

# The Relationship between Family Stress and Social-Emotional Learning in Adolescence: A Comparative Study

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## **Abstract**

*Adolescence is the most important phase of human life as it is the period where an individual explore oneself and its surroundings. In this phase of life, adolescents look for family and peer support to guide them through this process of identification and exploration. To facilitate adolescents through this expedition, understanding and incorporation of social-emotional learning competencies are very essential. Therefore, the present study aimed to determine the relationship between family stress and social-emotional learning among adolescents. For this purpose, 500 adolescents were selected from government schools and Scale of Family Stress by Bisht (2005) was administered to measure the level of family stress. The results of the study indicated that majority of the adolescents were observed at average level of family stress. Significantly more number of adolescents from nuclear families were noted at high level of family stress which signifies that adolescents from nuclear families had more family stress. Further, social-emotional learning was non-significantly negatively correlated with overall family stress in overall adolescents and adolescents from nuclear families. Social-emotional learning had non-significant positive correlation with overall family stress in adolescents from joint families.*

**Keywords:** Family stress, joint family, nuclear family, adolescents, social-emotional learning

Reference to this paper  
should be made as  
follows:

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Seema Sharma**

*The Relationship  
between Family Stress  
and Social-Emotional  
Learning in  
Adolescence: A  
Comparative Study*

Journal Global Values,  
Vol. XI, No.II  
Article No.26, pp.209-217  
[https://anubooks.com/  
jgv-vol-xi-no-2-july-  
dec-2020/](https://anubooks.com/jgv-vol-xi-no-2-july-dec-2020/)

[https://doi.org/  
10.31995/  
jgv.2020.v11i02.026](https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2020.v11i02.026)

## **Introduction**

The significance of family as a unit in making and shaping an individual and persuading social groups and outlines has been documented by social scientists. Family is the central and universal social organization of human culture. In existing scenario, the structure and purpose of a family has undergone adaptive transformation. Family is a key source of care, nurturance, emotional attachment and socialization and determines individual's development (Bahadur and Dhawan 2008).

Adolescence, a “storm-and-stress” period (Hall 1904) as they deal with challenges of puberty, coping with new feelings and meeting changing expectations (Aggarwal *et al* 2007). Individuals are not born with a predetermined set of social-emotional learning competencies. These competencies are malleable as parents and family members play a noteworthy part in developing and enhancing the learning environments in which adolescents grow, develop, and learn (Ikesako & Miyamoto 2015) which ultimately promotes social-emotional development (Robin 2000). Family stress is defined as any stressor that creates uneasiness for one or more family members or entire family at a specific point of time. These concerns have an impact on emotional connection between family members and their well-being, mood, as well as safeguarding of the family ties (Randall & Bodenmann 2012).

A research study done by Ngai and Cheung (2000) investigated family stress among adolescents studying in grade 8 through grade 10. The results indicated that adolescent experienced less family stress and more family support. A research study by Naik and Shukla (2018) examined the impact of home environment on interactional effect of social and emotional intelligence among adolescents. The findings pointed out that home environment had an impact on social and emotional intelligence of adolescents. Thus, it could be suggested that home environment is considered as one important factor in enhancing social and emotional intelligence of adolescents. Therefore, the present study was planned to determine the relationship between family stress and social-emotional learning among adolescents in joint families and nuclear families.

## **Materials and Methods**

The sample of the present study comprised of 500 school going adolescents of which 250 adolescents were from joint families and 250 adolescents were from nuclear families. The age range of adolescents was 13-14 years and participants were randomly selected from eight government schools of Ludhiana City of Punjab. The objectives of the study were explained to all the selected participants and consent from all the participants to take part in the study was also taken.

The research instrument, Bisht Battery of Stress Scales developed by Bisht (2005) was administered to measure the level of stress among adolescents. This battery had 13 sub-tests and out of 13 sub-scales, Scale of Family Stress (SFS) was used for the present study. Each sub-scale of battery measured four components of family stress viz. family frustration, family conflict, family pressure and family anxiety. Data gathered was analyzed by using suitable statistical techniques for instance frequency, percentage, Z-test, and Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Assessment of family stress among adolescents as per their family structure**

Data portrayed in the table 1 represents the frequency distribution of adolescents in relation to family structure across different dimensions of family stress. It was reflected that among total respondents in family frustration (frustration attributable to unpleasant family members' behaviour and health condition, home infrastructure and family rule system) dimension of family stress, majority of the adolescents were at average level (63.40%) followed by low level (25.40%) and high level (11.20%). It was indicated with regards to family composition that more number of adolescents from nuclear families (2.20;  $p < 0.05$ ) differ significantly at high level of family frustration as compared to adolescents from joint families. On the contrary, non-significant differences were found at average level (64.80%) and low level (28.40%) wherein adolescents belonging to joint families outweighed their counterparts.

Further investigation of data with respect to family structure on family conflict (conflict which arises owing to negative behaviour of family members which generates struggle in interpersonal interaction) dimension of family stress determined that most of the adolescents from joint families (2.25;  $p < 0.05$ ) had significant difference at average level in comparison to adolescents from nuclear families. However, non-significant differences were noticed at low level (50.80%) and high level (16.00%) wherein adolescents from nuclear families outnumbered their counterparts. Irrespective of the family structure, it was found that more percentage of adolescents were at low level (46.80%) followed by average level (40.20%) and high level (13.00%) of family conflict.

On the family pressure (pressure encountered by an individual at home in consequence of fulfilling family responsibilities, caring for others and detrimental family environment) dimension of family stress, it was noted that in overall sample, majority of the adolescents (60.40%) were at average level followed by low level (27.20%) and high level (12.40%). Further, with reference to family structure, non-

significant differences were observed at all the levels of family pressure wherein at average level (61.20%) and high level (15.20%), adolescents from nuclear families and at low level (30.80%), adolescents from joint families outnumbered when compared with their counterparts.

In the dimension of family anxiety (fear experienced due to dreadful condition of family for instance, presence of violence and ailing family members), the distribution of data indicated that significantly more percentage of adolescents living in nuclear families were at high level (2.05;  $p < 0.05$ ) in comparison to adolescents from joint families. On further examination, non-significant differences with regards to family structure were observed at average and low level of family anxiety. However, at both average level (72.40%) and low level (20.00%), adolescents from joint families outnumbered adolescent living in nuclear families. Further, the data regardless of family structure revealed that majority of the adolescents (71.00%) were observed to be at average level followed by low level (17.20%) and high level (11.80%) of family pressure dimension of family stress.

Data pertaining to the overall family stress (stress among family members due to disequilibrium in family system) reflected that there were significant differences with respect to family structure in the distribution of adolescents at high and low level. It was noted that significantly higher percentage of adolescents from nuclear families (2.08;  $p < 0.05$ ) were at high level of overall family stress, whereas adolescents living in joint families were significantly more in number at low level (2.84;  $p < 0.01$ ) of overall family stress when compared with their counterparts. Though, non-significant difference was noted at average level but the analysis revealed that adolescents from nuclear families (68.80%) outnumbered adolescents from joint families. It was imperative to note that in overall respondents, most of the adolescents (68.00%) were found at average level followed by high level (19.20%) and low level (12.80%) of overall family stress.

**Table 1: Per cent distribution of the adolescents as per their family structure across different dimensions of family stress**

Dimensions of Family Stress	Levels	Joint Families (n <sub>1</sub> = 250)		Nuclear Families (n <sub>2</sub> = 250)		Z-value	Total respondents (n= 500)	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		<i>f</i>	%
Family Frustration	Low	71	28.40	56	22.40	1.09	127	25.40
	Average	162	64.80	155	62.00	0.46	317	63.40
	High	17	6.80	39	15.60	2.20*	56	11.20
Family Conflict	Low	107	42.80	127	50.80	1.26	234	46.80
	Average	118	47.20	83	33.20	2.25*	201	40.20
	High	25	10.00	40	16.00	1.41	65	13.00
Family Pressure	Low	77	30.80	59	23.60	1.27	136	27.20
	Average	149	59.60	153	61.20	0.25	302	60.40
	High	24	9.60	38	15.20	1.34	62	12.40
Family Anxiety	Low	50	20.00	36	14.40	1.17	86	17.20
	Average	181	72.40	174	69.60	0.48	355	71.00
	High	19	7.60	40	16.00	2.05*	59	11.80
Overall Family Stress	Low	47	18.80	17	6.80	2.84**	64	12.80
	Average	168	67.20	172	68.80	0.27	340	68.00
	High	35	14.00	61	24.40	2.08*	96	19.20

Note: \*Significant at 5% level, \*\*Significant at 1% level

### Comparison of family stress among adolescents as per their family structure

The presentation of data in the table 2 gives a picture of the mean difference across different dimensions of family stress among adolescents in relation to family structure. It was noticeable from the data that there were significant differences in overall family stress (3.64;  $p < 0.01$ ) as well as in all the dimensions of family stress namely, family frustration (3.58;  $p < 0.01$ ), family conflict (2.70;  $p < 0.01$ ), family pressure (2.34;  $p < 0.05$ ) and family anxiety (5.09;  $p < 0.01$ ).

It was further noted that in overall family stress and in all the dimensions of family stress, adolescents from nuclear families had more mean scores in comparison to adolescents belonging to joint families. Thus, these findings signifies that adolescents living in nuclear families had more family related stress which makes adolescents' frustrated, anxious, and pressurized and they had more conflicts with family members.

These findings have come into sight owing to small support system in nuclear families where both the partners work outside the home which results in adolescents being neglected, feeling lonely and emotionally insecure. While in joint families, there are a lot of members around to provide emotional support, help and also, allow adolescents to share their joys and sorrows which creates a sense of security in them that there are people whom they can lean upon in times of trouble. This finding is supported by Kumar (2011) who proposed that nuclear families have individualistic approach in which adolescents feels alienated making them frustrated, anxious of emotional problems and lack of family support system. Consequently, feels more family stress due to substantial erosion of traditional family support unit. Another study by Tewari and Suryawansh (2015) suggested that joint families in India are more successful in satisfying the necessary emotional needs of growing adolescents than nuclear families.

**Table 2: Comparative mean scores ( $\pm$ SD) of the adolescents as per their family structure across different dimensions of family stress**

Dimensions of Family Stress	Joint Families (n <sub>1</sub> = 250)		Nuclear Families (n <sub>2</sub> = 250)		t-value	Total respondents (n= 500)	
	Mean	$\pm$ SD	Mean	$\pm$ SD		Mean	$\pm$ SD
Family Frustration	39.18	16.60	44.84	18.61	3.58**	42.01	17.84
Family Conflict	16.21	9.27	18.51	9.74	2.70**	17.36	9.57
Family Pressure	48.98	18.05	53.32	23.08	2.34*	51.15	20.81
Family Anxiety	30.56	9.37	36.00	14.04	5.09**	33.28	12.23
Overall Family Stress	134.93	48.06	152.67	60.10	3.64**	143.80	55.08

Note: \*Significant at 5% level, \*\*Significant at 1% level

### **3. Correlation between different dimensions of social-emotional learning and family stress among adolescents**

The data shown in the table 3 demonstrates the correlation analysis between five dimensions of social-emotional learning and four dimensions of family stress among adolescents. The data pointed out that self-awareness ( $r = -0.09$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and self-management ( $r = -0.09$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) were noticed to be significantly negatively related with family pressure dimension of family stress. Thus, these findings suggest that when adolescents were able to identify and regulate their emotions and thoughts then, they were less likely to encounter family pressure. However, non-significant

association of other dimensions and overall social-emotional learning were noticed with overall family stress and its dimensions.

**Table 3: Correlation between different dimensions of social-emotional learning and family stress among adolescents Dimensions of Family Stress Adolescents (n = 500)**

Dimensions of Family Stress	Adolescents (n = 500)					
	SA (r)	SoA (r)	SM (r)	RM (r)	RDM (r)	Overall SEL (r)
Family Frustration	-0.01	-0.04	-0.03	-0.02	0.01	-0.02
Family Conflict	-0.05	0.005	-0.04	-0.03	0.001	-0.03
Family Pressure	-0.09*	-0.05	-0.09*	-0.07	-0.01	-0.07
Family Anxiety	-0.03	-0.04	-0.01	0.005	0.05	-0.004
Overall Family Stress	-0.05	-0.04	-0.05	-0.04	0.01	-0.04

Note: \*Significant at 5% level; r= correlation coefficient; SA= Self-Awareness; SoA= Social Awareness; SM= Self-Management; RM= Relationship Management; RDM= Responsible Decision Making; SEL= Social-Emotional Learning

#### **4. Correlation between different dimensions of social-emotional learning and family stress among adolescents as per their family structure**

The interpretation of data in the table 4 highlights the correlation analysis between different dimensions of social-emotional learning and various dimensions of family stress among adolescents with reference to family structure. The data indicated that among adolescents from joint families, significant positive relationship was found between responsible decision making and family anxiety ( $r= 0.12$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). Thus, this implies that adolescents living in joint families, who were able to make decisions considering ethical norms and principles, were likely to experience struggle in interpersonal interactions at home. However, other dimensions and overall social-emotional learning were noticed to be non-significantly related with all the dimensions of family stress and overall family stress.

The investigation of data among adolescents from nuclear families reflected that overall social-emotional learning and its five dimensions were noted to be non-

significantly correlated with overall family stress and its four dimensions.

**Table 4: Correlation between different dimensions of social-emotional learning and family stress among adolescents as per their family structure**  
**Dimensions of Family Stress**

Dimension s of Family Stress	Joint Families (n <sub>1</sub> = 250)						Nuclear Families (n <sub>2</sub> = 250)					
	SA (r)	SoA (r)	SM (r)	RM (r)	RDM (r)	Over all SEL (r)	SA (r)	SoA (r)	SM (r)	RM (r)	RD M (r)	Overa ll SEL (r)
Family Frustration	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.03	0.09	0.07	-0.06	-0.09	-0.08	-0.05	-0.01	-0.06
Family Conflict	-0.06	0.10	-0.04	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.02	0.01	-0.02
Family Pressure	-0.07	0.04	-0.05	-0.06	0.01	-0.04	-0.09	-0.08	-0.10	-0.05	-0.01	-0.07
Family Anxiety	0.05	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.12*	0.09	-0.04	-0.06	-0.03	0.06	0.06	-0.01
Overall Family Stress	-0.00	0.07	0.004	-0.002	0.06	0.02	-0.07	-0.08	-0.08	-0.03	0.00	-0.05

Note: \*Significant at 5% level; r= correlation coefficient; SA= Self-Awareness; SoA= Social Awareness; SM= Self-Management; RM= Relationship Management; RDM= Responsible Decision Making; SEL= Social-Emotional Learning

### Conclusion

It is evident from the findings of present study that majority of the adolescents were found to be at average level of family stress. It was illustrated from the findings that significantly more number of adolescents living in nuclear families were observed to be at high level of family stress when compared with adolescents living in joint families which signifies that adolescents living in nuclear families were significantly passing through more family frustration, family conflict, family pressure and family anxiety so, experienced more family stress. Further, self-awareness and self-management dimensions of social-emotional learning had significant negative correlation with family pressure dimension of family stress in overall adolescents. Responsible decision making dimension of social-emotional learning was significantly positively related with family anxiety dimension of family stress in adolescents from joint families. Furthermore, social-emotional learning was non-significantly negatively correlated with overall family stress in overall adolescents and adolescents from nuclear families. Also, social-emotional learning was noted to be non-significantly positively correlated with overall family stress in adolescents from joint families.



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