Family Environment and Mental Health of Adolescent Girls

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ABSTRACT; *The present study was undertaken to examine the relationship between family environment and its influence on mental health of adolescent girls. The family environment of the respondents was assessed by using Family Interaction Pattern Scale developed by Bhatti (1986) and mental health of the respondents was assessed by General Well Being Scale (Positive Mental Health) by S.K.Verma (1986). 90 adolescent girls were chosen through disproportionate sampling procedure in Government Higher Secondary School, Ammapalayam, Perambalur District of Tamilnadu. Data was analyzed in terms of percentage, anova and coefficient of correlation. Results indicated that more than half of the respondents have low scores in various dimensions (reinforcement, social support system, role, communication, cohesiveness and leadership) of family interactions and mental health of adolescent girls. The statistical analysis revealed that there was a significant relationship between the family interactions and mental health of adolescent girls. The findings of the study will help to understand the role of family environment to enable the adolescent girls to cope with the challenges that arise in these critical transitional periods. The study will suggest suitable measures to strengthen the mental health of adolescent girls.*

KEY WORDS: *Adolescent girls, family interactions, family environment, Family patterns, mental health*

I. INTRODUCTION

The family environment is the nucleus of all other social institutions. The family interactions play an important role in the development of an individual. The healthy functioning of these interaction patterns enhances mental health of the individual. There are some important interactional effects between family and its members at different developmental stages. It influences the whole life of the adolescent girls. It is the primary and important social environment to which an adolescent girl is exposed. A positive, stable, emotional bond between the family and adolescent girls is an important protective factor for their health and development. A clear and unambiguous understanding of roles in the context of family functions is very important in shaping the adolescent girls. Researchers have consistently proved that both overall family system functioning and parental behaviours are positively related to adolescent well-being (Grotevant, 1998; Karavasilis et al., 2003; Muris et al., 2004; Wolfradt et al., 2002).Consciously, or unconsciously the home environment moulds the behaviour, personality, and attitude, level of aspiration, aptitude and self-esteem of the adolescent girls.

Mental health is an important determinant of one's integrated personality and balanced behaviour identified on the basis of the level of his/her adjustment to own self, others and environment. Wikipedia Dictionary (2010) explains the meaning of mental health as a state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life. The nature of the family environment (e.g., level of cohesion, degree of conflict, and organization) is strongly associated with adolescent mental health (Siddique and D'Arcy, 1984).

The present study is a deliberate attempt to see the relationship of mental health among adolescent girls with their home environment, how the different dimensions of home environment can influence them, and their mental health. The objectives of the study is

01.To study the family interaction pattern (Family Environment) of adolescent girls.
02. To assess the level of general well being (Mental Health) of adolescent girls
03. To find out the relationship between family environment and mental health

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

UNIVERSE : The universe of the present study includes VIII, IX and X standard female students of Government Higher Secondary School, Ammapalayam, Perambalur District during the academic year 2011 - 2012. This consists of 130 students.

SAMPLING : For the present study the researcher has used disproportionate stratified random sampling method in the selection of the respondents. The researcher has selected 32 (adolescent girls) respondents from each of the class or strata irrespective of the size of the population or stratum. The total sample size of the study comprises of 96 respondents.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT : A self prepared interview schedule was used to collect the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Family interaction pattern scale developed by Bhatti (1986) was used to measure the family environment perceived by adolescent girls, FIPS consisting of 106 items pertaining to six areas of family functioning as Reinforcement (10 items),social support system (10 items), Role (26 items), Communication (25 items), Cohesiveness (16 items) and Leadership (17 items). Items are rated on a 4 point scale and scores varies from 106 – 424. PGI General Wellbeing Scale (S.K.Verma, 1986) was administered to assess the level of General Well Being (Positive Mental Health) of adolescent girls. It has 20 items and consists of statements pertaining to well beings, life satisfaction, feeling of belongingness and emotional stability. Scores below ten were interpreted as poor, 11 – 15 as average and above 15 – 20 as good.

Socio – Demographic profile of the respondents : The study revealed that the age group of the respondents was 13 -16 years. The mean age of the respondents was 14.5 years. With regard to the ordinal position of the respondents, Nearly half (46.6 %) of the respondents were fall on second position on their birth order and a significant portion (20.9 %) of the respondents were third on their birth order. It shows that the small family norm was not adopted. The mean age of the maternal parent of the respondents was 30.7years. It clearly indicates that the maternal parent of the respondents was married at the age of 16.   Regarding the domicile of the respondents, the vast majority (96%) of the respondents were from rural areas because the study was conducted in the rural area. With regard to economic variable majority (74 %) of the respondents' family income was up to Rs.5000. Majority (62.9%) of the respondents' fathers were coolies. Below half (37.9%) of the respondents' mothers were illiterate. Above half (56.8%) percent of the respondents' family size was 4 – 6. Regarding the religion of the respondents, majority (86.8%) of the respondents was Hindu and a significant portion (13.2%) of the respondents was Muslims. Majority (78 %) of the respondents were living in nuclear family type.

TABLE NO - 1
Distribution Of The Respondents On Various Dimensions of Family Environment.

s.no	Variable	Percentage	
		Low	High
01	Reinforcement	54.6	45.4
02.	Social Support system	66.0	34.0
03.	Role	53.6	46.4
04.	Communication	58.5	41.5
05.	Cohesiveness	61.4	38.6
06.	Leadership	57.6	42.4
07.	Overall (Family Interaction Pattern)	53.0	47.0

With regard to reinforcement of the respondent, it is seen that more than half (54.6 %) of the respondents have low scores. Majority (66.0%) of the respondent have low scores in primary and secondary social support system available in the family. More than half   (53 .6 %) of the respondents have perceived low level of scores in socio – culturally prescribed role in their family environment. When it comes to the level of communication among family members of adolescent girls, it was found that more than half (58.5 %) of them have low scores. Majority (61.4 %) of the respondent were found low scores in family cohesiveness. More than half (57.6 %) percent of the respondent were found low scores in leadership in the family. With regard to the overall perception of adolescent girls in relation to family environment, more than half (53.0 %) of them have low scores. The respondents perceived low scores on various dimensions of family interaction pattern because, the study was conducted in poor SES families and the family members could not   spend quality time with their adolescent girls to express their views. Patel, (2000) was found that economic level of the family was an important factor influencing the nature of various dimensions of family environment. Brown and Gilligan (1992) mentioned that as girls move into adolescence, their relationships often become characterized by disassociation and disconnection from themselves and others. This situation makes the respondents feel of

rejection by their family and lack of closeness. Numerous research studies have proved that family is the primary institution and the proper development of the child is impossible without a good family environment. Shah and Sharma (1984) found if parents want their children to achieve better, they should provide and maintain, highly congenial atmosphere in the family. Lau and Kwok (2000) concluded that a cohesive, orderly and achieving family environment is conducive to more positive development among adolescents. Crouter et al. (2004) found that families who share more quality time together have much warmer family relationship resulting in better psychological adjustments. Thus, family members should provide opportunity to take part in the family to their adolescent girls through effective communication, relationship skills, and socially acceptable behaviours. Schools should make an effort to guide the parents to handle their adolescent girl children.

TABLE NO - 2

Distribution Of The Respondents By Their Level Of General Well Being.

S.no	Level of general well being	No of Respondents	Percentage
01	Low	50	52.0
02	High	46	47.9

The above table reveals that the level of General Well Being of the respondents. More than half (52.0 %) of the respondents have low level of General Well Being and nearly half (47.9 %) of them have high level of General Well Being. The adolescent girls in this age group (13 – 16) face many kinds of pressures both at home and outside. During adolescence, a child goes through a lot of changes physically, emotionally and socially. These rapid changes weaken the adolescent girls psychologically and create complexities in their well being.

Home environment also plays a vital role to determine their well being. Shek (2002) family functioning was significantly related to measures of adolescent psychological well-being (existential well-being, life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of mastery, general psychiatric morbidity).

TABLE NO - 3
Karl Pearson's Coefficient Of Correlation Between Family Environment and General Well Being.

S.no	Variable	Correlation value	Statistical inference
01	Family Environment and General Well Beings	0.642	P < 0.05Significant

It infers that there is a significant positive relationship between family environment of the adolescent girls and their levels of General Well Being. General Well Being (positive mental health) is highly dependent with the family environment of an individual. Wolman et al. (1994) pointed that there is a strong association between family connectedness and adolescent well being. Chahal et al. (2003) observed through his study of women, family cohesion, intellectual cultural orientation, achievement orientation, socialization and classmates' supports, adjustment and sociability were significantly important contributors of well-being. Adolescent who have positive relationships with their family are more likely to report high levels of perceived well-being.(Hair et al 2005). These researches show that family and home environment plays a major role in adolescence's general well beings. If the conditions at home are congenial then their mental health is high. A secured emotional base is essential for the positive development of young girls. When the family members understand their members of the family girls appropriately and offer supports, their positive mental health will improve to a great extend.

TABLE NO - 4
One – Way Analysis Of Difference Among Various Standards Of The Respondents And Their Level Of General Well Beings.

Source	df	Ss	Ms	X	Statistical inference
Between groups Within groups	2 93	16.58 734.40	8.29 12.88	VIII Std = 28.83 IX Std = 28.39 X Std = 29.63	F= 0.64 P > 0.05 Not significant

The above table shows that there is no significant variation seen among the standard of the respondents and the level of general well beings. However, the mean score of the X standard respondents shows a little higher than the other too.

IV. CONCLUSION

Family members especially parents should spend qualitative time with their adolescent girls and create home atmosphere to feel free for them. Therefore it helps them not only to ensure their mental health but also safe and secure environment for them. Government or NGO should take an initiation that the social scientist like social workers should take part in the parent - teachers association. It helps to guide the parents and teachers to handle the adolescent girls and promote their mental health. Special association for adolescent girls should be established at school if possible in community level to solve their unique problems through peer group with the guidance of expert. Adolescence is a crucial phase in the life of a woman as the girl stands at the threshold of adulthood. This stage is the most eventful for mental, emotional and psychological well being of adolescent girls. Girls' welfare today shapes the prospects for future families. The health and other achievements of future generations are directly related to the physical and intellectual conditions of the present period. The individual is the product of the family environment. There is a need to create an enriched environment for adolescent girls.

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