

<https://doi.org/10.33472/AFJBS.6.14.2024.2400-2409>



**African Journal of Biological Sciences**

Journal homepage: <http://www.afjbs.com>



Research Paper

Open Access

## **ROLE OF FAMILY ENVIRONMENT IN PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTURBANCES AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS**

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**Article Info**

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Volume 6, Issue 14, August 2024

Received: 11 June 2024

Accepted: 14 July 2024

Published: 9 August 2024

doi: [10.33472/AFJBS.6.14.2024.2400-2409](https://doi.org/10.33472/AFJBS.6.14.2024.2400-2409)

**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** The family environment plays a crucial role in shaping the psychological well-being of college students. Positive family dynamics, such as cohesion, open communication, and emotional support, can contribute to better mental health outcomes, while negative dynamics, such as conflict, neglect, and lack of support, can lead to psychological disturbances such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Understanding and addressing these factors is essential for promoting the overall well-being and academic success of college students.

**Aim:** The aim is to study the role of family environment in psychological disturbances among college students.

**Material and Methods:** This study included 100 college students, 50 of whom were male and 50 were female. The test measure used in this study was the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-42) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) and the Family Environment Scale by Dr. Harpreet Bhatia and NK Chadha (1993).

**Result:** positive association was found between good family environment and low scores on stress, anxiety and depression. College students reported moderately positive family environments and mental health found to be in normal capacity and free from any intrusion.

**Conclusion:** Enhancing family relationships may improve student mental health. Dysfunctional families relate to poorer adjustment. Colleges should supply family services and mental health services to aid struggling students. Fostering healthy family environments could have enduring benefits for students' psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Family environment, psychological disturbances, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, College students.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The family is like a life jacket in the stormy sea of life, providing trust, companionship, comfort, compassion, support, and love. It serves as the foundation of a person's formative experiences, influencing their socialization and psychological development. Bronfenbrenner's

ecological systems theory highlights how family dynamics are shaped by various cultural, societal, and economic factors, impacting individuals' mental development<sup>1</sup>. The quality of family relationships, attachment bonds, and parenting styles significantly influence an individual's psychological growth and overall welfare<sup>2</sup>.

Adolescence is a crucial period where a child needs guidance, support, and strength from their family. The family's capacity for flexibility and perseverance in confronting difficulties, emphasizing its function as a safe haven where people acquire vital social skills.<sup>3-4</sup> Good parenting practices and a supportive family environment help foster secure attachment bonds and emotional stability. However, children who lack attention and validation at home may seek fulfilment outside the family, leading to detachment and potential negative consequences like becoming people-pleasers.

In today's fast-paced world, parents often prioritize providing material opportunities but may neglect their children's emotional needs. This can result in a loss of attachment between parents and children, exacerbating issues during adolescence, such as generation gaps and rebellious behaviour. Effective communication and compromise are important for filling these gaps and creating a secure family setting. Charles J. (1995)<sup>5</sup> found that youth who had more parental support were less stressed and more well-adjusted than those teenagers who had very less support. A loving and caring family setting can help shield a person from psychological distress<sup>6</sup>

College life represents a significant transition where students experience new difficulties and opportunities for personal growth. Extracurricular activities, exposure to diverse perspectives, and academic rigor contribute to students' holistic development. However, college students may also experience stress and mental health issues, exacerbated by unhealthy family dynamics.

Unhealthy family environments characterized by conflict, abuse, neglect, or poor communication had a negatively consequences a student's emotional health and academic performance. Conversely, the importance of the family environment as an important factor in psychological well-being<sup>7</sup> that is a supportive and loving family setting can promote resilience and improved mental health outcomes for college students. Family-related factors extend beyond immediate family members and include broader familial influences, such as cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

It is crucial to recognize the role of family structure in shaping a student's emotional and mental state during college years. Students who lack support and direction from their families may struggle to cope with the challenges of college life, hindering their ability to succeed academically and emotionally. Current study has focused on exploring the role of family in psychological disturbances among college students.

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The aim and objective is to assess the role of family environment in psychological disturbances among college students. A total of 100 college students participated, out of which 50 were male, and 50 were female. The inclusion criteria were students residing with their parents, and age between 18-25 years, both male and female and those who are willing to participate. In attempting to gathering data, the tools used were the Family Environment Scale (FES) developed by Bhatia and Chadha (1993). This scale consists of 69 items for 17 to 50 years old population and Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-42) developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995). The data was evaluated in SPSS-23 and Microsoft Excel using mean, t-test, and correlation analysis. Purposive sampling was used for data collection and the aim of the study was explained to them before they provided informed consent.

### 3. RESULTS

Table no. 1 showing mean score of overall population, male and female and t-test score between male and female.

Variables	Overall mean & S.D.	Mean (male) & S.D.	Mean (female) & S.D.	T test (btw male & female)
FES: cohesion score	45.73 ±7.30	47.74 ±7.58	43.72 ±6.48	2.848
FES: expressiveness score	28.2 ±5.89	27.82 ±4.79	28.58 ±6.85	-0.642
FES: conflict score	38.03 ±5.02	38.54 ±6.06	37.52 ±3.69	1.015
FES: acceptance and caring score	38.59 ±5.13	39.24 ±5.89	37.94 ±4.21	1.269
FES: independence score	27.71 ±3.99	27.48 ±4.39	27.94 ±3.57	-0.574
FES: active - recreational orientation score	25.51 ±4.11	25.98 ±4.68	25.04 ±3.42	1.145
FES: organization score	7.05 ±1.73	7.38 ±1.70	6.72 ±1.71	1.932
FES: control score	13.26 ±2.68	14.28 ±2.76	12.24 ±2.19	4.084
Depression score	16.24 ±8.14	14.96 ±9.02	17.52 ±7.01	-1.584
Anxiety score	15.92 ±8.16	15.08 ±9.61	16.76 ±6.37	-1.029
Stress score	16.88 ±7.66	15.94 ±8.73	17.82 ±6.35	-1.23

Graph-1 showing mean score of FES and DASS in overall population of male and female.

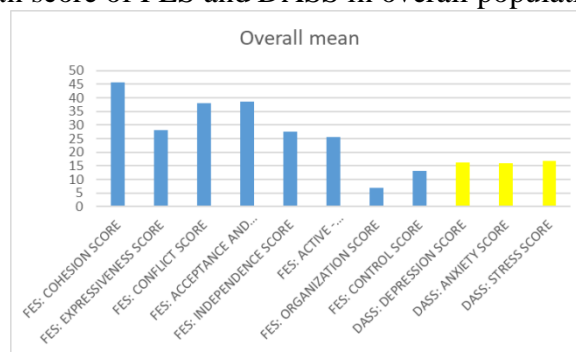


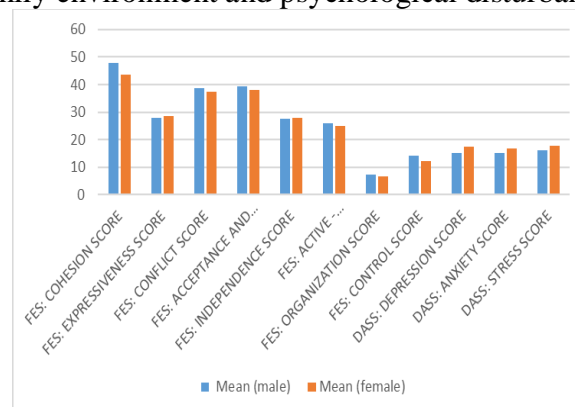
Table 1 is showing an overview of the family's environment along with mental health status of its members. The Family Environment Scale (FES) scores of students indicate they consider that their family has a strong sense of cohesion (45.73), implying a high level of emotional bonding and support among family members. The expressiveness score (28.2) is moderate, shows that family members are encouraged to express their emotions and thoughts openly. However, the conflict score (38.03) is slightly higher, suggesting that there is some openly expressed anger, aggression, and conflict within the families of students.

The acceptance and caring score (38.59) are moderate, indicating that family members provide reasonable support and care for one another. The independence score (27.71) is also moderate, shows that family members are assertive and self-sufficient. The active-recreational orientation score (25.51) is low, implying that the family does not frequently participate in social and recreational activities together. The low organization score (7.05) indicates that the family may not prioritize clear organization and structure when arranging family activities and responsibilities. Similarly, the control score (13.26) is low, implying that the family follows a less rigid set of rules and regulations for managing family life.

The depression score (16.24), anxiety score (15.92), and stress score (16.88) all indicate that family members have mild to moderate mental health concerns.

Therefore, while the family demonstrates strong emotional bonding and support, there are some domains that could be improved. The slightly higher conflict score and lower levels of organization, control, and participation in joint recreational activities indicate that the family could improve communication, reduce conflict, and engage in more shared activities. Furthermore, treating mild to moderate levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in family members may benefit their overall well-being and family functioning. By focusing on these areas, the family may utilize their existing strengths and foster a more harmonious and supportive environment.

Graph 2 showing the gender differences (male & female) among college going students on family environment and psychological disturbances.



Graph 2 is showing that, in the family environment, males tend to score higher on cohesion, expressiveness, and acceptance/caring than females. This implies that males perceive their family relationships as closer, more open in expression, and more caring than females do.

On average, females reported higher independence scores. This suggests that females see their families as giving them more autonomy and self-sufficiency.

Males had higher active-recreational orientation, organization, and control scores. This demonstrates that males see their families as more active, structured, and controlling than females do.

In (DASS) On average, women reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress than men. The mean scores for depression and stress are moderate, while those for anxiety are mild.

For stress alone, males' mean DASS scores were in the moderate severity range. Their depression and anxiety scores were mild.

Therefore, gender differences emerged in perceptions of family dynamics and mental health outcomes. Females have a less positive outlook on family relationships and report poorer mental health. Based on these findings, targeted support for females in terms of family and mental well-being may be appropriate.

Table no. 2 showing the correlation between FES: Subscales and DASS-42.

Variables	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
FES: COHESION SCORE	-.329**	-.324**	-.251*
FES: EXPRESSIVENESS SCORE	-.246*	-.199*	-.233*
FES: CONFLICT SCORE	-.323**	-.306**	-.343**
FES: ACCEPTANCE AND CARING SCORE	-.394**	-.397**	-.353**
FES: INDEPENDENCE SCORE	-.230*	-0.149	-0.171
FES: ACTIVE – RECREATIONAL ORIENTATION SCORE	-.245*	-0.196	-0.15
FES: ORGANIZATION SCORE	-.277**	-.220*	-.300**
FES: CONTROL SCORE	-.350**	-.212*	-.246*

\*. Significant Correlation at 0.05 level.

\*\*.. Significant Correlation is at 0.01 level.

It was found that all FES subscale scores were significantly negatively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress scores. The results suggests that participants who had a more positive perception of their family environment (higher cohesion, expressiveness, acceptance, etc.) indicated less negative mental health symptoms.

Depression scores highlights strongest negative correlations with FES Acceptance and Caring ( $r=-.394$ ), Control ( $r=-.350$ ), and Conflict ( $r=-.323$ ) subscales. This shows that students who saw their families as more caring, providing appropriate autonomy/control, and being less conflictual reported fewer depressive symptoms.

The analysis shows that anxiety is most strongly negatively associated with Acceptance and Caring ( $r=-.397$ ), Cohesion ( $r=-.324$ ), and Conflict ( $r=-.306$ ). Perceiving one's family as more caring and closer, along with less conflictual, is associated with less anxiety symptoms, similar to depression.

Finally, stress scores highlight strongest correlations with conflict ( $r=-.343$ ), acceptance and caring ( $r=-.353$ ), and organization ( $r=-.300$ ). This suggests that viewing one's family as less conflictual, caring, and organized is linked to lower stress levels.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The finding shows that college students usually perceive moderately positive family environments. The Family Environment Scale (FES) assesses various aspects of family functioning. Males had a higher cohesion score (47.74) than females (43.72), which was 9.2% higher than females, which was significant statistically ( $t=2.848$ ). This indicate that male perceive their family as more cohesive than females which aligns with pervious study showing a student's psychological health is crucial to their ability to perform better in life. Their mental health is significantly influenced by their family environment as well. (Talukdar, Rita Rani; Goswami, Kakali (2013) & Defauw et al., (2018)<sup>8-9</sup>. Overall, the dynamics of the family environment were relatively healthy, though some areas could be strengthened. The current findings showing links between family environment and college student mental health which is supposed by findings of Sax and Weintraub (2014)<sup>10</sup> who found that family dynamics have lasting impacts on emotional wellbeing in college. The role of family cohesion found in the present study also mirrors past evidence as Berryhill et al. (2018)<sup>11</sup> found positive family communication and self-compassion mediated the relationship between anxiety/depression and perceptions of cohesive-flexible family functioning their

findings also showed how cohesive family bonds can promote resilience. The conflict score, which assesses the level of openly expressed anger, aggression, and conflict among family members, was slightly higher for male students (38.54) than females (37.52), but the difference was not statistically significant. The control score, which measures the extent to which established rules and procedures are used to run family life, revealed a significant difference ( $t=4.084$ ), with males scoring higher (14.28) than females (12.24), or approximately 16.6% higher than females. This suggests that males perceive a greater sense of control and organization in their family environment.

To determine the level of psychological disturbances (depression, stress, and anxiety) among college students. The findings reveal that females have scored higher on depression, anxiety, and stress than males, but the differences were not statistically significant. Students who believe their families as more cohesive, caring, organized, and less conflictual reported fewer depressive, anxiety, and stress symptoms. These findings are supported with previous studies on college students' family environments and psychological disturbances. Silva et al. (2007)<sup>12</sup> Study looked at the connections between college students' anxiety, motivation, and academic success as measured by their grade point averages in high school and college, and the parenting styles they had as children. M. Blake Berryhill, Christian Harless, and Paige Kean (2018)<sup>13</sup> found self-compassion and good family communication mediated the relationship between anxiety and depression and college students' perceptions of cohesive-flexible family functioning. Jennifer Metheny and Ellen Hawley McWhirter (2013)<sup>14</sup> discovered that college going young adults need to better understand the roles of social status and family support in their career decisions. Charles J. Holahan, David P. Valentiner & Rudolf H. Moos (1995)<sup>15</sup> also found that students who had more parental support were less stressed and more well-adjusted than those who had less support. This demonstrates the long-lasting impact of early family dynamics on emotional health is found even in adulthood. Yacoub Khallad, Fares Jabr (2016)<sup>16</sup> found deeper awareness of the connection between college students' mental health and social support, and they highlighted the importance of certain contextual and cultural factors.

The statistical analysis found significant negative correlations between FES (Family Environment Scale) subscales and DASS-42 (Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale) scores, with (the significance levels 0.01). Cohesiveness, expressiveness, acceptance, and caring have negative connections with depression, anxiety, and stress, implying that better emotional bonds, open communication, and familial warmth protect against psychological distress. This is align with previous research indicating that a supportive and harmonious family environment can serve as a safeguard against mental health difficulties (MacLeod, 2019)<sup>17</sup>. Conflict scores have negative associations with sadness, anxiety, and stress ranging from (-.306 to -.343), indicating that greater familial disagreement is associated with increased psychological suffering. These findings are supported with pervious study done by Rai S. (2021)<sup>18</sup> found a significant negative association between the family environment scale's conflict aspect.

The organization and control components show negative correlation with depression, anxiety, and stress ranging from (-.220 to -.350), underscoring the importance of structured, orderly surroundings and balanced parental control in reducing psychological discomfort. These findings are supported by Dhanashree Sowani and Anagha Lavalekar (2020)<sup>19</sup> who found negative relationship of FES areas of organization and control with DASS.

In the present study there were some interesting gender patterns that emerged. Females had a higher mean depression score (17.52) than males (14.96), suggesting that females experience more depressive symptoms. Similarly, the mean anxiety score for females (16.76) was higher than that of males (15.08), and the mean stress score for females (17.82) was higher than males (15.94). The gender differences seen here have also emerged previously. Sax and

Weintraub (2014) & Panda, Satyananda (2016)<sup>20-21</sup> reported differences in depression and several aspects of the family environment between male and female college students also reported gender impacted parental communications and emotional wellbeing. Harris and Molock (2000)<sup>22</sup> also noted gender as relevant, with family factors relating differently to male and female mental health. Therefore, a supportive and loving family environment can act as a buffer against the stresses of college life, encouraging resilience and improving mental health outcomes. Beyond immediate family members, broader familial influences based on cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds shape people's experiences and coping mechanisms. Recognizing the complex interplay of family dynamics and psychological well-being is critical to creating a nurturing environment in which college students can thrive.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study found that students have moderately healthy family environments and average psychological adjustment. However, problematic family conflict and poor mental health have a significant impact on some students' lives. Family dynamics have strong associations with mental health. Enhancing family relationships may have long-term benefits for students' emotional well-being. While there are some gender differences in the family environment, both men and women face similar adjustment issues.

As a whole, promoting healthy family dynamics is critical for improving college students' mental health and well-being. A supportive and caring family environment serves as a buffer against the obstacles of college life, allowing students to overcome academic and personal obstacles with resilience and confidence. By emphasizing open communication, trust, and compassion within families, we can help students face adversity, develop coping mechanisms, and forge paths to personal growth and fulfilment. Investing in strong familial relationships not only boosts individual resilience, but also helps to create a supportive environment in which students can thrive both academically and emotionally.

### **Limitations**

The self-reported measures used in this research has limitations, including the possibility of response biases and inaccuracies. The use of cross-sectional data restricts our ability to establish causal and temporal relationships between family dynamics and psychological disturbances. Furthermore, the sample size of 100 college students may not be consider of the larger population, limiting the generalizability of the results. The study's focus on college students reside with their parents may exclude those from non-traditional family structures or self-sufficient living arrangements, potentially missing important differences in family dynamics and mental health outcomes. Furthermore, the research did not look into other potential confounding factors like socioeconomic status, cultural background, or previous mental health history, all of which could effect the relationship between family environment and psychological well-being. Future research should address these limitations by using longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse sample sizes, and in-depth assessments of family dynamics and mental health outcomes. Furthermore, incorporating qualitative methods may provide more in-depth insights into the subjective experiences of college students and families.

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