

## Family Climate as a Predictor of Emotional Intelligence in Adolescents

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The study examined whether family climate could predict emotional intelligence (EI) in adolescence. The sample (N=120) comprised of adolescents, in the age range 16-17 years, randomly chosen from the various higher secondary schools in Trivandrum district, Kerala, and stratified on the basis of gender. Family Climate Scale (FCS) and Emotional Intelligence Inventory (EII) were administered. The study employed a correlational design. Data were processed for correlation and regression analysis. Correlation results showed that adolescent's family climate has significant relationship with the different dimensions of emotional intelligence, except interpersonal efficacy. Regression analysis revealed maternal affect and sibling relationship as significant predictors of overall emotional intelligence and intrapersonal efficacy, whereas paternal affect accounted for the variance in personal efficacy. None of the family climate variables emerged as predictors of interpersonal efficacy. The essential elements of the family in predicting balanced emotional life during adolescence are discussed.

**Keywords:** Family Climate, Emotional Intelligence, Adolescence

Adolescence is a developmental phenomenon unique to man. This is a time of building new relationships with people both within the family and with the outside world. Family is a source of strength, groupings in which everyone experiences enjoyment and emotional fulfilment (McKie, & Callan, 2012). It is the basic unit of society, a nursery that provides for growth and development of its members through human interaction, emotional bonding and enduring relationships. When family relationships become secure and smooth, it will reflect in one's emotional and social competencies. Accordingly, parenting provides a strong basis for promoting children's emotional well being. Along with the interaction between parents and children also how parents deal with their own emotions has an enormous influence on their children's emotional regulation and development. Thus, family has been found to play a crucial role in influencing individual mental health; it being an important locus of social network for the young child (Friedman, 1998). Hence, understanding and thereby enhancing family functioning patterns will help to improve one's social and emotional aspects of development.

In India, family as a key social institution has the responsibility for the development

and growth of the child, providing physical, economic and emotional security and preparing the young for life. How well the family performs its functions is a key component to adolescent mental health and also determines the quality of an adolescent's relationship with his or her parents. Thus, the family climate ensures healthy personality as well as the strength of any society. Kaur and Jaswal (2005) conducted a study on the relationship between strategic emotional intelligence and family climate of Punjabi adolescents and found significant positive relationship between family climate and emotional intelligence.

Emotional development is affected by the emotional climate of the family via parenting style, the attachment relationship, family expressiveness and the marital relationship. Sonthalia and Dasgupta (2012) observed that attachment style significantly correlated with emotional intelligence of adolescent boys and girls. Female adolescents were seen to perceive their fathers as trustworthy and peers as communicative, as their level of emotional intelligence increased. Family context has a major impact on children and adolescent's social and emotional development, though the mechanisms through which the context impacts

development are less clear (Darling, & Steinberg, 1993). Tiwari and Srivastava (2004) also found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived environmental quality of home and school.

Any behaviour of an individual has an emotional component. Emotional elements intensify, inhibit, or otherwise modify the behaviour in process at any given time and are an integral part of the whole pattern of behaviour. Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) attempt to broadly define emotions as a subjective feeling state that includes (a) basic emotions such as joy, love and anger, and (b) social emotions, namely shame, guilt and jealousy. This definition also includes related constructs of affect, sentiments and moods. A by-product of this construct is the concept of emotional intelligence, which has gained substantial recognition in recent times. Emotional intelligence refers to a combination of skills, such as empathy, self-control, and self-awareness (Salovey, & Mayer, 1997). Such skills can make us more flexible, adaptable, and emotionally mature (Bonanno, Papa, Lalande, & Westphal, 2004). People who excel in life tend to be emotionally intelligent (Fisher, & Ashanasy, 2000; Merhrabian, 2000). Indeed, the costs of poor emotional skills can be high. They range from problems in marriage and parenting to poor physical health. A lack of emotional intelligence can ruin careers and sabotage achievement. Perhaps, the greatest toll falls on children and teenagers. For them, having poor emotional skills can contribute to depression, eating disorders, unwanted pregnancy, aggression, violent crime, and poor academic performance (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004). Thus, in many life circumstances emotional intelligence is as important as intelligence quotient (IQ) (Dulewicz, & Higgs, 2000).

According to Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, and Robinson (2007) family environment affects children's emotional intelligence in three aspects. Firstly, children learn emotions by observing the people around them. Secondly, their experiences and behaviours related to parent's emotions ensure that children also act appropriately to society's expectations. Thirdly, the factors reflecting the emotional status of family such as the quality of emotional

attachment between the child and the parents, attitude of parents, emotional and social openness, and marital relationship have impact on emotional intelligence. Bhatia (2012) reported that healthy family relationships greatly influence emotional intelligence of the adolescents.

In the present day world, the adolescent students have to face a lot of challenges. As students, they face intense competition, resulting in immense pressure for performing well in their studies; and out of school, as adolescents they confront a different set of concerns. All the physical, psychological and emotional changes may affect the mental, physical and emotional health of the adolescents. The social and psychological safety net and the support system that the family provides have considerably weakened due to various social and economic reasons. The parents are too absorbed in their day to day pursuits to be able to give quality time to their children and provide appropriate directions. A steady depreciation of family bonding is evident. As a result, in many cases, young teenagers find themselves not adequately prepared to handle these pressures and the stress. Some may even breakdown, leading to disastrous consequences. On the other hand, support from the family helps one in becoming an emotionally mature person capable of withstanding stressful life conditions. Thus, it can be said that the family has a very important role in determining one's mental and emotional health, which enables him/her to lead a productive and quality life. The present study attempts to highlight the importance of family climate in predicting emotional intelligence of adolescents.

#### **Objective:**

To explore the strength of relationship between family climate and its sub factors (paternal control, maternal control, paternal affect, maternal affect, parental harmony, sibling relationship) and the various dimensions of emotional intelligence (personal efficacy, interpersonal efficacy, intrapersonal efficacy and overall emotional intelligence). On the basis of this objective, the following hypotheses were formulated:

There is significant relationship between family climate and emotional intelligence of adolescents.

Family climate is a significant predictor of emotional intelligence of adolescents.

### Method

#### Participants:

The sample (N= 120) consisted of adolescent students, stratified on the basis of gender and drawn randomly from the various higher secondary schools of Trivandrum district, Kerala. There were 60 boys and 60 girls in the age range of 16-17 years.

#### Measures:

*Family climate scale (Vanajakumari & Sanantha Raj, 2000):* Family climate is treated as a global construct that describes the psychological environment prevailing in the family. The scale is divided into six sub dimensions, such as paternal/maternal control, paternal/maternal affect, parental harmony and sibling relationship.

- a. Paternal control: Paternal control is defined as the way in which the father exercises authority over his children. Operationally, control is defined as power-oriented, highly demanding, placing high value on conformity/obedience, resorting to force and punishment to deal with disobedience and biased towards paternal needs.
- b. Maternal control: Maternal control is defined as the way in which the mother exercises authority over her children. Just like paternal control, maternal control is operationalized as power-oriented, highly demanding, placing high value on conformity/obedience, resorting to punishment to deal with disobedience and biased towards maternal needs.
- c. Paternal affect: Paternal affect is measured in terms of the extent of the father's attachment, expression of affection and sensitivity to children's needs.
- d. Maternal affect: Just like paternal affect, maternal affect is also measured in terms of mother's attachment, expression of

affection, and sensitivity to her children's needs.

- e. Parental harmony: Parental harmony is defined and operationalized as the extent of mutuality through integration of needs and interests, trust and support, and sharing of responsibilities of both parents.
- f. Sibling relationship: An individual's social skill development is influenced by the early interaction patterns with the sibling. Sibling relationship is defined as the extent of interaction, intimacy and influence among siblings.

For the evaluation of control and affect, the student's responses towards father and mother were taken separately. The split half reliability coefficients obtained for the variable of paternal control is 0.84, for the maternal control is 0.81, for paternal affect is 0.73, for maternal affect is 0.79, for parental harmony is 0.82 and for sibling relationship is 0.76. The scale has face validity and content validity.

*Emotional intelligence inventory (EII)* (Thomas & Sushama, 2003) consists of mainly three factors, personal efficacy (a measure of one's ability to act with highest efficiency, in accordance with different social situations), interpersonal efficacy (a measure of the ability to develop and maintain social relations and personal relations), intrapersonal efficacy (a measure of the extent to which one is free from the mental conflicts and tensions) and the total EI score i.e., the overall emotional efficacy (a measure relating to a person's emotional development, maturity, general mental health, etc.). The internal consistency reliability of the scale has been determined using the Cronbach Alpha (N=432). The coefficient is found to be 0.88. The odd-even split-half reliability after correlation for attenuation is found to be 0.86 (N=432). The tool has high content validity.

#### Procedure:

The permission was secured from the respective authorities in the school and the subjects were administered on the family climate scale, emotional intelligence inventory and personal data sheet, after obtaining their consent. They were asked to read the instructions carefully and answer the questions

**Table 1. Correlation of Family Climate and Emotional Intelligence (N=120)**

Correlation		Paternal control	Maternal control	Paternal affect	Maternal affect	Parental harmony	Sibling relationship
Variables							
Personal efficacy	Pearson correlation	-.227*	-.235**	.283**	.268**	.172	.225*
Interpersonal efficacy	Pearson correlation	-.166	-.167	.105	.146	-.040	.106
Intrapersonal Efficacy	Pearson correlation	-.094	-.160	.221*	.269**	.054	.322**
Emotional intelligence	Pearson correlation	-.236**	-.266**	.293**	.318**	.105	.296**

\*p&lt;0.05 level \*\*p&lt;0.01 level

.225\*p&lt;0.05 for sibling relationship).

without omitting any. The subjects were assured that their responses would be kept confidential.

### Results and Discussion

Correlation analysis and stepwise regression analysis were carried out in order to find out the relationships between the family climate variables and various dimensions of emotional intelligence.

#### (a) Relationship between family climate and emotional intelligence

Table 1 shows the correlation between the variables to be studied: family climate (paternal and maternal control, paternal and maternal affect, and parent harmony and sibling relationship) and emotional intelligence (personal efficacy, interpersonal efficacy and intrapersonal efficacy). It is observed that the overall emotional efficacy or emotional intelligence is significantly negatively correlated with the control aspects of parental disciplinary action ( $r = -.236^*p < 0.05$ ,  $-.266^{**}p < 0.01$ ) and positively correlated with parental affect and sibling relationship ( $r = .293^{**}p < 0.01$ ,  $.318^{**}p < 0.01$  and  $.296^{**}p < 0.01$ ). Sethi and Ajawani (2008) have studied emotional intelligence as the function of parent-child relationship. It was found that the average emotional intelligence score of the subjects with good parent-child relationship was higher than that of poor parent-child relationship. Similar results were observed with the personal efficacy dimension of emotional intelligence ( $r = -.227^*p < 0.05$  for paternal control,  $-.235^{**}p < 0.01$  for maternal control,  $.283^{**}p < 0.01$  for paternal affect,  $.268^{**}p < 0.01$  for maternal affect and

However, the interpersonal efficacy dimension is found to be purely independent of family functioning aspects. It could be possible that during adolescence, interactions with the peers are perceived as more important causing them to discount the influence of the family. Intrapersonal efficacy, i.e. the extent to which one is free from mental conflicts and tensions, is positively correlated with paternal affect ( $r = .221^*p < 0.05$ ), maternal affect ( $r = .269^{**}p < 0.01$ ) and sibling relationship ( $r = .322^{**}p < 0.01$ ). No correlation was found with control aspects and parental harmony. When adolescents possess intrapersonal efficacy, there is a better level of adjustment with parents and siblings. So they perceive parental affect and sibling relationship in a positive way.

It is seen that parental harmony is not related with any of the dimensions of emotional intelligence. It may be noted that in all the subcomponents of perceived family climate except parental harmony, the respondent is directly involved in the relationship (i.e., being subjected to paternal and maternal control and affect or involved in sibling relationship). In the case of perceived parental harmony, the respondent is merely reporting the nature of the relationship between the parents. This may be the reason why perceived parental harmony has low/non significant correlation with emotional intelligence of the respondents.

Thus, the first hypothesis is accepted on the basis of the results obtained.

**Table 2. Stepwise regression analysis of emotional intelligence as a dependent variable and family climate as an independent variable.**

	Dependent variables	Predictor variables	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Standard error of the estimate	Beta coefficient
1	Emotional intelligence	Maternal affect	.318	.101**	.093	20.870	.249
		Sibling relationship	.379	.144*	.129	20.454	.218
2	Personal efficacy	Paternal affect	.283	.080**	.072	12.412	.283
3	Intrapersonal efficacy	Sibling relationship	.322	.104**	.096	7.783	.264
		Maternal affect	.368	.135*	.120	7.679	.186

\* $p < 0.05$  level \*\* $p < 0.01$  level

### (b) Predictors of emotional intelligence

The results of the stepwise regression analysis (given in Table 2) revealed that some of the sub variables of family climate were significant in predicting certain dimensions of emotional intelligence.

Regression analysis revealed that maternal affect and sibling relationship emerged as significant predictors of both overall emotional intelligence and intrapersonal efficacy, though their relative contribution to these variables is varied. The most significant predictor of emotional intelligence is maternal affect ( $R = .318$ ,  $R^2 = .101$ ). The  $R^2$  of .101 indicates that 10.1% of the total variance in EI is explained by maternal affect, where as sibling relationship accounts for the remaining 4.3%. The obtained beta values (maternal affect = .249, sibling relationship = .218) were positive, indicating that high beta scores are associated with high scores of corresponding variables. Dasgupta and Sanyal (2008) explained about different dimensions of family interactions, aspects of family dynamics and emotional tone of the family in the context of one's emotional well-being and portrayed a clear picture of the influence of family in promoting children's emotional well-being. As noted before, Bhatia (2012) also underscored the significant relationship between family relationship and emotional intelligence of students.

When considering personal efficacy, .080 (8%) of variance in personal efficacy is explained by the paternal affect and its beta coefficient is

.283. Personal efficacy is a measure of one's ability to act with highest efficiency in accordance with the different social situations. In this study, result revealed that paternal affect was closely associated with one's personal efficacy. This can be explained in the context of our culture. In most families, father is always in a dominant role and other members try to teach children to imbibe the qualities of the father. Thus, from a young age children learn to emulate the action role of their fathers with encouragement from other family members, become efficient in different social situations and capable of thinking and acting independently.

Nevertheless, the father's role, like the mother's, entails emotional commitments, the traditional role is that of the bread-winner of the family, and there is less involvement directly in the care and upbringing of the children. Hence, children develop strong bonds with their mothers than fathers, and feel secure in their presence. Field (1994) pointed out that mother's emotional unavailability is a highly distressing event, more so even than the mother's temporary physical unavailability. Vanajakumari and Sakthidharan (2009) have also found significant relationship between parental affect and emotional stability among adolescents. The results of the present study also converge with these findings.

It can be seen that sibling relationship accounted 10.4% of variance in intrapersonal efficacy and the remaining 3.1% of variance is predicted by maternal affect. In other words, sibling relationship and maternal affect together

contributed 13.5% of variance in intrapersonal efficacy. The positive beta values indicated the fact that high scores in family climate variables such as sibling relationship ( $B=.264$ ) and maternal affect ( $B=.186$ ) were associated with high scores in Intrapersonal Efficacy.

Sibling relationships play a distinct role in socialization, different from those with parents or peers (Vandell, 2000). Sibling conflicts can become a vehicle for understanding social relationships (Dunn & Munn, 1985; Ram & Ross, 2001). Lessons and skills learned from interactions with siblings carry over to relationships outside the home (Brody, 1998). The findings of the present study that sibling relationships predict one's intrapersonal efficacy and emotional intelligence attest to this observation.

None of the family climate variables were found significant in predicting interpersonal efficacy. This can be explained on the basis that age becomes a powerful bonding agent in adolescence. It is a time when close and dependent relationships with parents begin to give way to more intense relationships with peers and older adults. Moreover, friendships are fundamentally different from family relationships. Adolescents quarrel less angrily and resolve conflicts more equitably with friends than with family members, perhaps because they realize that too much conflict could cost them a friendship (Adams, & Laursen, 2001; Laursen, 1996). This ascendancy of peer relationships over family relationships could be the reason why the contribution of family to interpersonal efficacy remain scaled down in adolescents. However, statistically rigorous studies should be conducted to delineate the exact role of factors outside the family in fostering interpersonal efficacy. On the basis of the results obtained, the second hypothesis is also accepted.

The findings of the study have brought to light that emotional intelligence has significant positive relationship with parental affect and sibling relationship and negative relationship with the control dimension of the family climate. Parental harmony, however, is found to be independent of emotional intelligence. Maternal affect emerged as a strong predictor of overall

emotional intelligence whereas paternal affect and sibling relationships were potent predictors of personal efficacy and intrapersonal efficacy, respectively.

However, the small sample size and confining the study to only one district of Kerala precludes us from making stable generalizations. Despite these limitations, the study findings imply that programs that focus on positive parenting styles may be useful in ensuring the welfare of students.

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Received: August 20, 2013

Revised: June 11, 2014

Accepted: December 14, 2014

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