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# Family environment on emotional, social, and academic adaptation of adolescents: A study of middle school students

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**ABSTRACT**

Maintaining a positive relationship among family members creates a harmonious learning environment. When children are nurtured in such surroundings, they are likely to increase their emotional, social, and academic accomplishments and learn more effectively. The purpose of this paper was to analyze the familial role in emotional, social and academic adaptation of middle school students. The sample consisted of 9,728 middle school students from different parts of a Middle East country. The size of the sample was determined using multistage random sampling. Data were obtained using an emotional, social and academic survey and a family structure questionnaire. The study showed that most students have average or better behavior adaptation. Moreover, healthy family structures, favorable economic situation, and high-end paternal professions facilitate behavior adaptation. On the other hand, maternal employment has no effect upon behavior adaptation.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education and training of children is one of the most important principles upon which the development of a country is dependent. In order to efficiently educate and guide adolescents, we must correctly understand them. Even though the modern meaning of the term adolescence has been established in the 20th century, the essence of adolescence is still vague and self-contradictory and thus cannot be properly defined. According to classic interpretation, adolescence is a period of conflict, confusion, and anxiety.

Hall has defined adolescence as a period of internal disturbance, stress, and physical, mental, and emotional changes. Many psychoanalysts still regard adolescence as a period of psychological confusion [1]. Integration of the self and environment is a vital necessity for all living beings. All creatures endeavor to adapt to their surroundings in order to preserve their security and obtain their needs. According to the Piagetian model, adaptation is described as the equilibrium of organism and environment. Adaptation is the balance between accommodation and assimilation. It is a process with two scopes with which a child creates new mind structures in order to effectively associate with its surroundings [2, 3].

According to Erickson [4] adolescents are in search of individual identity. Thus, they endeavor to establish a correlation between the disparate elements of their personality and subsequently re-experience their previous conflicts. As a result, they frequently quarrel with their parents. By the time a child reaches adolescence, he has experienced three social groups: family, peers, and school [5]. As indicated by Gesell's model, adolescence is the period between ages ten and sixteen. This phase of growth is full of change and

vicissitude. In this model, adolescence is divided into four successive stages. Ages eleven and twelve are considered a conduit between childhood and adolescence. This stage consists of much change for the adolescent. Age thirteen is a period of introspection and self-analysis in which adolescents experience the novelties of their new situation, distance themselves from others, and prefer to refrain from talking about their problems. At age fourteen they become more extroverted, direct their interests toward others, and enter their social life. After much undulation, a person reaches the final cycle of adolescence at fifteen years of age and thus attains a type of equilibrium [6, 7].

Many delinquencies and social offences are rooted within psychosocial maladjustment. Maladjustment is a biological, mental, and social phenomenon which is derived from a sense of insecurity. It is a mechanism which causes a person to be unable to cope with the demands of normal society [8-10]. The sense of maladjustment can be found within the family [11]. Furthermore, the causes of many students' difficulties are familial troubles [12, 13]. The extent of adherence to the norm of society is directly related to the general condition of families. Moreover, all social traumas are directly or indirectly associated with families.

The quality of cultural and moral upbringing is slowly degrading in today's societies. Many social psychologists assume that this decline originates from dysfunctional families. Long periods of absence of working fathers and mothers from home, and socioeconomic crisis are considered the main reasons of unbalance in families. Unfavorable familial performance creates disruptions and breaks in child development [14].

In his research, Steinberg [15] investigated five types of families: a) intact affectionate families; b) responder families; c) indifferent families; d) autocratic families; and e) dysfunctional families. The findings show that intact and affectionate families and also responder families are the best types of families for the upbringing of a child. Dysfunction, autocracy, and indifference lead to anxiety, depression, antisocial behavior, and a severe delinquent mentality in children while family solidarity leads to mental health in children [16]. A child's family deeply affects formation of their personality, maladjustment, and tendency for delinquency through its child-parent relationship and unique structure.

The social and emotional adjustment of students whose mothers are employed is significantly better than that of students whose mothers are homemakers. Additionally, students who live in families with low economic and social situations are less socially adjusted and have more problems with their studies [17]. Prior studies show that the existence of traumatic relations between mother and child, incompatibility between family members, stressful and unstable atmosphere, parent drug use, divorce, collapse of family structure, inferiority feeling relative to siblings, uncertainty and confusion, and insecurity are effective factors in maladjustment and delinquency and also cause psychopathological disorders in parents and their children [18-20]. Therefore, in this study the purpose was to ascertain the extent of emotional, social, and academic adjustment of students and determine the degree of familial influence in their adjustment. For this study, four research questions were formulated: 1) what is the condition of the emotional, social, and academic adjustment of middle school students nationwide?; 2) does family structure influence student adjustment if so, how?; 3) how does parental employment and profession type affect student adjustment?; 4) in what ways does the economic situation of families affect student adjustment?

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

### 2.1. Participants

The subjects for this study included a wide spectrum of middle school students in different provinces of the country. There were 9,780 students recruited from middle schools nationwide using random multistage sampling. The sample was intentionally selected in order to contain an equal quantity of each gender.

### 2.2. Instrumentation

Deductive statistics were used to analyze accumulated data. Adjustment and its influential factors were measured using questionnaires: a 55-item adjustment questionnaire [21, 22] consisting of emotional, social, and academic adaptation assessments, and a familial structure survey.

The content validity of these surveys was investigated by six professors with considerable experience in research who made the necessary corrections. The reliability of these surveys and their components was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha with a random sample of 1,800 student participants. The results are shown in Table 1. These values illustrate the internal parallelism of the surveys which adequately indicates their reliability.

Table 1. Reliability ratio of behavior adaptation and family structure surveys

| Survey | Cronbach's Alpha Ratio |
|---|---|
| Emotional section of adjustment survey | 0.75 |
| Social section of adjustment survey | 0.78 |
| Academic section of adjustment survey | 0.78 |
| Family structure survey | 0.82 |
| Total | 0.80 |

## 3. RESULTS

Evaluation of social, emotional, and academic adjustment: the frequency and distribution ratio of the sample was evaluated in five classes which are shown in Table 2. According to Table 2, most students have an adjustment ratio of average or better. Furthermore, emotionally 30.8%, socially 21.4%, and academically 20.1% of the students had under average adjustment ratios. These students are socially, emotionally, and academically maladjusted.

Table 2. Frequency and distribution ratio of social, emotional, and academic adjustment in middle school students

| | Very Poor | | Poor | | Average | | Satisfactory | | Excellent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | Ratio% | F | Ratio% | F | Ratio% | F | Ratio% | F | Ratio% |
| Emotional Adjustment | 1,012 | 10.9 | 1,843 | 19.9 | 1,936 | 20.8 | 3,324 | 35.8 | 1,172 | 12.6 |
| Social Adjustment | 665 | 6.8 | 1,425 | 14.6 | 2,817 | 28.9 | 3,241 | 33.3 | 1,593 | 16.4 |
| Academic Adjustment | 457 | 4.9 | 1,411 | 15.2 | 1,868 | 20.2 | 2,365 | 25.5 | 3,166 | 34.2 |

In order to determine influential familial factors upon student adjustment, the independent t-test was used to analyze data collected from the surveys in relation with intact and dysfunctional families as displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Independent t-test used to compare adjustment levels of children in intact and dysfunctional families

| Adjustment Type | Family Structure | F | Mean | Std | SE | t-value | df | p-level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional Adjustment | Intact Families | 5,143 | 72.81 | 17.6 | 0.230 | 7.2 | 8,163 | 0.000 |
| | Broken & Dysfunctional Families | 3,022 | 69.60 | 18.4 | 0.350 | | | |
| Social Adjustment | Intact Families | 5,381 | 72.66 | 13.62 | 0.181 | 4.6 | 8,558 | 0.000 |
| | Broken & Dysfunctional Families | 3,179 | 71.15 | 13.56 | 0.233 | | | |
| Academic Adjustment | Intact Families | 5,097 | 79.61 | 16.16 | 0.230 | 10.4 | 8,152 | 0.000 |
| | Broken & Dysfunctional Families | 3,057 | 75.17 | 17.93 | 0.310 | | | |

As shown in Table 3, there is a significant difference in adjustment ratios between the two groups (a < 0.001). The mean adjustment score for students of intact families is higher than that of students living in dysfunctional families. The independent t-test was used to ascertain the effects of maternal employment on student adjustment by comparing the survey scores of students with employed and unemployed mothers as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent t-test regarding influence of maternal employment on student adjustment

| Adjustment Type | Maternal Employment | F | Mean | Std | SE | t-value | df | P-level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional | Employed | 881 | 71.57 | 17.83 | 0.601 | 0.03 | 9,076 | 0.97 |
| Adjustment | Unemployed | 8,197 | 71.56 | 18.16 | 0.201 | | | |
| Social | Employed | 925 | 71.92 | 13.39 | 0.44 | 0.04 | 9,528 | 0.96 |
| Adjustment | Unemployed | 8,605 | 71.94 | 13.57 | 0.14 | | | |
| Academic | Employed | 865 | 79.20 | 17.1 | 0.51 | 1.76 | 9,064 | 0.21 |
| Adjustment | Unemployed | 8,201 | 78.98 | 16.9 | 0.18 | | | |

As can be seen from Table 4, no significant difference was found concerning student adjustment within these two groups. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Scheffe's test were used to determine the effects of economic status on student adjustment as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. ANOVA regarding effects of economic status on pupil adjustment

| Adjustment Type | Variability | df | SS | MS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional Adjustment | Within group | 6 | 6,626.32 | 1,104.38 |
| | Between group | 8.600 | 2,821,857.75 | 328.21 |
| | Totals | 8.606 | 2,828,686.07 | |
| Social Adjustment | Within group | 6 | 3,092.47 | 515.41 |
| | Between group | 9.028 | 1,665,537.38 | 184.48 |
| | Totals | 9.034 | 1,668,629.86 | |
| Academic Adjustment | Within group | 6 | 21,999.47 | 3,666.58 |
| | Between group | 8.612 | 2,411,930.115 | 280.066 |
| | Totals | 8.618 | 2,433,939.61 | |

According to the ANOVA regarding effects of economic status on student emotional adjustment, there is a significant difference between the means ($a < 0.002$). The ANOVA regarding social adjustment of students showed a significant difference between social adjustment score means ($a < 0.001$). Furthermore, the ANOVA regarding student academic adjustment showed a significant difference between academic adjustment score means ($a < 0.001$).

Scheffe's test was applied to compare student emotional as seen in Table 6, social as seen in Table 7, and academic as seen in Table 8 adjustments based on economic status. The test indicated that student emotional adjustment means were significantly higher in families with good economic situation (monthly income higher than 301,100 Tomans; roughly 320 dollars) when compared with families with lower economic situations. No significant difference was observed regarding other economic classes.

One-way ANOVA was also performed in order to determine effects of various paternal professionals on emotional, social, and academic adjustment of students as displayed in Table 9. The analysis showed a significant difference between means regarding emotional adjustment ($a < 0.0007$). Also, with respect to social and academic adjustment, a significant difference between means was found ($a < 0.001$).

Table 6. Scheffe's test applied to compare student emotional adjustment based on economic status

| Income | | 0-100 | 101-200 | 201-300 | 301-400 | 401-500 | 501-600 | 0ver 600 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | 70.47 | 70.99 | 71.2 | 72.5 | 72.6 | 72.86 | 73.01 |
| 0-100 | 70.47 | * | | | | | | |
| 101-200 | 70.99 | | * | | | | | |
| 201-300 | 71.2 | | | * | | | | |
| 301-400 | 72.5 | • | • | | * | | | |
| 401-500 | 72.6 | • | • | | | * | | |
| 501-600 | 72.86 | • | • | | | | * | |
| Over 600 | 73.01 | • | • | | | | | * |

Table 7. Scheffe's test applied to compare student social adjustment based on economic status

| Income | | 0-100 | 101-200 | 201-300 | 301-400 | 401-500 | 501-600 | 0ver 600 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | 71.12 | 71.16 | 72.2 | 72.3 | 72.35 | 72.39 | 72.82 |
| 0-100 | 71.12 | * | | | | | | |
| 101-200 | | | * | | | | | |
| 201-300 | | | | * | | | | |
| 301-400 | • | • | • | | * | | | |
| 401-500 | • | • | • | | | * | | |
| 501-600 | • | • | • | | | | * | |
| Over 600 | • | • | • | | | | | * |

Table 8. Scheffe's test applied to compare student academic adjustment based on economic status

| Income | Mean | 0-100 | 101-200 | 201-300 | 301-400 | 401-500 | 501-600 | 0ver 600 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0-100 | 75.46 | * | | | | | | |
| 101-200 | 77.22 | | * | | | | | |
| 201-300 | 78.83 | | | * | | | | |
| 301-400 | 79.2 | • | • | • | * | | | |
| 401-500 | 79.7 | • | • | • | | * | | |
| 501-600 | 79.94 | • | • | • | | | * | |
| Over 600 | 80.75 | • | • | • | | | | * |

Table 9. ANOVA regarding effects of male parent profession on pupil adjustment

| Adjustment Type | Variability | df | SS | MS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional Adjustment | Within group | 6 | 7,669.71 | 1,278.28 |
| | Between group | 9.026 | 2,964,887.42 | 328.48 |
| | Totals | 9.032 | 2,972,557.14 | |
| Social Adjustment | Within group | 6 | 5,087.59 | 847.93 |
| | Between group | 9.474 | 1,725,931.59 | 182.17 |
| | Totals | 9.480 | 1,731,019.18 | |
| Academic Adjustment | Within group | 6 | 14,379.74 | 2,396.62 |
| | Between group | 6.010 | 2,506,016.74 | 278.13 |
| | Totals | 6.016 | 2,520,396.48 | |

Scheffe's test was also implemented in order to compare effects of various paternal professions on student adjustment. The average emotional shown in Table 10, social shown in Table 11, and academic shown in Table 12 adjustment score for students whose fathers were in the military, or were staffers, teachers, specialists, or self-employed was significantly higher than the average emotional adjustment score of students whose fathers were laborers or unemployed.

Table 10. Scheffe's test implemented in order to compare student emotional adjustment means based on various paternal professions

| Profession | mean | Unemployed | Laborer | Military | Staffer | Teacher | Self-employed | Specialist |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | mean | 69.01 | 71.27 | 73.2 | 73.4 | 73.6 | 73.7 | 73.9 |
| Unemployed | 69.01 | * | | | | | | |
| Laborer | 71.27 | | * | | | | | |
| Military | 73.2 | • | • | * | | | | |
| Staffer | 73.4 | • | • | | * | | | |
| Teacher | 73.6 | • | • | | | * | | |
| Self-employed | 73.7 | • | • | | | | * | |
| Specialist | 73.9 | • | • | | | | | * |

Table 11. Scheffe's test implemented in order to compare student social adjustment means based on various paternal professions

| Profession | mean | Unemployed | Laborer | Military | Staffer | Teacher | Self-employed | Specialist |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | mean | 66.49 | 71.71 | 73.2 | 73.4 | 73.5 | 73.8 | 74.20 |
| Unemployed | 66.49 | * | | | | | | |
| Laborer | 71.71 | | * | | | | | |
| Military | 73.2 | • | • | * | | | | |
| Staffer | 73.4 | • | • | | * | | | |
| Teacher | 73.5 | • | • | | | * | | |
| Self-employed | 73.8 | • | • | | | | * | |
| Specialist | 74.20 | • | • | | | | | * |

Table 12. Scheffe's test implemented in order to compare student academic adjustment means based on various paternal professions

| Profession | Mean | Unemployed | Laborer | Military | Staffer | Teacher | Self-employed | Specialist |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | 73.0 | 77.37 | 83.1 | 83.4 | 83.5 | 83.67 | 84.68 |
| Unemployed | 7.3 | * | | | | | | |
| Laborer | 77.37 | | * | | | | | |
| Military | 83.1 | • | • | * | | | | |
| Staffer | 83.4 | • | • | | * | | | |
| Teacher | 83.5 | • | • | | | * | | |
| Self-employed | 83.67 | • | • | | | | * | |
| Specialist | 84.68 | • | • | | | | | * |

## 4. DISCUSSION

An adolescent is neither adult nor child, rather a person who is midway between a bygone childhood and an unrealized adulthood. He is an individual who has ceased youthful imitation but has yet to come into harmony with his new role. Hall described adolescence as a "rebirth" since humanity's most advanced traits and civilized manners appear in this period [23].

Results showed that 75% of middle school students have an average or better emotional, social, and academic adaptation ratio. Although 30.8% of examined students had a lower than average emotional adaptation, 20.1% had lower than average social adaptation, and 21.4% had lower than average academic adaptation. Thus, these students are emotionally, socially, and academically maladjusted. Gesell [24] maintains that adolescence is a period of change and vicissitude which begins at ten and ends at sixteen years of age. In this period, adolescents experience puberty – a time of sudden and extensive physical changes accompanied by severe anxiety which my produce emotional and social maladjustment. Most researchers agree that puberty and identity crisis are two of the most important risk factors in adolescent equilibration. According Adler, the tendency for behavioral maladjustment reaches its climax in adolescents [25].

New age psychology schools have executed many comprehensive analyses regarding risk factors in maladjustment. The results of these analyses present many practical guidelines for educators and psycho-pedagogic counselors. Many of these studies can be found in the works of Sigmund and Anna Freud. Major ramifications of pupil maladjustment include academic dropout and various types of delinquency. In order to elucidate further, it must be stated that many psychological features such as emotional deficiency, rejection, and ineffective communication expose students to maladjustment. Behavior maladjustment of adolescent students endures throughout their pedagogic years and exposes them to serious problems including academic failure, behavioral defects, behavioral and emotional disorders, delinquency, and academic dropout. Parent-child conflicts gradually escalate and reach their height in the middle of adolescence [26-28].

While self-identity is an essential concern for everyone, most fluctuation and confusion occurs within the period of adolescence in which most social maladjustments originate. Adolescents must accept the fact that they must sooner or later take professional and familial responsibility. Additionally, seniors and peers develop new expectations of adolescents as they grow older [29]. These issues may be causes for maladjusted behavior in adolescent students.

Data analysis showed significantly higher student adaptation ratios in intact families compared with student adaptation in dysfunctional or broken families. The majority of researchers postulate that familial structure and performance are the most important factors in a child's psychological growth and evolution and many of children problems are in essence domestically derived. Gerstein and Crnic [30] studied how whole family interactions are related to children's developing behavior problems and social competence. They demonstrated that emotional, social, and academic adjustment is lower in families with less interaction and emotional ties.

Inferiority feeling due to physical defects, familial cultural, social and economical deficiency, collapse of family structure, lack of parental sentiment, and lack of correct moral criterion within the family are all behavioral risk factors for students and thus cause antisocial behavior which is an unacceptable method for students to facilitate reduction of accumulated internal tension [31]. Student's achievement within their own families influences social and emotional adjustment. Being an orphan, foster child, or single child; possessing a stepfather or stepmother; and indifference or overprotection all cause emotional immaturity in children and complicate their emotional, social, and academic adjustment in various environments [32].

Compared to children living in an intact and healthy family, children of divorced parents manifest greater antisocial behavior, aggression, disobedience, and depression. They also demonstrate more behavioral problems in social relations [33, 34]. According to a study on the effects of collapse of marriage and divorce on family structure and children [35], such children have internal problems like depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, external problems such as disobedience, aggression, and delinquency, social incompetence, confused friendly relationship, and psychological disorders throughout adulthood.

Additionally, findings revealed that maternal employment has no effect on emotional, social, and academic adjustment with reference to middle school students nationwide. Several prior studies assume that maternal employment adversely affects student emotional, social, and academic adjustment [36]. While other studies assert that it positively affects adjustment [37]. This study found that maternal employment has no effect on emotional, social, and academic adjustment of students. Mothers who work have less time to spend with their children. Particularly, in low income families, mothers who work spend most of their time outside the home and do housework when at home and as a result they have very little time to spend with their children. It seems that conformity and understanding between parents and children are no longer effective factors in emotional, social, and academic adjustment and thus maternal presence becomes irrelevant to adjustment. This may be due to the generation gap caused by development of new technology and alteration

of social views. Additionally, with academic advancement, children surpass their parents in knowledge thus creating distance between parents and children.

Moreover, data analysis showed that emotional, social, and academic adjustment of middle school students living in families with a good economic situation is significantly better than students living in families with a poor economic situation. According to Morsy and Rothetein [38], "parental unemployment and low wages, housing instability, concentration of disadvantage in segregated neighborhoods, stress, malnutrition, and health problems like asthma" are harmful characteristics among students who live in families with poor economic situation [39].

Findings suggest that the emotional, social, and academic adaptation ratio of students whose parents are administrative employees, teachers, businessmen or specialist is significantly higher than students whose parents are laborers or unemployed. Several of the research studies indicate the fact that paternal profession affects emotional, social, and academic adaptation of students and further maintain that development of student mental structure and adjustment is related to welfare. Parental profession and socioeconomic and cultural status affect student conduct, emotional climate, academic progress, and adjustment. Chen, et al. [40] state that many "studies have shown that personal characteristics, family socioeconomic status, teachers, and school characteristics are key factors affecting students' . . . academic achievement." [41-45]. According to National Research Council [46], health is also deeply influenced by "social determinants," such as income and wealth, education, occupation, and experiences based on racial or ethnic identification.

## 5. CONCLUSION

While all poor children are not maladjusted, economic, social, and cultural deficiency and the lack of welfare are significant risk factors in adjustment. Student runaways and delinquencies may be caused by parental unemployment and drug addiction. In many families, children's health and development are being affected by the difficulties their parents are experiencing.

Adolescents are subject to widespread mental disparity; therefore, they should be treated with great care in order to facilitate progression through crises. Student emotional, social, and academic adjustment should be determined annually through valid tests. Students with adjustment issues should receive necessary counseling. Students living in dysfunctional or broken families should be identified in order to receive special care and counseling. Moreover, they should be specially observed in order to determine and suppress any sort of maladjustment or delinquency. Courses should be developed for parents regarding correct methods of child training and education in accordance with various periods of child development. Fifth, targeted initiatives should be designed in order to raise the economic status of deprived families, minimize inflation, and lower unemployment rates in order to decrease familial problems which cause maladjustment and delinquency.

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