

## The Mediating Role of Openness to Life Experiences in the Relationship between Family Cohesion and Psychosocial Functioning among Adolescents: A Gender-Based Analysis

Krishna Sharma<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

In the present study, the mediating role of OL in the association between family cohesion and psychosocial functioning among school-going adolescents was explored with a focus on gender differences. The population consisted of 50 males and 50 females adolescents having ages of 10-19 from purposive sample of urban, English medium co-educational schools of Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. The family cohesion scale from FACES III (Olson, 1985), the corresponding subscale of the Ego Resiliency Scale–Revised (ERS-R; Alessandri et al., 2012), and the Adolescents' Psychosocial Functioning Inventory (APFI; Akpa et al., 2015) were used to assess family cohesion, openness to life experiences and psychosocial functioning, respectively. Pearson correlations, independent samples t-tests and Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation steps with the Sobel test were used. The results indicated that there were significant positive correlations between family cohesiveness, openness to life experiences, and psychosocial functioning. Mediation analysis showed that the partial effect of family cohesion on psychosocial functioning was mediated by openness to life experiences (indirect effect = 0.856, Sobel  $z = 3.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ) accounting for 43.9% of the total effect. Results of the gender-based analyses indicated that the mediation was significant for males (indirect effect = 0.699;  $z = 2.43$ ,  $p = .015$ ) and females (indirect effect = 0.954;  $z = 2.69$ ,  $p = .007$ ); however, for the males, the direct effect was marginally different from zero ( $p = .054$ ), whereas the direct effect was significant for females ( $p = .014$ ). There was a significantly higher level of optimism and coping strategies in the male adolescent than the female ( $t = 2.11$ ,  $p = .037$ ). The findings highlight the significance of family integration in supporting the psychological dispositions of adolescents that promote successful functioning in social and psychological domains, and thus family and school-based interventions targeting these dispositions need to be gender responsive.

**Keywords:** *Family Cohesion, Openness to Life Experiences, Psychosocial Functioning, Adolescents, Mediation, Gender Differences, Ego Resiliency, Indian adolescents*

The youth stage is a time of rapid change in the biological, psychological, cognitive and social development of people, making it one of the most dynamic and vulnerable periods of life (Masten, 2014; Steinberg, 2011). In this developmental stage, people experience the challenges of identity development, emotional control and socialization, as

<sup>1</sup>Student

\*Corresponding Author

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well as the demands of school, friends and changing family roles (Kagitcibasi, 2013, Kobak et al., 2017). Emotional health, interpersonal skills, and adaptive coping are all aspects of psychosocial functioning that have been found to be important factors when it comes to adolescent mental health outcomes and trajectories later in life (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2012; Prime et al., 2020). The family environment is of central importance in shaping the adolescent's psychosocial functioning, among the contextual factors shaping adolescent functioning. Family cohesion has been defined as the emotional bonding, connectedness and sense of belonging that adolescents experience among their family members, and has been found to be a strong predictor of positive development in teens in a variety of cultural contexts (Olson, 2011; Walsh, 2016). The findings of the research are consistently consistent that cohesive family environments are protective against behavioural issues, emotional dysregulation and psychosocial maladjustment (Prime et al., 2020; Walsh, 2016). The importance of family cohesion is of particular interest in the Indian sociocultural context where family has always been seen as a powerful force shaping the identity and behavior of its adolescent members, as the nuclear family increasingly replaces traditional joint families systems (Kagitcibasi, 2013; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Although the relationship between family cohesion and psychosocial functioning is broadly known, the internal processes by which family environments impact on adolescents' outcomes have not been studied to the same extent. Within this context, the concept of 'ego resiliency' theory, developed by Block and Block (1980) and implemented by Alessandri et al. (2012), provides a suitable paradigm to explain this mediated pathway. Ego resiliency refers to a person's ability to flexibly adjust to the demands of their environment, manage emotions, and achieve psychological balance in the face of challenges. In the framework of ego resiliency, the openness to life experiences is specifically about the adolescent's openness to novelty, willingness to accept uncertainty in life, willingness to learn from new situations, and adaptive and flexible responses to change (Alessandri et al., 2012). Theoretically, this disposition supports cognitive-affective flexibility theory and is correlated with resilient adaptation, positive emotionality, and better psychosocial adaptation (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; McCrae, 2010).

The hypothesis that openness to life experiences mediates the family cohesion-psychosocial functioning relationship is theoretically grounded. Emotionally supportive family environments can facilitate adolescents' willingness to engage in life experiences, as they have a secure base from which to explore the world (Bowlby, 1969; Alessandri et al., 2016). Adolescents growing up in high cohesion families can become more curious, psychologically flexible and open, leading to more adaptive psychosocial functioning (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Notwithstanding this theoretical consistency, there is a lack of empirical tests of this mediated pathway, especially among the adolescent population in India. Also, gender is an important moderating context for family dynamics and in adolescence for personality development. There is emerging evidence that adolescent girls and adolescent boys may have different family cohesion experiences, their adaptive response to these experiences (ego resilience), and how family experiences relate to psychosocial outcomes (Hyde, 2014; Weisberg et al., 2011). Gender differences may exist in the nature and strength of mediation pathways, with girls exhibiting more relational orientations and internalising response patterns, and boys showing a more externalised coping profile (Weisberg et al., 2011; Hyde, 2014). To fill these gaps, the present study tests a theoretically informed mediation model, where openness to life experiences can be the link between family cohesion and psychosocial functioning, with a gender as an analytical lens. In particular, the following hypotheses are tested in the study: H1: Family cohesion will

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significantly and positively predict adolescent psychosocial functioning. The family cohesion will predict adolescents' openness to life experiences significantly and positively. Family cohesion will not mediate the relationship between openness to life experiences and psychosocial functioning: the relationship will be significant and positive. The hypothesis is that family cohesion will be a significant mediator between openness to life experiences and psychosocial functioning. There will be gender differences in the mediation pattern for male and female adolescents.

### METHOD

#### *Participants and Sampling*

The current study utilizes a purposively selected subsample of 100 adolescents (50 males, 50 females) drawn from a larger initial data collection pool (N = 300) to ensure strictly balanced gender and age-group quotas for comparative mediation analysis. The adolescents who participated were school going (aged 10-19 years) as per the definition of WHO (2023). This included equal numbers from early adolescence (10-13 years), middle adolescence (14-16 years) and late adolescence (17-19 years). The respondents were all from nuclear family system and they were living with both parents and attending urban co-educational English medium schools in Jaipur, Rajasthan, India. The participants were eliminated if they were diagnosed with cognitive, psychological, or neurological disorders or if they did not understand English well. School authorities and parents/legal guardians were informed and legal government consent was obtained and participants were given assent. All participants were given the option to participate and confidentiality was guaranteed during the process.

#### *Measures*

- **Family Cohesion:** Family cohesion was measured with the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales – III (FACES III; Olson, 1985) Cohesion Subscale. Items in the subscale are each rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Almost Never," 5 = "Almost Always" around the family, and a higher score represents higher family cohesion perceived by the child. The FACES III is psychometrically sound, with generally high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's ranging from .77 to .83) and good construct validity across a variety of populations (Olson, 2011). The dimensions of emotional closeness, time together, shared support, trust, and shared problem solving are measured in the present study within the family.
- **Openness to Life Experiences:** The Ego Resiliency Scale–Revised (ERS-R; Alessandri et al., 2012) was used to assess openness to life experiences, with the corresponding subscale. ERS-R is a 10-item tool that measures the following two factors of ego resiliency: Optimal Regulation (5 items) and Openness to Life Experiences (5 items). Items are scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Does not apply at all, 7 = Applies very strongly). Higher scores on the Openness subscale indicate a greater openness to novelty, openness to change, and cognitive-emotional flexibility. In adolescent samples, the ERS-R has been shown to have good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .80$ ) and construct validity (Alessandri et al., 2012). The Openness subscale score was used as the variable between the two.
- **Psychosocial Functioning:** Adolescents' Psychosocial Functioning Inventory (APFI; Akpa et al, 2015) was used to assess psychosocial functioning. The APFI is a 23 item inventory with three scales: Optimism and Coping Strategy (OCS; 9 items), Behaviour and Relationship Problems (BRP; 7 items), and General Psychosocial Dysfunction (GPD; 7 items). Items are rated on a 5 point Likert Scale. Higher OCS scores are associated with adaptive optimism and adaptive coping and higher BRP

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and GPD scores are associated with greater psychosocial problems. A composite psychosocial functioning score (PSF) was created as a composite of OCS – BRP – GPD, where higher scores on PSF indicate better social functioning. The APFI has been found to have internal consistency values (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) that range from .57 to .90 for each subscale and the instrument has demonstrated adequate convergent validity with other clinical measures of adolescent mental health (Akpa et al., 2015).

### *Procedure*

Self-report questionnaires were administered to groups in the classroom during regular school hours. Research assistants were on hand to answer questions and to assure uniform administration. Participants filled out a short demographic information sheet followed by the FACES III, ERS-R, and APFI in a counterbalanced order. The data collection period took two school terms. All raw data were entered, cleaned and organized then the analysis was reported in this paper.

### *Statistical Analysis*

Analysis of data was performed in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 20.0) and custom Python scripts for computing Sobel test. All the variables were subjected to descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations). Bivariate relationships between the family cohesion, openness to life experiences and psychosocial functioning and their subscores were examined using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Independent samples *t*-tests were used to determine any gender differences on all the key variables. We used the four-step Baron-Kenny (1986) mediation analysis and the Sobel test for mediation indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The Baron and Kenny framework demands that demonstration of the following be made: (1) The independent variable (family cohesion) predicts the dependent variable (PSF; path *c*); (2) The independent variable predicts the mediator (openness; path *a*); (3) The mediator predicts the dependent variable controlling for the independent variable (path *b*); and (4) The direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is reduced when the mediator is included (path *c'*). The Sobel test (*z* statistic) was used to determine the indirect effect ( $a \times b$ ) at the  $p < .05$  level of significance. The percentage of the total effect mediated was determined by dividing  $a \times b$  by  $c$  by 100. Gender based mediation models were tested for male and female sub-groups separately.

## **RESULTS**

### *Descriptive Statistics and Gender Differences*

Table 1 gives descriptive statistics for all key variables among all respondents as well as by gender. Family cohesion ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ) and openness to life experiences ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) were both in the moderate range for the respective scales in the sample ( $N = 100$ ). There was a near-average composite psychosocial functioning score ( $M = 0.05$ ,  $SD = 2.92$ ) across the sample. There was no difference in female and male adolescents' scores on the Coping Strategy scale ( $M_{\text{males}} = -0.16$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ;  $M_{\text{females}} = 0.14$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ;  $t(98) = -0.96$ ,  $p = .336$ ,  $d = -0.42$ ), but male adolescents' scores were significantly higher on the Optimism scale ( $M_{\text{males}} = 0.26$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ;  $M_{\text{females}} = -0.24$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ;  $t(98) = 2.11$ ,  $p = .037$ ,  $d = 0.42$ ). Overall psychosocial profiles of the male and female adolescents were similar, with no statistically significant gender differences in family cohesion ( $t(98) = 1.15$ ,  $p = .254$ ), openness to life experiences ( $t(98) = 1.18$ ,  $p = .242$ ), behaviour and relationship problems ( $t(98) = -0.49$ ,  $p = .627$ ), general psychosocial dysfunction ( $t(98) = -1.19$ ,  $p = .237$ ), or the composite PSF score ( $t(98) = 1.54$ ,  $p = .126$ ).

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**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables by Gender (N = 100)**

Variable	Full Sample M (SD)	Males M (SD)	Females M (SD)	t	p	Cohen's d
Family Cohesion	3.07 (0.77)	3.16 (0.80)	2.98 (0.74)	1.15	.254	0.23
Openness to Life Exp.	3.03 (0.75)	3.11 (0.72)	2.94 (0.78)	1.18	.242	0.23
Ego Resiliency	3.00 (0.72)	3.13 (0.73)	2.87 (0.69)	1.78	.078	0.37
OCS	0.01 (1.20)	0.26 (1.01)	-0.24 (1.33)	2.11	.037*	0.42
BRP	-0.08 (1.23)	-0.14 (1.22)	-0.02 (1.25)	-0.49	.627	0.10
GPD	0.04 (1.16)	-0.10 (1.19)	0.18 (1.12)	-1.19	.237	0.20
PSF (Composite)	0.05 (2.92)	0.50 (2.65)	-0.40 (3.13)	1.54	.126	0.31

Note. OCS = Optimism and Coping Strategy; BRP = Behaviour and Relationship Problems; GPD = General Psychosocial Dysfunction; PSF = Composite Psychosocial Functioning – (OCS – BRP – GPD). \*  $p < .05$ . Mean Scores for OCS, BRP, GPD, and PSF represent mean-centered values, not raw scale scores.

**Correlation Analysis**

Intercorrelations of all key variables for the total sample are reported in Table 2. Family cohesion was significantly positively correlated with openness to life experiences ( $r = .505$ ,  $p < .001$ ), psychosocial functioning ( $r = .515$ ,  $p < .001$ ), OCS ( $r = .582$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and negatively correlated with BRP ( $r = -.398$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and GPD ( $r = -.271$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Openness to life experiences showed significant positive correlations with psychosocial functioning ( $r = .594$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and OCS ( $r = .644$ ,  $p < .001$ ); and significant negative correlations with BRP ( $r = -.425$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and GPD ( $r = -.378$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These patterns suggest that positive overall psychosocial adaptation was related to family cohesion and openness to life experiences. Gender-specific correlations corroborated these trends. Among males, family cohesion correlated significantly with openness ( $r = .521$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and PSF ( $r = .483$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and openness correlated with PSF ( $r = .549$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For females, similar associations were found: family cohesion with openness ( $r = .480$ ,  $p < .001$ ); family cohesion with PSF ( $r = .537$ ,  $p < .001$ ); and openness with PSF ( $r = .618$ ,  $p < .001$ ), respectively, with the openness–PSF relationship being slightly stronger in females than in males.

**Table 2 Pearson Correlations among Key Variables (N = 100)**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Family Cohesion	—						
2. Openness to Life Exp.	.505**	—					
3. Ego Resiliency	.629**	.821**	—				
4. PSF	.515**	.594**	.737**	—			
5. OCS	.582**	.644**	.739**	.818**	—		
6. BRP	-.398**	-.425**	-.537**	-.807**	-.475**	—	
7. GPD	-.271**	-.378**	-.520**	-.813**	-.521**	.475**	—

Note. PSF = Composite Psychosocial Functioning; OCS = Optimism and Coping Strategy; BRP = Behaviour and Relationship Problems; GPD = General Psychosocial Dysfunction. \*\*  $p < .01$ .

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**Mediation Analysis**

The mediation analysis results for the entire sample (N = 100) are reported in Table 3, based on Baron and Kenny (1986). Step 1 confirmed that family cohesion significantly predicted psychosocial functioning (path c:  $b = 1.949$ ,  $SE = 0.327$ ,  $t(98) = 5.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .266$ ), supporting H1. Step 2 confirmed that family cohesion significantly predicted openness to life experiences (path a:  $b = 0.491$ ,  $SE = 0.085$ ,  $t(98) = 5.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .255$ ), supporting H2. H3 was confirmed as the openness to life experiences was a significant predictor of psychosocial functioning, even after controlling for family cohesion (path b:  $b = 1.745$ ,  $SE = 0.350$ ,  $t(97) = 4.98$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .415$ ). This direct effect of family cohesion on PSF was partially mediated (path c':  $b = 1.092$ ,  $SE = 0.340$ ,  $t(97) = 3.21$ ,  $p = .002$ ). To test H4, the indirect effect of family cohesion on psychosocial functioning via openness to life experiences was statistically significant, with Sobel test results of indirect effect = 0.856,  $SE = 0.227$ ,  $z = 3.78$ ,  $p < .001$ . This indirect effect was significant, representing 43.9% of the total effect ( $0.856 / 1.949 \times 100$ ).

**Table 3 Mediation Analysis: Family Cohesion → Openness to Life Experiences → Psychosocial Functioning (N = 100)**

Path	b	SE	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>	Effect
<b>c: Cohesion → PSF (Total)</b>	1.949	0.327	5.95	< .001	.266	Total
<b>a: Cohesion → Openness</b>	0.491	0.085	5.80	< .001	.255	Path a
<b>b: Openness → PSF (ctrl. Cohesion)</b>	1.745	0.350	4.98	< .001	.415	Path b
<b>c': Cohesion → PSF (Direct, ctrl. Openness)</b>	1.092	0.340	3.21	.002	.415	Direct
<b>Indirect Effect (a × b)</b>	0.856	0.227	—	—	—	43.9% of total
<b>Sobel Test: z = 3.78, p &lt; .001</b>						Partial Mediation

*Note.* PSF = Composite Psychosocial Functioning Score. SE = Standard Error.

**Gender-Based Mediation Analysis**

For H5, mediation models were estimated in male and female subgroups. The results are shown in Table 4. For male adolescents (n = 50), family cohesion significantly predicted psychosocial functioning (path c:  $b = 1.592$ ,  $SE = 0.416$ ,  $t(48) = 3.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .234$ ) and openness to life experiences (path a:  $b = 0.465$ ,  $SE = 0.110$ ,  $t(48) = 4.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Openness significantly predicted PSF after controlling for family cohesion (path b:  $b = 1.505$ ,  $SE = 0.506$ ,  $t(47) = 2.97$ ,  $p = .005$ ). The direct effect of family cohesion became non significant (path c':  $b = 0.892$ ,  $SE = 0.452$ ,  $t(47) = 1.98$ ,  $p = .054$ ), indicating full mediation. The Sobel test confirming a significant indirect effect (indirect = 0.699,  $z = 2.43$ ,  $p = .015$ ), accounting for 43.9% of the total effect. For female adolescents (n = 50), family cohesion significantly predicted both psychosocial functioning (path c:  $b = 2.283$ ,  $SE = 0.518$ ,  $t(48) = 4.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .288$ ) and openness (path a:  $b = 0.507$ ,  $SE = 0.134$ ,  $t(48) = 3.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Openness significantly predicted PSF after controlling for cohesion (path b:  $b = 1.883$ ,  $SE = 0.493$ ,  $t(47) = 3.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For the females, the direct effect of family cohesion was also statistically significant (path c':  $b = 1.328$ ,  $SE = 0.521$ ,  $t(47) = 2.55$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $R^2 = .457$ ) and showed significant direct pathway along with the indirect path. The Sobel test confirmed that there was a significant indirect effect for females (indirect = 0.954,  $z = 2.69$ ,  $p = .007$ ) and this accounted for 41.8% of the total effect.

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**Table 4 Gender-Based Mediation Analysis: Family Cohesion → Openness to Life Experiences → Psychosocial Functioning**

Path	Male (n = 50)				Female (n = 50)				
	b	SE	t	p	R <sup>2</sup>	b	SE	t	p
<b>c:</b> <b>Cohesion</b> → PSF (Total)	1.59 2	0.416	3.83	< .001	R <sup>2</sup> =.23 4	2.28 3	0.518	4.41	< .001
<b>a:</b> <b>Cohesion</b> → <b>Openness</b>	0.46 5	0.110	4.22	< .001		0.50 7	0.134	3.79	< .001
<b>b:</b> <b>Openness</b> → PSF (ctrl)	1.50 5	0.506	2.97	.005	R <sup>2</sup> =.35 5	1.88 3	0.493	3.82	< .001
<b>c':</b> <b>Cohesion</b> → PSF (Direct)	0.89 2	0.452	1.98	.054†		1.32 8	0.521	2.55	.014*
<b>Indirect</b> <b>(a×b)</b>	0.69 9		z=2.4 3	.015	43.9% of total	0.95 4		z=2.6 9	.007
<b>Type of</b> <b>Mediation</b> <b>n</b>		Full	(Non- Sig.)	direct			(Partial Sig.)	direct)	41.8 %

Note. †  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; PSF = Composite Psychosocial Functioning. Females  $R^2 = .457$  for full model.

**DISCUSSION**

In the present study, an intervening variable, namely Openness to Life Experiences was investigated between Family Cohesion and the psych-social functioning of Indian adolescents, across gender. The results were generally consistent with the hypothesized model, and provide several theoretically interesting and practically useful contributions.

**Family Cohesion and Psychosocial Functioning**

As in H1 and previous research (Olson, 2011; Prime et al., 2020; Walsh, 2016), family cohesion was a significant positive predictor of adolescent psychosocial functioning with 26.6% of the variance being explained. The result is consistent with Family Systems Theory (Minuchin, 1974) which suggests that the emotional environment in the family is the major context in which children's psychologies develop. In the Indian context of family relationships, where family cohesion is tightly linked to collectivist values and norms of interdependence (Kagitcibasi, 2013), family environments may play a dual role: to offer instrumental support and to reinforce family cultural identity, which in turn may help to mediate psychosocial distress. These moderately positive correlations, between family cohesion and OCS ( $r = .582$ ) as well as between family cohesion and the negative association with BRP ( $r = -.398$ ) and GPD ( $r = -.271$ ) reflect attachment theory thinking on parenting and adolescent development (Kobak et al., 2017), indicating that cohesive families promote both adaptive coping and decrease maladaptive behavioural patterns.

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### ***Family Cohesion and Openness to Life Experiences***

The positivity and significance of the support received from H2 were positively and significantly associated with openness to life experiences ( $b = 0.491$ ,  $R^2 = .255$ ). The results are consistent with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), which suggests that a secure family attachment offers a secure base for adolescents to seek out and experience new things. Adolescents are more likely to grow confident in their abilities to interact adaptively with the world when family members are emotionally available, supportive and trusting (Kassandri et al., 2016; Walsh, 2016). The fact that the correlation between family cohesion and openness accounts for about one-quarter of the variance in this adaptive personality disposition during adolescence demonstrates the importance of the family's constituent role in the development of this dimension in the adolescent.

### ***Mediating Role of Openness to Life Experiences***

The central hypothesis (H4) was supported: Opening-up to life experiences partially mediated the relationship between family cohesion and psychosocial functioning (indirect effect 0.856; Sobel  $z = 3.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ), accounting for 43.9% of the total effect. This is the first report in the Indian adolescent literature, and adds values to understanding the psychological pathways by which family context influences developmental outcomes. Although partial mediation suggests that family cohesion does have a direct link to psychosocial functioning beyond the effect of openness to life experiences, this direct link also exists and therefore additional mediators could be explored in future research (e.g., self-esteem, social support and coping self-efficacy). Theoretically, these findings suggest a developmental asset framework (Masten, 2014) whereby a cohesive family environment fosters internal psychological assets such as openness, curiosity, and cognitive-affective flexibility, which lead to psychologically safe family environments, which protect against psychosocial difficulties. Ego resiliency theory (Alessandri et al., 2012) describes the capacity of adolescents to engage in stressors with adaptable rather than rigid responses, which can help them to better regulate their emotions and help them cope, relate to others, and process stress. The very high correlation between openness and ego resiliency ( $r = .821$ ) provides further evidence of the theoretical consistency of the construct with the overall construct of resilience.

### ***Gender-Based Differences***

The gender-based analyses were nuanced support for H5. Adolescents showed significant mediation, with important differences between the direct effects, which were stronger in male than female adolescents. The direct effect of family cohesion on PSF was only slightly significant ( $p = .054$ ) following the inclusion of openness as a mediator, implying that for male adolescents the impact of family cohesion on PSF is more robustly mediated by openness to life experiences as a channel. For the female adolescents, the direct effect was statistically significant ( $p = .014$ ), suggesting that family cohesion still had an independent effect on the psychosocial outcome of girls, even after controlling for the effects of openness. The more direct route for females could be due to gender-differences in style of socialisation into greater relational sensitivity and internalised family environment quality (Hyde, 2014; Weisberg et al., 2011). The finding that males scored significantly higher on OCS ( $t = 2.11$ ,  $p = .037$ ) is consistent with well-established gender patterns of coping and positive affect during adolescence (Hyde, 2014; Weisberg et al., 2011) indicating that males may be more likely to use externalised coping strategies than females. For both genders the indirect effect was numerically larger for the female (0.954) and explained a similar proportion of variance (41.8%), implying the role of openness to life experiences is

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consistent for both genders, but with different residual direct effects. These results highlight the need to examine family–adolescent relationships with a gendered lens, and not assume universal trajectories (Weisberg et al., 2011).

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations in the present study. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences, which could be made with a longitudinal design. Second, the purposive sampling of the urban English-medium school students in Jaipur restricts the generalisability to multilingual and/or economically challenged adolescent populations and/or to the rural population. Third, the gender variable was coded according to data organisation in the larger study and was not field checked in this sub-sample analysis. Fourth, using self-report instruments brings the possibility of common method variance and social desirability bias. Fifth and last, although informative, the Sobel test is less powerful for detecting mediation in small samples than are the procedures suggested by bootstrapping (Preacher & Hayes, 2008); future studies should use the bootstrap-based confidence intervals. Last, the mediation model only included one mediator, and a more elaborate model that includes other mediators, such as peer support or self-esteem, may account for further variation in psychosocial function.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that family cohesion is related to psychosocial functioning in adolescents, partially mediated by openness to life experiences, and with a significant gender-based nuance. The positive psychosocial outcomes seem to be obtained through adolescents' dispositional openness, which is fostered by cohesive family environments. The findings point to the need to promote supportive and strong family environments as an important developmentally sensitive intervention context, especially within the Indian sociocultural context wherein families' structures are rapidly changing. Practically, school counsellors, mental health professionals, and parents can use the results of this study to create gender-responsive family-based programs for adolescents that focus on the family climate and on developing healthy personality traits. This model needs to be extended in future studies with the use of longitudinal designs, various sampling procedures and culturally appropriate instruments to further understand these pathways in the developmental psychology of Indians.

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