

Family Environment and Life Satisfaction of Adolescents

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Abstract: *Parents are the primary source of influence for a child. How the parents present things shapes their lives. Equally important is the environment of the family that the child is reared in, the social climate within the family. Life satisfaction is defined as the evaluation one makes in his life in general and what they feel about the directions that they are taking. As the family is the major source of creating happiness and positivity in life leading to satisfaction with life's conditions, as it was desired to study the relationship between family environment and life satisfaction.*

The sample for the present study consisted of 50 college going adolescents residing in Bhopal city. Family Environment Scale by Moos & Moos (1974) and Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Diener et al (1985) were employed to assess family environment and life satisfaction. It was expected that there would be a positive correlation between life satisfaction and family environment.

Key Words: *Life satisfaction, family environment, adolescents.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Human is an objective creature always evaluating his life situation. He will feel no satisfaction until he gains his goals. Perhaps, it can be said that the final aspiration of every human being is to attain his goals and desires and this attainment leads to life satisfaction. Therefore, Life Satisfaction is the central aspect of human welfare. It is ultimate goal and every human being strives to achieve this goal throughout the life.

Life satisfaction is a multidimensional concept related to psychological and environmental life conditions. The term life satisfaction can be split into two words-life and satisfaction. Life is the state of functional activity peculiar to organized matter and especially to the portion of it such as, constituting on animal or plant before death (Oxford Dictionary, 1990). Life is what one's thinking makes it, one makes it human or hell through one's thinking (Bartlett, 1986). Satisfaction is a Latin word that means to make or do enough. Satisfaction is a word difficult to define. Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of English Language (1977) defines it as an "act of satisfying or state of being satisfied, contentment in possession and enjoyment; and to satisfy is to gratify fully the wants, wishes or desires of any to supply to the full extent, with what is wished for". In general, the word satisfaction is defined as fulfillment or gratification of desires, feelings or expressing pleasures, happiness, contentment and optimism. It is the knack of finding a positive for every negative. Satisfaction wholly depends upon the individuals' environment, caliber, behavior and nature. It is more concerned with mind than the material world. Family environment involves the circumstances and social climatic conditions within the family. It tells us about the family's values and traditions and how it affects the development of child. Family environment affects level of life satisfaction of adolescents as, if family has healthy and loving environment it will have a positive effect on child's development.

Life satisfaction is attainment of a desired end and fulfillment of essential conditions (Wolman, 1973). Satisfaction in life does not lie in the length of days, but in the use we make of them. A man may live long yet may get little from life. Thus satisfaction in life does not depend on number of years, but on will (Bartlett, 1977). It is a degree of contentment with one's own life style.

Psychologically, satisfaction may occur on a conscious, preconscious and unconscious level and brings an organism to a balanced state (Goldenson, 1984). Satisfaction with one's life implies a contentment with 'or' acceptance of one's life circumstances, or the fulfillment of one's wants and needs for one's life as a whole. Life satisfaction is the conscious and cognitive judgement of one's life in which the criteria of judgement are upto the person (Pavot & Diener, 1993). It is frequently uttered that the persons sharing the view that life has a meaning, goal and direction, are the ones having optimal life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is defined as a cognitive evaluation of one's life as a whole and/or of specific life domains (Huebner et al., 2005; Myers and Diener, 1995). In contrast to a wealth of research on the life satisfaction of adults, few studies of life satisfaction in children and adolescents have been conducted (Huebner, 1994; Park and Huebner, 2005). Subjective well-being is generally considered to be comprised of three interrelated but distinct factors, namely the relative presence of positive affect, absence of negative affect and perceived quality of life, or life satisfaction (Huebner et al., 2004). In general, most adolescents report positive global life satisfaction (Huebner et al., 2005). While studies have been carried out to examine perceived economic stress in parents and adults, perceived economic

stress in adolescents has been rarely researched. Furthermore, few researchers have used measures of positive mental health as developmental outcome indicators related to economic hardship (Shek, 2005c). Research on positive outcomes among at-risk youth of- 548 ten referred as "resilient" has attempted to define the features of the individual or the environment that may function as protective factors in the context of significant threats to development (Masten, 1994; Masten et al., 1999). Among these are stable emotional relationships with at least one parent, social support from persons outside family and experiences of self- efficacy and positive self-esteem (Loesel et al., 1989). The relationships between risk factors such as economic disadvantage, protective factors such as social support and self-esteem, and well-being as an outcome are usually described in additive or interactive models (Kirby and Fraser, 1997). Additive models, in which protective factors are said to exhibit main or direct effects, posit that the presence of a protective factor directly increases the likelihood of a positive outcome. According to buffering hypothesis (interactive model), protective factors have an effect in interaction with risk factors and their effect emerges when stress is high. In the current study, we focused on differential and interactive influences of individual, family and environmental variables on adolescent perceived quality of life. We examined the relations between life satisfaction in adolescents and various socio-demographic variables, perceived family economic status, quality of family functioning, parental parenthood qualities, support from a close friend and adolescents' global self-worth. We aimed to determine to what extent certain objective indicators of quality of life, aspects of social relationships and personal variables predict adolescent life satisfaction as well as to examine to what extent quality of relationships with significant others (parents and peers) and personal resources (self-esteem) moderate the effects of perceived economic disadvantages on adolescent life satisfaction.

In most of the societies about a century ago, the family was the most valued system in almost all spheres of life and human living. Family is the only institution which provides the security and support without any rewards in return. The effectiveness of family functioning in conditioning the children's personality and social development has an outstanding importance (Roelfse and Middleton, 1985). The family interactions play an important role in the development of an individual. These interactions and interpersonal relationships are seen between parents, parent and child, siblings, and any other relative or person living in the household. The healthy functioning of these interaction patterns enhances mental health of the individual Children need a happy and stable family environment and a conductive social network for their overall growth and development. Yet, happy families are not happy all the time. Disagreements and conflicts are a necessary part of living closely together. Both love and hate are to be expected in the intensity of family life and peers interactions, but it is the way negative emotions are handled that makes a difference to family life and social interactions (Parke and Buriel, 1998). Parenting has long been recognized as making an important contribution to the development of competencies and problem behavior among children and adolescents. However, recently researchers have begun to develop attention to understanding variations in parenting in different cultures and how it is related to psychosocial outcomes in children and adolescents (Murry et al., 2001). Recent studies investigating parenting in different cultures have pointed to several important patterns regarding linkages between parenting strategies and psychosocial outcomes (Barber et al., 2003). Research has shown that family dynamics is one of the most important elements affecting healthy child development. Positive family functioning can help mitigate the influence of other factors in child development, such as family income and family structure (Schaffer, 1998). Research shows that both overall family system functioning and parental behaviors are positively related to adolescent well-being (Grotevant, 1998; Karavasilis et al., 2003; Kauffman et al., 2000; Miyamoto et al., 2001; Muris et al., 2004; Wolfradt et al., 2002). Cultural factors have been also found to affect adolescent mental health. Culture through parenting and societal norms and beliefs, plays an important role in adolescent behavior (Diaz, 2005). Culture influences the lives of adolescents in many ways: language, values, beliefs, as well as social norms and expectations. Through an adolescent's own experience of familial and cultural norms, he/she learns how to control culturally acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. In addition, culture affects parenting strategies, and the development of emotions and self-concept, which are all key components of adolescents' lives. The majority of recent studies have shown the significant effects of cultural variations in parenting on stress, psychosomatic symptoms, self-esteem, adjustment, and general well-being among adolescents (Barnes et al., 2000; Bean et al., 2003; Carlson et al., 2000; Dekovic, 1999; Halloran et al., 2002; Henry, 1994; Sartor and Youniss, 2002; Turner and Lapan, 2002). The concept of well-being is sometimes used interchangeably with the term, happiness, although focus has been on other aspects, as well (Natvig et al., 2003). Child and youth life satisfaction research has focused on the study of life satisfaction as an outcome variable, that is, most studies have investigated assumed determinants of individual differences in life satisfaction. Such studies have revealed a wide ranging network of associated variables (Gilman and Huebner, 2003). These variables include family, peer, neighborhood, self-related (personality, cognitive attributions), and activity (participation in structure extra curricular activities) variables. Demographic variables (gender, socioeconomic status) appear to play a very modest role at best in child or youth global life satisfaction reports. Many studies reported that psychological beliefs such as optimism, personal control, and a sense of meaning are known to be protective of mental health (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, 2001, 2002; Hagquist, 1998; Huebner, 2004; Huebner et al., 2000; Roelfse and Middleton, 1985; Sirohi, 2002; Taylor,

2000). Regarding to what was mentioned above, here, this research aimed to study perceived family environment and positive mental states viz. happiness, optimism and hope among the adolescents of two different cultures, Iran and India. The main aims and objectives of this study are: 1- To study the relationship of adolescents' perceived family environment with positive mental states viz. happiness, optimism and hope. 2- To make a cross-cultural comparison among adolescents of Iran and India on perceived family environment and positive mental states viz. happiness, optimism and hope. 3- To study gender differences among adolescents of Iran and India on perceived family environment and positive mental states viz. happiness, optimism and hope.

2. HYPOTHESES:

There will be a positive correlation between life satisfaction and family environment of adolescents.

3. SAMPLE:

The total sample for the present sample consists of 50 college-going adolescents residing in Bhopal city. No categorization on the basis on gender was done for the selection on the sample. The sampling was done through convenience sampling.

4. TOOLS:

Family Environment Scale by Moos & Moos (2002)

The Family Environment Scale was constructed and standardized by Moos & Moos (2002). The scale consists of 90 items belonging to 10 different areas: cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, independence, achievement orientation, intellectual-cultural orientation, active-recreational orientation, moral-religious emphasis, organization and control. Internal consistency reliability estimates for form R subscale ranges from 0.61-0.78. The face and content validity of the instrument are supported by clear statements about family situations that relate to subscale domains. Evidence of construct validity is present in the form of comparisons of distressed and normal family samples, comparisons of parent responses with those of their adolescent children etc.

Life Satisfaction Index A by Neugarten, Havingurst & Tobin (1961). The alpha internal consistency ranges from 0.79-0.90 and showed strong correlations with other scales measuring life satisfaction ranging from 0.55-0.59.

5. PROCEDURE:

The subjects selected for the study were approached and their cooperation was solicited. After giving appropriate instructions, the questionnaires were handed over to be filled by the subject. While taking the sheets back, it was ensured that the subjects had marked a response for each statement. Following which, the subject was debriefed and thanked for their cooperation.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The result of the study is found to be positive. The mean for family environment scale is = 49.56 and standard deviation is = 4.96. the mean for life satisfaction scale is = 12.1 and standard deviation is = 2.58. There is a high correlation between both of them which is = 0.48 . Hence, the hypotheses is accepted. As there is a positive correlation between family environment and life satisfaction of adolescents, it can be said that they are satisfied with what they have and how the way they are living and the way they are treated at home. Also, they have a very positive family environment which means they have very supportive parents who help them with their problems. Adolescents are happy with their family as their parents understanding and they allow their children to fulfill their dreams and hobbies in any of the fields they want may it be cultural, sports, etc. Families are also outgoing of most of the participants and they happily take interest and part in cultural and art work and encourage their children to take part. Hence, it can be concluded by saying that most there is a correlation between family environment and life satisfaction and the understanding and adjustment level of adolescents can be seen. Furthermore, it was also seen as the satisfaction level of the adolescents was high they did their work more effectively and efficiently.

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