

Perceived family environment : A study in relation to Economic status of family.

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present investigation was to study the differences and similarities with respect to various areas of family environment as perceived by adolescents belonging to lower, middle and upper economic status. A sample of 526 students of class 8th, 9th, and 10th were selected from the various schools of Rajkot city. Out of total sample 191 students belonged to lower economic status, 190 students belonged to middle economic status and 145 students belonged to upper economic status. Hind adaptation of Moos (1974) family environment scale by Joshi and Vyas(1996) and personal data sheet were administered to the selected students. Significant difference were observed between lower and middle economic groups and between lower and upper economic group with respect to various area of family environment such as cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, independence, organization and control. However close similarities were observed between middle and upper economic groups with respect to various areas of family environment such as expressiveness, conflict, achievement orientation, intellectual cultural orientation and moral religious emphasis.

Introduction:

Such family has its own unique environment. Yet there is some marked similarity in the family environment with in a particular subculture, which differs from the family environment of other subcultures. Families belonging to the some social, economic, occupational, and educational group may exhibit more or less similar pattern of family interactions. Studies point out the importance of economic level as crucial factor having profound impact on family life and relationships. Parents of low Socio-economic class were found to be more conservative, more punitive and authoritarian, less nurturing, more restrictive, provided less verbal and more aggressive role models (Kapur, 1995; Wolff, 1985; Sing, 1990; Kohn, Pearlin & Kohn, 1969). The objective of the present investigation was to explore the impact of economic level on various dimension of family environment. Parents have their own beliefs in practicing certain child-rearing techniques and they try to shape the factors of family environment according to their own thinking. But how children perceive these factors is of great importance. Therefore the present study was based on adolescents perception of their family environment.

Method:

Sample: A sample of 526 adolescent girl and boys aged 13-15 years were selected from nine high school of Rajkot city by random sampling. They were the students of class VIII to V. Out of 526 students, 191 belonged to lower income families (monthly income between Rs 3500-4000), 190 belonged to middle income families (monthly income Rs 4000-15000) and the rest 145 students belonged to high income families (monthly income more than 15000).

Tools: The following tools were used in present study.

1. Personal data sheet: A Personal data sheet was prepared and used to collect information about the class. Age, type of family. Monthly income etc.
2. Family environment scale: family environment scale developed by Moos(1974) and adapted and standardized in Hindi Joshi and Vyas (1996) was used. This 79 items scale consists of 10 subscales covering ten dimension of the family environment. Each item of every subscale is on a five point scale ranging from 'Always (4) and Never (0).

Procedure:

All the selected subjects were contacted in their respective class. A detailed information regarding the questionnaires were given and the questionnaires were administered to the students in small groups. Results were arrived at by using "t" test.

Results:

In order to know the impact of economic level on different dimensions of family environment, adolescents on the basis of their monthly family income were divided in to three economic group i.e. lower, middle and higher income groups. The three groups were compared on all the 10 dimensions of family environment.

The findings of this study suggest that economic level of the family is an important factor having influence on the nature of various dimensions of family environment. Result clearly indicated that family having low income were less cohesive, allowed less expression of feelings, had more conflicts, permitted less independence were less organized and exercised more control in comparison to the families having average and high income. The findings have special implications as many studies reported a very strong negative association between socio-economic status and behaviour disorder like anxiety, depression, obsessive

Table 1: Means, SDs and t-values on subscales of family environment as perceived subjects of three income groups (N=526)

Family Environment Subscales	Low income group(n=191)		Middle income group(n=190)		High income group(n=145)		LVsM	LVsH	MVsH
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
1. Cohesion	22.69	4.55	25.92	3.37	26.72	3.24	6.09*	9.36**	2.23*
2. Expressiveness	14.31	5.79	17.37	3.92	16.69	4.13	6.00	4.33**	1.51
3. Conflict	14.75	8.62	8.70	3.25	8.14	2.87	9.03**	10.02**	1.60
4. Independence	22.30	5.17	25.37	4.78	26.45	5.04	6.02**	7.46**	1.98*
5. Achievement orientation	19.42	3.66	18.87	4.24	19.08	3.42	1.34	0.87	0.50
6. Intellectual Cultural orientation	16.63	4.11	17.41	3.84	17.14	4.69	1.90	1.04	0.56
7. Active Recreational Emphasis	17.50	5.15	17.25	3.74	18.38	3.99	0.54	1.76	2.69* *
8. More Religious Emphasis	22.76	4.52	22.22	3.89	21.55	4.15	1.23	2.52*	1.52
9. Organization	21.29	4.92	24.54	2.81	25.11	2.50	7.93*	9.12**	2.04*
10. Control	20.21	4.32	16.16	4.29	18.98	4.81	9.21*	5.53**	2.41*

compulsive behaviour and delinquency (Sood and Mishra, 1995; Patel & Dodia, 1997; Desai 1998). Mehata (1969) reported that children from families of lower socio-economic status have increased vulnerability to behaviour disorders. In the present study members of low income families were found to be less concerned and less committed to the family and were less helpful and less supportive of each other. Warmth, love and social support are important factors in fostering healthy personality development and emotional adjustment. However these factors were found at low level in low income families as compared to families belonging to middle and high income group.

The result indicated several differences as well as similarities between middle and high income group

relating to many areas of family environment. The dimensions on which they were found to be similar are expressiveness, conflict, achievement orientation, intellectual culture orientation and moral religious emphasis. The dimensions on which they differ were cohesions, independence, active recreational orientation, organization and control in competition to families having middle level income, families belonging to high income group were more cohesive, encouraged the members more to be self-sufficient and make their own decision, participated more actively in various kind of recreational, supporting or festivity type of actives were more organized, i.e giving more importance to family rules and responsibilities and structuring the family activities and gave more importance to control.

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