

## Family Communication and Family System as the Predictors of Family Satisfaction in Adolescents

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**Abstract-** The current study was conducted to explore the family communication and family system as the predictors of family satisfaction in adolescents. A Purposive sample comprised of 120 adolescents from nuclear (n = 60) and joint family (n = 60) were equally taken comprised of girls (n = 30) and boys (n = 30) having age range of 14 to 19 years. A demographic form was used to obtain the information about variables of interest e.g., age, sex, family system (Nuclear & joint) & education. Family Communication Scale (Olson et al., 2004) and Family Satisfaction Scale (Olson, 1995) were administered to measure family communication and satisfaction respectively. The reliability for FCS was  $\alpha$ .60 and for FSC was  $\alpha$ .71. Correlation, Multiple Regression Analysis and Independent Sample t-test was performed with SPSS (version 17). The results suggested that family communication is the most significant predictor of family satisfaction in adolescents ( $\beta = .37, p < .001$ ). Moreover, family system found to be non significant predictor ( $\beta = -.12, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, results of correlation also indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between family communication and family satisfaction ( $r = .37, p < .001$  respectively). However, the non significant differences in the scores of adolescents for nuclear and joint family on FSS and FCS ( $\beta = .37, p < .001$ ). These results are consistent with the prior findings of Western countries. The current research findings have implications for the researchers who are interested in the impact of family dynamics in adolescent development.

**Keywords:** Family Communication, Family Satisfaction, Family System

### Introduction

Communication within the context of the family appears to be particularly important during the adolescents' years. Family communication research has surged over the past three decades and has provided important implications for both academics and practitioners (Galvin, 2004; Zhang, 2008). Although a focus on youth problems is important, some scholars have expanded their focus to include positive indicators of well-being, attempting to shift research, public discussion, and policy-making efforts toward the promotion of optimal levels of adolescent health (Peterson, 2006). Adolescence, the transitional stage of development between childhood and adulthood, represents the period of time during which a person experiences a variety of biological changes and encounters a number of emotional issues (Sternberg, 2001).

Families are one of the fundamental units of society and are the building blocks of social structures and organizations in every culture. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) stated that

families are goal-directed, self-correcting, dynamic, interconnected systems that both affect and are affected by their environment and by qualities within the family itself.

Nuclear family system is a term used to define a family group consisting of a father, mother and their children (Reiss, 1988). Joint or extended family system comprises of father, mother, and children, one or more grandparents, an Aunt, an Uncle and even some cousins, live together within the same household (Reiss, 1988). In Pakistan, the joint or extended family system has been the prevalent family system (Mason, 1992). However, in recent times, urbanization has led to alterations in existing family structures in the country, especially the larger cities. It has been suggested that urbanization leads to households becoming less extended and more nuclear and that this trend would be observed in developing countries (Bongaarts, 2001).

Family communication is the way verbal and non-verbal information is exchanged between family members (Epstein et al., 1993). Communication within the family is extremely important because it enables members to express their needs, wants, and concerns to each other. It is through communication that family members are able to resolve the unavoidable problems that arise in all families (Peterson & Green, 2009). The circumplex model of marital and family systems is a graphic representation of the dynamic relationships within family systems and emphasizes how family members and their behaviors are interconnected. The three dimensions addressed by the model are family cohesion (i.e., togetherness); family adaptability (i.e., the ability to cope with change); and family communication (Olson & DeFrain, 2000). Although communication is not pictured graphically in the model, as a facilitating dimension it helps the families move between the extremes of the other two dimensions. According to Olson and DeFrain (2000) "If a family has good communication skills, they are more likely to be close (cohesion dimension) and be able to work out problems (adaptability dimension) when they arise.

Systems theory helps clarify how family communication is an important part of effective family functioning (Beavers & Voeller, 1983; Bloom, 1985; Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985; Olson & DeFrain, 1994). Open communication within families creates an environment of positive change, understanding, and growth. Therefore, facilitating open family communication should encourage the development of stronger relationships within families. Among those who may benefit most from improved family communications are children in their adolescence.

A number of investigators have demonstrated a link between the communication that occurs in the family and adolescent developmental outcomes. Positive developmental outcomes such as school achievement (Georgiou, 1995; Marta, 1997), self-esteem (Demo, Small, & Savin-Williams, 1987), ability to resolve difficult life issues (Hops, Tildesley, Lichenstein, Ary, & Sherman, 1990), moral maturity (Walker, 1991), and taking an active role in coping with their stress (Day, Bosworth, Gustafson, Chewning, & Hawkins, 1985) have all been linked with communication that is perceived as open. Further, perceived open communication has been associated with the ability to express opinions and ideas (Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983).

Family satisfaction is defined as the degree to which family members feel happy and fulfilled with each other (Olson & Wilson, 1982). Anderson et al. (2001) consider both relational and group satisfaction research to better understand how group members' satisfaction is affected by communication within their group. Satisfaction has previously been linked to family communication environments. The impact of communication within families has been examined with family satisfaction (Schrodt, Soliz & Braithwaite, 2008). Schrodt (2009) found that the family expressiveness environment was positively associated with satisfaction and structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance were inversely related to family satisfaction. Anderson et al. (2001) consider both relational and group satisfaction research to better understand how group members' satisfaction is affected by communication within their group. Satisfaction has previously been linked to family communication environments. The impact of communication within families has been examined with family satisfaction (Schrodt, Soliz & Braithwaite, 2008). Schrodt (2009) found that the family expressiveness environment was positively associated with satisfaction and structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance were inversely related to family satisfaction.

Researchers have discovered a strong link between communication patterns and satisfaction with family relationships (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Studies have found that during adolescence, life satisfaction is strongly influenced by life experiences and relationships, particularly within the context of the family (Gohm et al., 1998; Rask et al., 2003; Edwards & Lopez, 2006). Across the full range of adolescence, students' ratings of the quality of their family relationships have been shown to be of greater significance to their overall life satisfaction than peer, school, or community-level ratings (Dew & Huebner, 1994). Despite increasing amounts of time spent with peers, the quality of family relationships appears to be most important to adolescents' lives.

A family who has good family communication will be better able to alter their cohesion and flexibility to meet developmental and situational demands that arise (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Family systems with poor communication tend to have lower functioning in regard to cohesion and flexibility, whereas family systems with good communication tend to function higher (Olson, 2000). Research has demonstrated that families function best during adolescent development when families are adaptable and cohesive (Henggler, Burr-Harris, Borduin, & McCallum, 1991; Gaughan, 1995).

Pakistan has one of the largest cohorts of young people in its history, with approximately 25 million adolescents and young people aged 15 and 24 years (Government of Pakistan, 2001). As in most countries, there is the awareness that the health and well-being of the current and subsequent young cohorts is profoundly important for the social, political, and economic development and stability of the country (Sathar et al., 2003). Research on adolescents is still relatively new in Pakistan. Only recently have studies been conducted on the lives of adolescents in Pakistan (Durrant, 2000; Sathar et al., 2003), however, they provide only limited data on adolescent's family communication and family satisfaction.

It is common knowledge that cultures seem to have different types of family systems. In the United States and Canada and the countries of northern Europe the nuclear family, father, mother and the children, appears to predominate. In almost all of the rest of the world, extended families, the grandparents, father, mother, children, but also aunts, uncles, cousins, and other kin are considered to be "family". The 20th century has seen the greatest upheaval in history of family change. Family system has already been explored with reference to different variables. Taqui et al, (2007) conducted a study in Pakistan on depression and family system and found that residing in a nuclear family system is a strong independent predictor of depression in the elderly people.

## Method

### Research Design

Survey research design was used in this research project.

### Sampling Strategy

Non-probability purposive sampling strategy was used. The following inclusive criteria were used to draw the sample.

1. The adolescents lived in the joint and nuclear family systems.
2. Education base line was of Matric.
3. The age range of the participants was 14 to 19.
4. Willingness of the adolescents to participate in the current research.

### Sample

The sample was composed of 120 adolescents. The sample was divided into 2 categories in terms of family system. Each category comprises of 60 participants ( $n = 60$ ). Category 1 consisted of the adolescent from nuclear family. Category 2 comprised of adolescent from joint or extended family. Both categories included equal number of girls and boys ( $n = 30$ ) who met the above-mentioned inclusive criteria. The distribution of sample is described below:

### Instruments

Three instruments were used for this study to operationalize the constructs of interest:

1. Demographic Form

2. Family Communication Scale FCS (Olson et al., 2004)
3. Family Satisfaction Scale FSC (Olson, 1995).

### 1. Demographic Form

A demographic form was formulated to obtain the required information such as age, sex, family system, and education of every participant. The entire participants were assured that the information shall be kept confidential.

### 2. Family Communication Scale

The Family Communication Scale (Olson et al., 2004) is a self-report measure of family communication for the age of 12 year and over. It consists of 10 items. Each item has five optional responses which are scored, as follows:

Optional Responses	Scores
Strongly Disagree	1
Generally Disagree	2
Undecided	3
Generally Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

The range of scores is from 10-50 whereas 10 indicate very low family communication and 50 indicate very high family communication. The FCS was found to be internally consistent. The results given in Table 2 indicate statistically significant reliability ( $\alpha = .60$ ) for FCS which was used to assess the degree to which family members feel unconstrained and satisfied with the communication in their family (Olson et al., 2004).

**Table 1:** Reliabilities Analysis of Family Communication Scale FCS

Scale	No. of items	$\alpha$
FCS	10	.60

### 3. Family Satisfaction Scale

The Family Satisfaction Scale (Olson, 1995) is a self-report scale specifically designed to assess the level of satisfaction family members have with their families functioning. The

scale currently assesses ten aspects of family functioning in a 10 item format for age 12 and over. These ten items when taken together reveal a single satisfaction factor. For each item, participants rated on a 5-point Likert scale:

Optional Responses	Scores
Very Dissatisfied	1
Somewhat Dissatisfied	2
Generally Satisfied	3
Very Satisfied	4
Extremely Satisfied	5

Following Olson (1995) recommendation, the total score was used as an index of satisfaction with family functioning. Based on a sample of 2,465 family members, the 10 item family

satisfaction scale has an alpha reliability of .92 and test re-test of .85 (Olson, 1995).

**Table 2:** Reliabilities Analysis of Family Satisfaction Scale FSS

Scale	No. of items	$\alpha$
FSS	10	0.71

### Procedure

The current study was conducted to explore the family communication and family system as the predictors of family satisfaction in adolescents. The sample was approached individually at their relevant places. The participants of the study were briefed about the purpose of the research. Informed consent was obtained from participants since the study has no risk for them as well as they were ensured that their responses will be kept confidential. The scales containing 10 items of Family Communication scale (Olson et al., 2004) and 10 items of Family satisfaction scale (Olson,

1995) were administered on 120 individual from nuclear and joint family. There was no restriction of the time for the completion of scales. The desire personal information was obtained on the demographic form. In the end the participants were thanked for their kind cooperation.

### Statistics

The SPSS (version 17) was used to perform correlation to find out relationship between family communication and family satisfaction among adolescents. Independent t-test was also used to check the mean difference between the two variables.

Furthermore, multiple regression analysis is applied in order to get the clear cut picture of predictability of the variables that which variable proved to be a better predictor.

## Results

The results given in Table 3 suggest statistically significant positive relationship between family communication and

**Table 3:** Correlation between Family Communication Scale and Family Satisfaction Scale (N=120)

Scale	FCS	FSS
FCS	0	.37***

\*\*\* $p < .001$

However, Multiple Regression Analysis revealed that family communication,  $F(10.43) = p < .001$ , had  $R = .37$  and  $R^2 = .15$  as the most significant predictor of family satisfaction. The

family system came out to be a non significant predictor of family satisfaction as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictors of Family Satisfaction (N = 120)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$
Constant	20.28	5.13	
Family Communication	0.51	0.12	.37***
Family System	-1.13	0.83	-0.12

$R^2 = .15, F = 10.43$

\*\*\* $p = < .001, p = n.s.$

The results given in Table 5 revealed the non significant differences in the scores of adolescents for nuclear and joint family on FSS and FCS

**Table: 5** Mean Scores of Adolescents of Nuclear and Joint Family on FCS & FSS (N=120)

Scale	Family system	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
FCS	Nuclear family	60	43.17	3.85	-0.32
	Joint family	60	43.32	3.41	
FSS	Nuclear family	60	40.98	4.25	1.18
	Joint family	60	39.93	5.45	

$p = n.s., df = 118$

## Discussion

The present study is conducted to explore the family communication and family system as the predictors of family satisfaction in adolescents. The main objective of the study was to predict the family satisfaction on the basis of family communication and family system in adolescents. It was hypothesized that family communication will be the significant predictor of family satisfaction as compare to family system. In order to get the clear cut picture of the variables step wise regression analysis was used to see the level of predictability of different variables. This analysis revealed that family communication is the most significant predictor of family satisfaction in adolescents. Moreover, family system came out to be a non significant predictor (see Table 4). Furthermore, results of correlation also indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between family communication and family satisfaction (see Table 3).

These results are consistent with the earlier works of different researcher. Researchers have discovered a strong link between communication patterns and satisfaction with family relationships (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Research suggests that parent-adolescent communication impacts family functioning and adolescents' psychosocial well-being (Shek, 2000). During the time of adolescents change, communication is critical for healthy adjustment (Hart, Olsen, Robinso, & Mandelco, 1997). Schrodt (2009) found that the family expressiveness environment was positively associated with satisfaction and structural traditionalism and conflict avoidance were inversely related to family satisfaction. Studies have found that during adolescence, life satisfaction is strongly influenced by life experiences and relationships, particularly within the context of the family (Gohm et al., 1998; Rask et al., 2003; Edwards & Lopez, 2006).

Another hypothesis of the study was that there would be significant difference in the scores of adolescent from Joint family and Nuclear family on Family Communication Scale and Family Satisfaction scale. But contrary to the hypothesis, results revealed the non significant differences in the scores of adolescents for nuclear and joint family on FSS and FCS (see Table 5). Although these results are contrary to the hypothesis yet are consistent with some of the previous researches. Zimmerman et al., (1995) found non-significant differences in global life satisfaction across five different types of families, including intact, single-mother, mother and extended family members, stepparent, and extended family only. Thus, the impact of family structure on adolescent life satisfaction is unclear. Grossman and Rowat (1995) observed no differences in overall life satisfaction between adolescents in intact versus non-intact families.

## Conclusion

Family communication is a key to successful family functioning. Researchers agree that clear, open, and frequent communication is a basic characteristic of a strong, healthy family. Families that communicate in healthy ways with the adolescents are more capable of problem-solving and tend to be more satisfied with their relationships. The summative information of the present study was suggestive of a significant positive relationship between family

communication and satisfaction. On the other hand family system was the non significant predictor of family satisfaction in adolescents.

## Implications

The findings of this research have implications for the researchers who are interested in the impact of family dynamics in adolescent development. Moreover, the findings of the study can be very helpful for the persons who are interlinked with psychological fields e.g. psychologists, counselors and psychiatrists. This study will give a better indication of what is influential in promoting adolescents' family satisfaction and why differences exist within subgroups of the population.

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