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Research Paper

Family Stress and Adolescent Efficiency in the Tea Tribes Community: Examining the Moderating Role of Parental Income

Nirmali Puzari[1]*, Dr. Zulfiqar Ullah Siddiqui[2]

ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency among youth belonging to the Tea Tribes community in Assam, and examined the moderating role of parental income. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 300 adolescents (aged 13–17 years) through stratified proportionate random sampling in Tea Garden Model High Schools of Sonitpur district. Family stress was assessed with the Family Climate Scale, efficiency with the Psychological Well-Being Scale, and parental income was self-reported. Pearson's correlation and moderated regression analyses were conducted. Family stress showed no significant direct association with adolescent efficiency ($r = –.01$, $p = .90$). However, parental income moderated this relationship. Adolescents from the lowest-income households experienced significant declines in efficiency with increasing stress ($B = –0.511$, $p= .017$). The regression model was significant ($R^2= .060$, $p= .032$). The findings highlight that while family stress alone does not reduce efficiency, its negative impact intensifies under conditions of low parental income. Economic stability can buffer stress effects, underscoring the importance of resilience-building and poverty-reduction interventions for marginalized communities such as the Tea Tribes youth.

Keywords: *Family stress, Adolescent efficiency, Parental income, Tea Tribes, Marginalized youth*

The term Family stress and tension include a wide range of factors that trigger stress within the family climate. It presents in many forms. It is broadly defined as a disruption in the family system's equilibrium caused by internal or external events such as death, divorce, unemployment, or war. These changes, whether expected or unexpected, represent transitions that affect the family's structure and processes, ultimately influencing well-being either positively or negatively depending on the family's perceptions, coping strategies, and resilience. The Family Stress Model (Conger et al., 1992) further explicates how economic hardship places pressure on the family system, undermining parents' psychological well-being and interparental relationships. However, within this framework, family tension and stress specifically refer to the emotional strain adults experience due to conflicts, unmet expectations, or pressures within the family, often manifesting as anxiety, frustration, and distress.

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya, India
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya, India
*Corresponding Author

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Efficiency is commonly defined as the ratio between actual output or performance and the potential output achievable with the same level of resources, such as time, money, and labour (Leibenstein, 1966). This concept reflects the quality of producing desired effects with minimal waste or effort, encompassing both economic and social dimensions of performance. In psychological and developmental contexts, efficiency pertains to how individuals effectively utilize their available personal and environmental resources to achieve optimal outcomes. For the purpose of this study, adolescent efficiency refers to the extent to which youth maximize their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacities to perform and succeed across academic, social, and personal domains, relative to the resources accessible to them. Measuring this efficiency helps to understand how adolescents navigate challenges and leverage support, particularly under varying family stress conditions and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Family stress significantly disables adolescent efficiency. It hinders the harmonious development of all aspects of an adolescent's personality and effective functioning. Family stress caused by interparental conflict is a risk factor for poor academic performance, partly mediated by youth self-blame (Ghazarian and Buehler, 2010). Academic and family stress trigger depressive symptoms in adolescents, which in turn disrupt learning efficiency (Deng et al., 2022). Stress induced by socio-economic status and marital conflict negatively affect adolescents' life satisfaction, which mediates the relationship between family stress and substance use (Chappel, 2011). This highlights the extensive psychosocial impact of family stress beyond the academic realm. Stress triggered by parent-adolescent disputes weaken self-esteem and achievement motivation while increasing risk-taking behaviors, with significant gender differences in these associations. It also negatively impacts motivation and academic achievement (Mayra et al., 2020). Adolescent's perception of their parents' expectations influences their motivation and performance. Moderate parental expectations increase efficiency, whereas very high or very low expectations reduce adolescents' performance (Kushwaha and Bhatia, 2019). For adolescents in mental health counseling, ongoing family stress drains their energy. When they face many family problems, their social development suffers because the energy they could use to learn and grow is spent dealing with family conflict and tension. (Harr et al., 2011).

Parental income shapes the extent to which family stress impacts adolescent efficiency. Financial stability can buffer the harmful effects of family stress, whereas lower income often amplifies these effects. Economic hardship is a common source of family pressure that compounds developmental challenges. Financial instability may heighten family stress by increasing parental conflict, emotional strain, and reducing parenting quality. Such a tense home environment can hamper adolescents' efficiency, as they must devote more energy to coping with family problems rather than focusing on learning, personal growth, and skill development. Research shows that household income positively impacts children's developmental outcomes-including cognitive abilities, social behavior, and health-particularly in low-income families (Cooper & Stewart, 2021). Moreover, parents' financial stress affects adolescent problem behavior indirectly via parental depressive symptoms, interparental conflict, and parenting quality, with these effects being stronger and more direct in low-income families (Ponnet, 2014). Supporting this, Chen et al. (2023) found that having valuable family resources reduces the impact of low income on adolescent maladaptive behaviors by reducing caregiver distress. Additionally, children from low-income families face higher risks of mental health difficulties, with parental wellbeing and parent-child relationship quality playing important mediating roles (Wilson et al., 2025).

Miller et al. (2023) further emphasize that adolescents' perceptions of economic hardship significantly predict emotional and behavioral problems. Income dynamics also strongly influence adolescents' emotional and social functioning, which affects their overall efficiency (Xie et al., 2024). Together, these findings highlight the vital moderating role of parental income and economic resources in shaping adolescent adjustment amid family stress.

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage in human life, during which individuals require a supportive and conducive environment to navigate the challenges brought about by this transitional phase. Such an environment enables them to flourish across all areas of development. Within this context, stress and tension within the family can significantly influence adolescents' ability to function effectively. Parental economic stability can help buffer these effects by reducing family tensions and providing better support, while economic hardship often increases developmental risks. This issue is especially crucial for marginalized communities such as the youth of the Tea Tribes community of Assam. The Tea Tribes community of Assam is a diverse socio-cultural group composed of multiple tribes and castes. Ethnographic documentation indicates that the community comprises 96 distinct ethnic groups officially categorized as "Tea Tribes" in Assam (Begum, 2017). These communities, comprising approximately 17% of Assam's population, predominantly reside in remote tea estate areas characterized by severe socio-economic and political vulnerabilities. Growing up in impoverished conditions marked by lack of basic amenities, illiteracy, poverty, addiction, inadequate healthcare, and limited educational support, the adolescents of the Tea Tribes face significant challenges including financial constraints, exposure to violence, family disharmony, and exploitation by the tea industry. These adverse living conditions create an environment of heightened developmental risk, exacerbating mental health and psychosocial problems among the Tea Tribes adolescents.

Although remarkable research has examined the impact of family stress on adolescent development, there is a notable gap in research focusing on marginalized groups, such as the Tea Tribes youth. Given that marginalized communities often experience low socio-economic status, adolescents in these contexts face heightened risks across multiple developmental domains. Understanding how parental income may buffer the effects of family stress on adolescent efficiency in such communities can provide valuable insights into the interplay between family stress, economic resources, and adolescent outcomes. This perspective is especially relevant within the socio-cultural context of the Tea Tribes community and can inform both theoretical frameworks and targeted interventions.

Objectives

The objectives of the present study are

- To examine the relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency among adolescents belonging to the Tea Tribes community.
- To investigate whether parental income moderates the relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency among adolescents belonging to the Tea Tribes community.

Hypotheses

The hypothesis of the present study are

- **H1:** Family stress will be significantly and negatively associated with adolescent efficiency among adolescents belonging to the Tea Tribes community.

- **H2:** Parental income will significantly moderate the relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency among adolescents belonging to the Tea Tribes community.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopted a descriptive survey research design with a quantitative strategy. Within this framework, Pearson's correlation was employed to examine the relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency, and linear regression analysis was used to test the moderating effect of parental income.

Population and Sample

The study population comprised adolescents aged 13-17 years belonging to the Tea Tribes community of Sonitpur district, Assam, who were studying in Classes VIII, IX, and X. A total of 300 respondents (150females and 150 males) were selected using stratified random sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (a) adolescents belonging to the Tea Tribes community, (b) Living with both parents, both of whom are engaged in income-generating activities (c) enrolled in Tea Garden Model High Schools of Sonitpur district in Classes VIII, IX, or X. Adolescents who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

Measures Used

Family Stress: In the present study, *Family Stress* refers to the *Family Stress and Tension* dimension of the standardized Family Climate Scale developed by the researcher. This dimension consists of three negatively scored items measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale, with the first adjective in each pair representing the positive extreme. All items were reverse scored prior to analysis (1→7, 2→6, 3→5, 4→4, 5→3, 6→2, 7→1) so that higher scores reflected greater family stress and lower scores indicated lesser family stress. The scores for the three items were summed to obtain the total Family Stress score, yielding a possible range of 3 to 21. The score was treated as a continuous variable in the analysis; manual-based categorical cut-offs were not applied because they pertain to the overall Family Climate Scale rather than to individual dimensions. The Cronbach's alpha for this dimension was 0.63, which, although modest, is acceptable for a short subscale, particularly considering the limited number of items and the influence of cultural context.

Efficiency: Efficiency was assessed using the *Efficiency* dimension of the *Psychological Well-Being Scale* developed by Dr. Devendra Singh Sisodia and Ms. Pooja Choudhary (2012). This dimension is the second among the five dimensions of the scale and consists of items 11 to 20, all positively worded. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, with scores assigned as follows: 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree. The reliability of this dimension was found 0.694, which is acceptable range. The scores of the ten items were summed to obtain the total Efficiency score, with higher scores reflecting greater efficiency. In the present study, the score was treated as a continuous variable for statistical analyses (correlation and regression), and the categorical interpretation norms provided in the manual were not applied.

Parental Income: Data on parental annual income were collected as part of the socio-economic profile of the students. Adolescents were asked to report their parents combined annual income in the questionnaire.

Ethical Consideration: Ethical guidelines were strictly followed throughout the entire research process, including data collection, data entry, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of results. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and participants' rights to withdraw at any time were respected.

Data collection and Analysis of Data: After obtaining necessary permissions from the headmasters of the concerned schools, the researcher collected data using the above-mentioned measures. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participants, and assistance was provided in case of any confusion during data collection.

The collected data were entered into SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were computed to summarize the main study variables (family stress, adolescent efficiency, and parental income). Prior to hypothesis testing, data were examined for normality through skewness and kurtosis statistics and checked for missing values.

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency. To test whether parental income moderated the relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency, a moderated multiple linear regression analysis was performed. Family stress and parental income variables were mean-centered prior to creating interaction terms to reduce multicollinearity.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 1. On average, adolescents reported a total efficiency score of 40.25 (SD = 4.25). The mean family stress score was 8.03 (SD = 3.03), and parents' annual income averaged 2.07 (SD = 1.19). Skewness and kurtosis values fell within acceptable ranges, indicating no serious deviations from normality.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Total Efficiency Score	40.25	40.00	4.25	-0.45	0.89
Total Family Stress Score	8.03	7.00	3.03	1.05	1.43
Parent's Annual Income	2.07	2.00	1.19	0.91	-0.13

Note: N=300

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency. The results indicated no significant relationship, r (298) = -.01, p = .90 (Table 2). Thus, Hypothesis 1, which predicted a negative relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency, was not supported. This finding suggests that, within this sample, family stress levels were not meaningfully associated with adolescent efficiency.

Table 2 Pearson Correlations Between Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	1	2
1.Total Family Stress Score	__	-0.1(.90)
2. Total Efficiency Score	-01(.90)	

*Note. Values are Pearson's r. p < .05 = *, p < .01 = **.*

To test Hypothesis 2, a multiple regression analysis was performed with dummy-coded parental income categories (D1–D4) and their interactions with family stress as predictors of adolescent efficiency. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(9, 290) = 2.07$, $p = .032$, explaining 6% of the variance in adolescent efficiency (Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3 Model Summary for Multiple Regression Predicting Adolescent Efficiency (N = 300)

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE of the Estimate
1	.246	.060	.031	4.19

Table 4 ANOVA for Multiple Regression Predicting Adolescent Efficiency

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	326.921	9	36.325	2.073	.032
Residual	5080.825	290	17.520		
Total	5407.747	299			

Note. df = degrees of freedom. p = significance value.

Among the predictors, the lowest income group (D1) showed a significant positive main effect, $B = 5.43$, $SE = 1.77$, $p = .002$, indicating that adolescents in this category scored higher on efficiency when family stress was centered at the mean. Notably, the interaction between family stress and D1 was significant, $B = -0.51$, $SE = 0.21$, $\beta = -.45$, $p = .017$ (Table 5). This suggests that increases in family stress were associated with a strong decline in efficiency among adolescents from the lowest income households, compared to other income groups. No other main effects or interactions reached statistical significance, implying that the moderating effect of parental income was specific to the lowest income group. These findings support Hypothesis 2, confirming that parental income moderates the relationship between family stress and adolescent efficiency, particularly in the lowest income group

Table 5 Coefficients for Multiple Regression Predicting Adolescent Efficiency

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	38.612	1.136	—	33.985	<.001
D1	5.434	1.769	.554	3.072	.002
D2	1.365	1.863	.124	0.733	.464
D3	0.920	2.480	.060	0.371	.711
D4	0.965	3.843	.051	0.251	.802
Int_D1	–0.511	0.213	–.446	–2.401	.017
Int_D2	–0.071	0.210	–.061	–0.340	.734
Int_D3	0.076	0.269	.048	0.282	.778
Int_D4	0.212	0.475	.091	0.448	.655
Family Stress Total	0.108	0.138	.077	0.783	.435

Note. $R^2 = .060$, Adjusted $R^2 = .031$, $F(9, 290) = 2.073$, $p = .032$. D1–D4 = dummy-coded parental income categories; Int_D1–Int_D4 = interaction terms between family stress and parental income categories.

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated whether family stress is directly associated with adolescent efficiency and whether parental income moderates this relationship. Contrary to Hypothesis 1, the findings of the present study reveal no significant relationship between family stress

and adolescents' efficiency among adolescents of the tea tribes community (r = –.01, p = .90). One possible explanation for this result could be the high levels of resilience observed in this population. Resilience is widely recognized as a protective factor for mental well-being, enabling individuals to function effectively even in adverse circumstances. Kerketta, Ali, Gujar, and Deuri (2019) reported that the majority of school-going adolescents from tea tribes demonstrated high resiliency traits. Adolescents with higher resilience have been found to exhibit lower levels of depressive symptomatology, which may buffer the potential negative effects of family stress. Another contributing factor may be the strong cultural identity and community cohesion within the tea tribes. Stable, connected communities with highly embedded social networks can promote youth well-being and stability in a positive, reinforcing cycle (Marçal & Maguire-Jack, 2022). These adolescents often engage in festivals, preserve cultural traditions, and maintain strong community bonds, all of which can built social connectedness and provide emotional support. Such informal supports have been identified as important factors of resilience for low-income families, particularly those who may be excluded from or reluctant to engage with formal social systems. In addition, other family climate dimensions, such as cohesion, connectedness, and effective communication, may play a role in maintaining adolescents' efficiency despite family stress. Future research should explore these dimensions in the context of tea tribe adolescents to better understand their contribution to stress resilience. School-based factors may also have influenced the results. The respondents in the present study were enrolled in newly established tea garden model high schools, where they may have received guidance and support that enhanced their functioning. School connectedness has been linked to better adolescent outcomes, with youth who feel more connected to their schools reporting lower levels of depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and social anxiety, along with higher self-esteem and more adaptive use of free time (Foster et al., 2017). Such school environments could therefore serve as a protective factor, reducing the effects of family stress on adolescents' efficiency.

However, supporting Hypothesis 2, the results showed that parental income significantly moderated this relationship: adolescents from the lowest income group experienced a significant decrease in efficiency with higher family stress (B = –0.511, β = –.446, p = .017). These results conform with the Family Stress Model (FSM), which suggest that economic hardship affects adolescent functioning indirectly through instability in family processes, such as intensifying parental distress and impaired parenting behaviors (Conger et al., 2002). Moreover, empirical studies highlights that stress-related instabilities are more impactful in low-income families lacking balancing resources, which align with our finding of a higher stress-efficiency link in this group (Prime et al., 2025)

In contrast, the absence of a significant direct effect suggests that family stress alone may not interrupt adolescent efficiency when families have sufficient resources or support mechanisms. Previous studies support this interpretation, indicating that strong family support and external resources can mediate the negative consequences of stress (Masarik & Conger, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Overall, while family stress alone did not affect adolescent efficiency, its detrimental impact was significantly amplified for adolescents in the lowest-income households. This emphasizes the need for interventions that reduce economic stress or enhance family resilience, particularly among the most economically disadvantaged families.

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