and adults in single families are more likely to face greater stress and parental conflicts, than those children and adults in joint families. Among single parent families, there is a limited access to the resources and social support, greater demand on parental time, restricted authority and instability in family shape (Heck and Parker 2002; Amato 2005; Cooper et al. 2009). Furthermore, they are linked with lower

Role of Family Structure on Mental Health of Adolescents: A Comparative Study

levels of parental support, engagement and warmth (Thomson, Hanson, McLanahan, 1994; Cavanagh, 2008).

Researches on adolescents and family structure conducted in recent years suggested that there is a connection between both the aspects and results showed that different kind of impact was observed that is, Adolescents delinquency, (Manning and Lamb, 2003), depression (Brown, 2006), cognitive skills (Manning and Lamb 2003), school engagement (Brown 2006), school problems (Manning and Lamb 2003), and substance abuse (Cavanagh 2008).

Issues related to health risk related accidents, injuries and illness is higher in single parent families because of less parental control and supervision (Angel and Worobey 1988; Case et al. 2000).

Adverse impact of changes in family structure or transitions may be seen later in life as they are cumulative in nature and outcomes may be negatively impacting the adolescents in coping with new stressors (Osborne and McLanahan 2007).

CONCLUSION

Parents, family and our surroundings knowingly and unknowingly impact our personality, behavior, values and beliefs. Individual act and reacts according to the environment he is brought up and it automatically becomes his obvious behavior. Thus, supportive parents and society initiates healthy individual who is able to cope up with his problems and is also able to manage his emotions effectively.

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Role of Family Structure on Mental Health of Adolescents: A Comparative Study

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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