

Issues Relating to Adolescents' Perception of Family Relationship in Nsukka Urban, Enugu State

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Abstract

This study focused on issues relating to adolescents' perception of family relationship in Nsukka Urban. Specifically, it determined indicators of adolescents' perception of family relationship; association between adolescents' relationship and their socio-demographic characteristics; factors influencing the relationship. Cross sectional survey design was adopted. Family relationship scale and a structured scale were used to collect data. Population was made up of secondary school students between 16 - 19years in Nsukka Urban. Data were analyzed using means, standard deviation and t-test at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. Result shows that respondents had strong adolescent/parent relationship with more family expressiveness than cohesion and conflict. Male respondents had more family cohesion and more expressiveness than the females but experienced more family conflict. Chaotic family environment, amongst other factors, influence adolescents' family relationship. Age of the adolescents was related to their family cohesion and expressiveness. There is strong adolescent/parent relationship in the study area. Expressive aspect of family relationship is experienced more by adolescents compared to cohesion and conflict. Age is associated with family relationship. It was recommended that tips on adolescents/parents relationship be included in the curriculum at secondary school to enable the adolescents understand how they can improve their relationship with their parents thereby contributing to the overall positive home environment.

Keywords: Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict, Family, Relationship, Perception, Adolescents

Introduction

The family is the hub of the society and a primary socializing agent whose indispensable role cannot be ruled out in the development of any nation. Pearson (2011) defined the family as a relational transactional group. That

implies that not only is a family made up of the individual members, it is largely defined by the relationships between the members which could be husband/wife, parent/child, or sibling/sibling relationship. Family members are linked in important ways

through each stage of life, and these relationships are an important source of social connection and social influence for individuals throughout their lives (Umberson, Crosnoe, & Reczek, 2010). Relationships within the family are important for the development of children's well-being, as well as for their overall satisfaction. Family connections can provide a greater sense of meaning and purpose as well as social and tangible resources that benefit well-being (Hartwell & Benson, 2007). Family members may also regulate each other's behaviors (i.e., social control) and provide information and encouragement to behave in healthier ways (Reczek, Thomeer, Lodge, Umberson, & Underhill, 2014).

American Association of Psychologists (2018) defined family relationship as the enduring bond between a caregiver and his child. It may also be defined as any combination of filial or conjugal relationship that indirectly or directly unite people. It encompasses cohesion, expressiveness and conflict. Family cohesion and conflict are widely acknowledged as predictors of child and adolescent adjustment and wellbeing, with low cohesion and high conflict often indicative of higher distress levels, poorer parent-child relationship quality, and increased rates of youth internalizing and externalizing problems (Bradford, Vaughn, & Barber, 2008). According to Kliever et al., (2006), family cohesion exists when all family members take pleasure in the activity they are doing

and are always concerned about each other. Cohesion in a family is essential in assisting children's development and performance (Arshat, Chai Yoke, Ng, & Pai, 2016). Family relationship greatly affects an adolescent life (Farahati, 2011). This is because their mental health is influenced substantially by the family context and interactions among and between family members (Letourneau et al., 2013). Studies have shown that favorable family relationships in childhood were connected with better social relations in adulthood, in terms of more satisfaction with partner relationships, stronger family relations, and a lower risk of experiencing loneliness (Merz & Jak, 2013). This shows the indispensable role of family relationship during adolescence.

According to Crone, Van Duijvenvoorde & Peper (2016), adolescence is a period of rapid biological, neurological and cognitive changes and in which psychosocial functioning and relationships may be influenced. There is also a significant change in interpersonal relationships, particularly with parents and peers. Adolescence is a difficult and challenging period for adolescents and their family members. Mood swings and emotional turmoil can be frequently observed during this stage. Some studies (De Goede, Branje & Meeus, 2009) have shown that adolescents report less parental support in early to middle adolescence, and perception of parents as less powerful and controlling over the course of the period. This may

contribute to mood swings which may give rise to many psycho-somatic problems such as anxiety, tensions, frustrations, and emotional upsets in day to day life. During adolescence these biological and psychosocial changes, might have a significant impact on the parent-adolescent relationship. According to Rogers, Padilla-Walker and McLean (2020) adolescents spend more time with friends than with parents, and the parent-child relationship experiences tension around adolescents' emerging independence.

Adolescents thrive more when there is healthy relationship between parents, and when there's respectful communication and great love (Fahey, Keithy & Polek, 2012). According to Bhatti (2011), the role of the family is the first and foremost influence over a child's development, including his or her personality. In most developing countries, there is an increase in crime rate as a result of poor family structure which leads to poor relationships in the family (Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013). That suggests that there have been considerable changes in the roles and functions of family, which is seen to have become more flexible in her roles and functions. For instance, a report by National Population Commission (NPC) (2014) a high proportion of these adolescents might have experienced adversities while growing up. Adolescence seen as a period for identity formation and role of families tends to depreciate as younger people discover themselves at this point. Although the nature of adolescents'

family relationship is changing, the continuity of family connections is crucial for the positive development of young people. In the area of this study as in other parts of Nigeria adolescents often exhibit behaviour patterns and challenges that could impact on family relationships and their wellbeing. This scenario could some time be triggered by poor parental involvement and peer pressure. Most families also neglect their caretaking role as well as transfer the breadwinning role to their adolescents who are not yet capable to take such responsibilities. There is therefore need to assess the adolescents' perceived family relationship issues in such families. More so, there is dearth of information on factors that influence adolescents' perceived family relationship. Therefore, this study is pertinent.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to assess issues relating to adolescents' perception of family relationship in Nsukka Urban. Specifically, the study determined:

1. indicators of adolescents' perception of family relationship in Nsukka Urban.
2. association between indicators of adolescents' perception of family relationship and their socio-demographic characteristics.
3. factors influencing adolescents' family relationship in the study area.

Hypotheses of the study:

Two null hypotheses guided the study:

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses on indicators of adolescents' perception of family relationship based on gender.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses on indicators of adolescents' perception of family relationship based on type of school.

Methodology

Design of the Study: This study adopted a cross sectional survey research design.

Area of the Study: The area of the study was Nsukka Urban. Nsukka is one of the Local Government Area (LGA) in Enugu State which lies on the North-West boarder of Enugu State and has a land mass of about 81 and 125km². Nsukka is the site of the University of Nigeria (1960), the first university established in Nigeria after independence. It is also the site of a teacher-training college and has a population of 309,633. It has both registered private and public secondary and primary schools. It has 30 registered secondary schools both mixed and only boys/girls school.

Population for the Study: The population comprised of 8,722 male and female adolescent students (16-19 years) in the thirty (30) registered private and public senior secondary schools (SS3) in Nsukka Urban source of information was Post Primary School Management Board (2019).

Sample for the study: Multistage sampling technique was employed in selecting the respondents. Out of the 30 secondary schools in Nsukka urban, nine schools (30%) were selected using simple random sampling without

replacement. From the selected schools, simple random sampling was used in selecting 30% of adolescents aged 16-19 years from each school (both male and female). This gave a total of 321 students who served as sample for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection: Two instruments were used for data collection. The first was the Family Relationship subscale of Family Environment Scale-Real Form(FES-Form R; Moos & Moos, 2002). This is a 14 item-instrument used to assess the relationship existing in the families of these adolescents. It has three sections: Cohesion (degrees of commitment, help, and support" provided by family members for one another), Expressiveness (degree to which family members are encouraged to express their feelings directly), and Conflict (degree to which family members openly express feelings of anger or hostility, specifically). The items were measured on a 3-point Likert scale which ranged from "0" not at all to "2" a lot. Scores that ranged from 14-29 were classified as low cohesion and expressiveness while scores of 30-42 were classified as high cohesion and expressiveness. Meanwhile, scores that ranged from 6-11 were classified as low conflict and scores which ranged from 12-18 were classified as high conflict. The other instrument was a structured scale which assessed factors that influence adolescent/parent relationship. This was developed after extensive literature review. It was scored on a 4-point scale which ranged from "1"

strongly disagree to “4” strongly disagree. Cronbach’s alpha reliability test of the instruments yielded scores of 0.94 (family relationship scale) and 0.89 (scale of associated family relationship factors) were obtained. The decision rule was placed at mean greater than 3.00 to mean agreed.

Data Collection Methods: A total of 321 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents. They were given orientation on how to complete the instrument. They responded to the instrument immediately and all the 321 were retrieved. This represents a 100 percent return.

Data Analysis Techniques: Data were analyzed using means and standard deviation. The hypotheses were tested using t-test and Chi square to determine the relationships between

socio-demographic characteristics and family relationship at $p < 0.01$ level of significance.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents: Data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents show that the male students were 44.5% while females were 55.5%. Most of them (36.8%) are within 17 years of age while few (11.5%) are 19 years old. A good number of them (49.5%) came from homes where both parents are married. Respondents who had stressful live events were 43.9% and others who have not had any stressful live events were 56.1%. Also, 34.5% of the respondents came from private school while 65.7% attended public school.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Responses on Indicators of Adolescents’ Perception of Family Relationship

S/N	Indicators of Adolescents’ Perception of Family Relationship	Not at all F(%)	Somew hat F(%)	A lot F(%)	\bar{X}	SD
Cohesion						
1	In our family we really help and support each other.	54(17)	101(32)	166(52)	2.35	.75
2	In our family we spend a lot of time doing things together at home.	55(17)	101(32)	165(51)	2.34	.75
3	In our family there is a feeling of togetherness.	48(15)	94(29)	179(56)	2.41	.74
4	My family members really support each other.	54(17)	95(30)	172(54)	2.37	.76
5	I am proud to be a part of our family.	24(8)	69(22)	228(71)	2.64	.62
Expressiveness						
6	In our family we can talk openly in our home.	44(14)	88(27)	189(59)	2.45	.72
7	In our family we sometimes tell each other about our personal problems.	45(14)	96(30)	180(56)	2.42	.73
8	In our family we begin discussions	45(14)	94(29)	182(57)	2.43	.73

easily.

Table 1 Contuned

Conflict

9	In our family we argue a lot.	43(13)	115(36)	163(51)	1.63	.71
10	In our family we are really mad at each other a lot.	130(41)	141(44)	50(16)	2.25	.71
11	In our family we lose our tempers a lot.	137(43)	130(41)	54(17)	2.26	.73
12	In our family we often put down each other.	133(41)	132(41)	56(17)	2.24	.73
13	My family members sometimes are violent.	126(39)	131(41)	64(20)	2.19	.75
14	In our family we raise our voice when we are mad.	123(38)	133(41)	63(20)	2.19	.74

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage responses on adolescents' perception on indicators of family relationship. From the table, majority (70%) of the respondents are very proud to be part of their families. Most (56%) of the respondents also

experienced feeling of togetherness. A good number (59%) of the respondents can also express themselves openly in their homes. Forty three percent do not experience temper outburst while only a few (20%) have families who are sometimes violent.

Table 2: Relationship between Indicators of Perceived Adolescents' Family Relationship and Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Low Cohesion F (%)	High Cohesion F (%)	Low Expressiveness F (%)	High Expressiveness F (%)	Low Conflict F (%)	High Conflict F (%)
Gender						
Male	42 (29.4)	101 (10.1)	25 (17.5)	118 (82.5)	69 (48.3)	74 (51.7)
Female	39 (21.9)	139 (78.1)	24 (13.5)	154 (86.5)	100 (56.8)	76 (43.2)
	$\chi^2 = 2.34, df = 1, p = 0.13$		$\chi^2 = 0.98, df = 1, p = 0.32$		$\chi^2 = 2.23, df = 1, p = 0.13$	
Age						
16 years	24 (28.2)	61 (71.8)	14 (16.5)	71 (83.5)	44 (51.8)	41 (48.2)
17 years	18 (15.3)	100 (84.7)	8 (6.8)	110 (93.2)	68 (57.6)	50 (42.4)
18 years	28 (34.6)	53 (64.5)	20 (24.7)	61 (75.3)	43(54.4)	36 (45.6)
19 years	11 (29.7)	26 (70.3)	7 (18.9)	30 (81.1)	14 (37.8)	23 (62.2)
	$\chi^2 = 10.77, df = 3, p = 0.01$		$\chi^2 = 12.6, df = 3, p = 0.01$		$\chi^2 = 4.55, df = 3, p = 0.21$	
Family type						
Single parent	46 (29.5)	110 (70.5)	25 (16.0)	131 (84.0)	76 (48.7)	80 (51.3)
Married parents	33 (20.8)	126 (79.2)	22 (13.8)	137 (86.2)	89 (56.7)	68 (43.3)
Divorced	2 (33.3)	4 (66.7)	2 (33.3)	4 (66.7)	4 (66.7)	2 (33.3)
	$\chi^2 = 3.40, df = 2, p = 0.18$		$\chi^2 = 1.84, df = 2, p = 0.40$		$\chi^2 = 2.45, df = 2, p = 0.29$	
Stressful live event						
Yes	39 (27.7)	102 (72.3)	25 (17.7)	116 (82.3)	72 (51.4)	68 (48.6)

No	42 (23.3)	138 (76.7)	24 (13.3)	156 (86.7)	97 (54.2)	82 (45.8)
	$\chi^2 = 0.78, df = 1, p = 0.37$		$\chi^2 = 1.18, df = 1, p = 0.27$		$\chi^2 = 0.24, df = 1, p = 0.62$	
Type of school						
Private	25 (22.7)	85 (77.3)	17 (15.5)	93 (84.5)	50 (46.3)	58 (53.7)
Public	56 (26.5)	155 (73.5)	32 (15.2)	179 (84.8)	119 (56.4)	92 (43.6)
	$\chi^2 = 0.56, df = 1, p = 0.46$		$\chi^2 = 0.01, df = 1, p = 0.95$		$\chi^2 = 2.93, df = 1, p = 0.09$	

Table 2 shows the relationship between areas of perceived adolescents' family relationship and socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. From the table, a positive significant relationship was seen to exist between family cohesion and age of the respondents. The same relationship was also seen to exist between family expressiveness and age. Majority of respondents who experienced high family cohesion

(84.7%) and high family expressiveness (93.2%) were those at the peak of middle adolescence -17years. Meanwhile most of those that experienced low expressiveness (6.8%) were those who just entered late adolescence -18 years. However, no significant relationship was seen to exist between perceived family relationship and other socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Respondents on Perceived Factors Affecting Adolescents' Family Relationship

S/N	Factors Influencing Relationship	Mean score	Standard Deviation	Remark
		\bar{x}		
1	Inadequate family time affects family relationship	3.63	5.41	Agreed
2	A chaotic home environment is not good for relationship	3.88	7.60	Agreed
3	Tight work schedule affects family relationship	3.63	5.41	Agreed
4	Weak bond among family members affects their relationship	3.65	5.40	Agreed
5	Family relationship is affected by family type	3.70	5.39	Agreed
6	Families who do not hold meetings normally have weak relationship	3.70	5.39	Agreed
7	Large family size affects family relationship	3.70	5.38	Agreed
8	Family monthly income may likely affect their relationship	3.78	5.38	Agreed

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation scores of respondents on perceived factors influencing

adolescents' family relationship. From the table, the respondents agreed to

the eight items as factors influencing adolescent/parent relationship.

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses on dimensions of family relationship based on gender.

Table 4: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation on Indicators of Perceived Family Relationship According to Gender

S/N	Dimensions of Adolescents/parents relationship	Gender	
		Male M±SD	Female M±SD
1	Cohesion	11.73 ± 2.88	12.40 ± 2.85
2	Expressiveness	7.05 ± 1.98	7.50 ± 1.83
3	Conflict	12.46 ± 2.55	12.97 ± 2.70
		t-value = 2.26, p = 0.00	

M= mean, SD= standard deviation, p = level of significance

Table 4 shows the mean responses and standard deviation on indicators of perceived adolescents' family relationship according to gender. From the Table, the female respondents had more family cohesion and more expressiveness than the males but experienced more family conflict. This is shown by t-cal value of 2.26 which

was higher than the critical value at $p < 0.05$ level of significance, consequently **HO₁** is rejected.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses on dimensions of family relationship based on type of school.

Table 5: Mean and Standard deviation of respondents on indicators of perceived family relationship according to type of school

S/N	Dimensions of Adolescents/parents relationship	Type of School	
		Public M±SD	Private M±SD
1	Cohesion	12.02 ± 2.92	12.26 ± 2.80
2	Expressiveness	7.32 ± 1.94	7.26 ± 1.85
3	Conflict	12.86 ± 2.63	12.52 ± 2.68
		t-value = 0.18, p = 0.64	

M= mean, SD= standard deviation, p = level of significance

Table 5 shows the mean and standard deviation scores of respondents on indicators of perceived adolescents' family relationship according to type of school. Respondents from private schools had more cohesion than those

in public schools, but lesser family conflict and expressiveness. Meanwhile, those in public schools had low cohesion, more expressiveness and more family conflict. However,

this was not significant. The H_{02} was therefore rejected at $P = 0.64$

Discussion

From the study, the mean score of indicators of adolescents/parents relationship- expressiveness is lesser than cohesion and conflict which shows that the respondents had more cohesion than expressiveness and less family conflict. This suggests that a favorable climate is provided at home which aids self-expression of the respondents. More so, the proliferation of different social media platforms might contribute to the development of self-awareness through writing of different post as well as commenting on others post. This might have influenced the interaction pattern of the adolescents at home. Supporting this, Rivera *et.al.* (2009) reported high level of perceived family cohesion among the research respondents. The strong emotional bonds measured by family cohesion are expected to promote family support. Similarly, a study by Martin-Biggers, Quick, Zhang, Jin and Bredbenner (2018) which showed low family conflict and high family cohesion among the research participant, corroborate with the findings of this study.

The study revealed a positive significant relationship between family cohesion and age of the respondents. This is explained by the family systems theory, which states that family cohesion could change in response to adolescent development. The theory suggests that family members responding to changes in other

members of the family may explain why family cohesion (maternal and paternal warmth) changes over time as adolescents' self-worth changes (Bowen, 1986). The findings of this study supports that of Augseeser, Jekielek, and Brown(2006), which revealed that most parents report having very close relationships with their adolescents, though there are some differences by type of family and the age of the child. Also, a positive relationship was also seen to exist between family expressiveness and age.

From this study, chaotic home environment, parents' occupation, type of bond among family members, family type, family size and monthly income amongst others were identified as associated factors that influence family relationship. Family environment is the first educational environment of a child. According to Carter et al. (2005), the effect of parent-child bonding is life-long and will transfer among different kinds of relationships. This implies that the types of parent-child bonding (the first bonding) will affect one's development of interpersonal relationships as one grows (Giordano, 2003). Maladaptive bonding with parents may lead to negative consequences such as (Lee & LoK, 2012). Vanassche, Sodderman, Matthijs & Swicegood (2014) stated that family type determines the kind of relationship which exists there. Also, a study by Pardini, Fite, and Burke, (2008) family relationship quality and child behaviour were seen to be influenced by demographic

characteristics of the respondents such as marital status, age, income and employment. The finding of this study is not surprising as it corroborates with the findings of studies above.

The male respondents in this study had more family cohesion and more expressiveness than the females but experienced more family conflict. This contradicts the findings of Tsai et al., (2013) who revealed that decreases in family cohesion during adolescence are less pronounced for girls than boys. Some studies (Fulgini & Masten, 2010; Tsai et al., 2013) have shown that females tend to identify more with their family and spend more time engaged in daily family leisure activities and familial communication than males throughout the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. In this study, the males experienced more family conflict than the females. This may be as a result of gender stereotype which makes the male folk feel as though they are not to take orders from females. Peer influence may also be an explanation for this high conflict. For instance several studies (Svensson & Oberwittler, 2010; Weerman et al. 2015; Weerman & Hove, 2012) have shown that boys spend more time with friends without adult supervision which has also been shown to be associated with offending/ disobedience at home. A study by Wong et al. (2010) showed that conflict between parents and children is associated with offending among both boys and girls as girls are more likely to bond with their parents

in ways that prevent or preclude offending (Worthen, 2011).

The findings also revealed that students from public school had more cohesion than those in private school, whereas, those in private schools had comparatively more family expressiveness and more family conflict. Private schools often teach students with some empirical basis which helps them understand a concept and its application in real world. More so, private schools possess racial and ethnic diversity which can enrich the school experiences of students. Knowledge from these experiences is applied in different areas of their lives including family relationship. This might explain why students from private schools in this study had higher family expressiveness. Parents of most students who attend private schools provide little opportunity for their children's' peer relationship and restrictions are placed on leisure time. This affects adolescent's autonomy and independence which is a vital need at that stage of development. This affects the bonding between parents and their children and consequently, parent-child conflict, which has been seen to affect family relationship.

Conclusion

The expressive aspect of family relationship is experienced more by adolescents compared to cohesion and conflict. Age of adolescents is related to their family cohesion and expressiveness. Chaotic family environment, type of family, income,

family size amongst others influences their family relationship. The male adolescents had more family cohesion and more expressiveness than the females but experienced more family conflict. Also, those from public school had more cohesion than those in private school, but those in private schools had comparatively more family expressiveness and more family conflict. This is a marker of the changing role of families.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following were suggested

1. Parents should create good environment that breeds cohesion among family members.
2. Family time should be created as this will lead to better understanding of the adolescents.
3. Adolescents should be taught how to relate with individuals within and outside the home and best emotion regulation strategies.

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