

EFFECT OF EARLY EXPERIENCES ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND MARITAL ADJUSTMENT OF WOMEN[#]

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The present investigation consisted of two parts. Study I examined the relation between intrafamily relationships, level of family adjustment, academic excellence, and marital harmony of women. Sample I consisted of 75 married women classified into academically excellent, high, and average groups. Family Adjustment Test (FAT, Elias, 1954) was administered individually to collect data concerning early childhood experiences about interparental and parent-child relations. The results demonstrate that subjects in excellent group have experienced a significantly higher level of family adjustment as compared to average and normal groups. Split-half reliability of the test was found to be .86. The sample II is comprised of 25 married women classified as psychologically disturbed. Construct validity of the test was determined by contrasted groups. Significant differences were found between mean FAT scores of psychologically healthy and disturbed women ($p < .001$).

Human affectional system is one of several discrete human motivational systems which often shows variations between different groups. The paradigm for such relationship is that of close family relationships, as between spouses, and between parents and children. There is an extensive social psychological literature on the intimate relationships of adults (Berschied, 1986). Within the developmental literature the emphasis has been on parent-child relationships (Maccoby & Martin, 1983); and to a lesser extent, on relationships of friendships among peers (Berndt & Ladd, 1989). The dimension of parent-child warmth has emerged in several factor analytic studies of parenting (MacDonald, 1992). A continuing relationship of warmth and affection between parents and children is expected to result in the acceptance of adult values by the child and identifying with parents, and generally higher level of compliance (Bandura, 1969; Mischel, 1976).

Lack of warmth, on the other hand, is associated with delinquency and aggression (East, 1991; Hetherington & Martin, 1979; 1986; Olwens, 1980; Parke & Slaby, 1983), an effect also clearly emerging in the cross-cultural literature (MacDonald, 1988; Rohner, 1975).

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Consistent with this view, Hinshaw (1987) found that hyperactive-aggressive children tend to have negative hostile family relationships. Similarly psychopathology and various types of maladjustment have been found to be characteristic of hostile-rejecting parent-child relationship (Conger & Peterson, 1984; Hetherington & Martin 1979, 1986; Taj, 1989).

Baker and Entwisle (1987) found gender as an important determinant of parental behavior. They suggested that the gender-specific attitudes endorsed by mothers result in differential expectations for boys and girls, expectations that generally favor boys (Dunton, McDevitt, & Hess, 1988; Holloway & Hess, 1985).

Another important factor that may predict parental attitude towards child is the mutual relationship of the parents. Marital harmony and spousal support have been found to be positively related to responsive, competent parenting in both fathers and mothers (Cowan & Cowan, 1983; Feldman, Nash, & Aschenbrenner, 1983). High conflict between parents is associated with negative feelings directed toward the children (Pederson, Anderson, & Cain, 1977).

It is evident that healthy and neurotic personalities can be explained in the perspective of earlier life experiences and interpersonal relationships of the family. Well-adjusted people tend to have a reasonably accurate self-concept and a fairly realistic level of aspiration. Maladjusted people on the other hand, seem to be unable to formulate meaningful life plans and goals and usually experience dissatisfaction.

The role of personality factors, such as self-esteem in intellectual development and achievement behavior, has been investigated (Ginsburg & Asmussen, 1988; Skaalvik, 1983), but the influence of parents' personalities and family relationship on children's achievement has been rather neglected in the literature.

The present study was undertaken to explore the effects of early home environment on academic achievement of women. The researcher further hypothesized that the marital harmony of parents would be positively related with the marital adjustment of their daughters.

METHOD

Sample

Sample 1

This sample consisted of 75 married women equally divided into the following three groups.

- I. Academically Excellent group.
- II. Academically High group.
- III. Academically Average group.

Group I and II were randomly selected from postgraduate departments and undergraduate colleges including Khyber Medical College, all located at Peshawar University Campus. These subjects come from teaching profession. All those women who had won Gold medal or other distinctions, or had earned Ph.D. were placed in Excellent group ($n=25$). The remaining subjects comprised of high group ($n=25$). Group III included 25 women matched with Group I and II on the basis of age, socioeconomic status, and residential area but varying in their academic accomplishments. These subjects did not pursue higher university studies and their academic record does not show any first division throughout their career. All these subjects comprised the Average group.

Subjects comprising Excellent, High, and Average groups were selected from normal families, that is, all members in such families were reported to be enjoying a harmonious life and no evidence of psychological illness or intervention was found.

Sample 2

A group of 25 married women (Group IV) was selected from psychologically disturbed families where one of the parents was under treatment of a psychiatrist. This group was matched with Average group on all the variables, viz., age, socioeconomic status, residential area, and education. Scores of group IV on Family Adjustment Test were compared with Average group to see if the test differentiates between subjects who come from normal and psychologically disturbed families. This comparison was based on the assumption that subject who come from psychologically disturbed families have had more unpleasant experiences in intrafamily relationships as compared to those who were brought up in normal families.

Instruments

(i) Family Adjustment Test (FAT: Elias, 1954) was used to assess subjects' feelings towards intra-family relations. It measures intra-family homeness-homelessness feelings that have been regarded since long as central to long-lasting adjustment of individuals. Homey feelings, as described by the author, are positive, full of warmth, love,

harmony, and other unifying qualities. Such an individual feels himself/herself positively drawn towards family members and vice versa. Homeless feelings, on the other hand, are negative, cold, hateful, loveless, and full of friction. An individual's feelings towards his/her intra-family relations are homeless when he/she feels moving away from the family group.

(ii) A questionnaire consisting of 10 questions was given to the subjects to collect information about harmonious/disturbed parental relationship.

(iii) Each subject was asked to rate her matrimonial relations on a 5-point scale ranging from most satisfactory to least satisfactory.

Procedure

FAT was administered individually in accordance with standard instructions. Each subject was asked to fill up a Personal Data Sheet as well to collect demographic information relevant to the present investigation. The subjects were asked to answer the questions comprising the questionnaire and rate their relationship with the spouse on the rating scale provided by the examiner for this purpose.

RESULTS

The present investigation was carried out to study the possible relationship among early home experiences, level of family adjustment, and academic excellence of subjects. The results are presented in Tables 1-5. Table 1 shows the percentile norms for the total scores on FAT. It shows the classification categories based on FAT scores. The normal range extends between 20th and 80th percentiles. Scores below 20th Percentile were classified as unrealistic. The bulk of psychological and clinical evidence indicates that about 15 to 20 per cent of adult population displays unrealistic attitudes toward family life (Elias, 1954). Subjects who fall in unrealistic categories are either faking their responses or trying to repress or suppress their feelings. It is usually regarded as self-deception by an emotionally disturbed individual. The higher the scores on FAT in the overtly homeless category the more extreme is the disturbance in family life of the individual.

Table 1

Percentile norms of the psychologically healthy women for total test scores on FAT (N= 75)

Percentiles	Scores	Classification Categories
10	180	Clearly unrealistic
20	207	Borderline unrealistic
30	215	
40	234	Normal (Homey)
50	258	
60	265	
70	274	
80	298	Borderline homeless
90	322	Overtly homeless
99	383	

Table 2 presents classification of subjects in four categories representing different levels of family adjustment as revealed by FAT scores.

Table 2

Classification of subjects into varying levels of family adjustment based on FAT scores

Subjects	Unrealistic (180-210)*	Normal (215-274)*	Homeless	
			Borderline (298)*	Overt (322)*
Academically Excellent	4 (16)**	17 (68)**	2 (8)**	2 (8)**
Academically High	5 (20)**	12 (48)**	5 (20)**	3 (12)**
Academically Average	8 (32)**	10 (40)**	4 (16)**	3 (12)**

*FAT Scores **Percentages

Table 3

Analysis of variance of the FAT scores for Excellent, High, and Average Groups

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F
Between groups	25669.68	2	12834.84	6.669*
Within groups	138557.60	72	1924.41	
Total	164227.28	79		

* $p < .001$

Table 3 shows the Analysis of Variance demonstrating significant differences between FAT scores of Excellent, High, and Average groups. These findings clearly demonstrate that level of family adjustment has contributed significantly towards academic excellence of our subjects. Table 4 reveals significant differences in level of family adjustment between normal and psychologically disturbed families.

Table 4

Means, standard deviations, and t-values of subjects on FAT scores

Subjects	n	M	SD	t
Academically Excellent	25	254.4	46.82	2.512*
Academically High	25	281.6	54.56	5.640*
Academically Average/Normal	25	239.8	24.58	6.238*
Psychologically Disturbed	25	333.6	71.02	

* $p < .01$ d.f = 48

Table 5 shows that majority of subjects in the present study have assessed interparental relationship either most satisfactory ($n=21$) or satisfactory ($n=31$); whereas, a few women ($n=6$) have described it unsatisfactory or most unsatisfactory ($n=5$). There are 12 women who have not been able to assess their parents' mutual relations either

positively or negatively. This assessment implies that the subjects do not perceive their interparental relations as harmonious. Out of these 12 women, 5 (13%) come from normal well-adjusted families ($n=39$), whereas 7 (18%) belong to families classified as homeless or maladjusted ($n=19$). Only 3 out of 19 maladjusted women have described their interparental relations as satisfactory, whereas 9 (51%) have assessed it as unsatisfactory or most unsatisfactory.

Table 5

Women's perceptions of interparental relationship

Adjustment Level	Interparental Relationship				
	Most Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Uncertain	Unsatisfactory	Most Unsatisfactory
Unrealistic ($n=17$)	12	5	-	-	-
Normal ($n=39$)	9	23	5	2	-
Homeless ($n=19$)	-	3	7	4	5
Total	21	31	12	6	5

Reliability and Validity of Family Adjustment Test

The reliability of FAT for the present sample was determined by split-half method. When corrected for test length, the reliability coefficient was found to be .86.

Validity of FAT was determined by contrasted groups. Significant differences were obtained when mean FAT scores obtained by a group of women ($n=25$) who come from psychologically disturbed families were compared with a matched group ($n=25$). This difference was found to be statistically significant at $p < .001$ (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

This results of the present study demonstrate significant differences in level of family adjustment, among the three groups of subjects, viz., academically excellent, high, and average (Table 3).

Further analysis of data (Table 4) demonstrate that academically excellent and average group, compared to high group, show a more positive valence/approach towards family. These subjects seem to have experienced their early family life full of warmth, love, and harmony. Similar findings were obtained when average group was compared with high group, i.e., subjects in average group seem to have a higher level of family adjustment as compared to high group. However, the difference between excellent and average group is nonsignificant. These findings may better be interpreted by examining Table 2. We find a spread of subjects, showing little variation, over three main categories revealing level of family adjustment, i.e., unrealistic, normal, and homeless (maladjusted). It is evident from this table that as compared to excellent and high groups, a higher number of subjects in average group has been classified as unrealistic (32%). Moreover, the difference between the frequencies/percentages of subjects in unrealistic, normal, and homeless categories is very small. So, it can safely be concluded that academically excellent group has experienced a significantly higher level of family adjustment during early years as compared to high and average groups. Similarly, number/percentage of homeless or maladjusted subjects is lowest in academically excellent group. On the basis of these findings, it may be concluded that early home experiences/intrafamily relationships and the resultant level of family adjustment is an important determinant of academic excellence of women. Similar findings have been reported for men. Terman (1954) in his longitudinal study of gifted men found that a high and strong achievement drive and the greater mental and social adjustment were the most significant determinants of their life success. Bulk of research evidence demonstrates that high achievers generally recall their childhood as happy and pleasant characterized by parental warmth and affection, whereas, low achievers frequently encounter difficulties in home and emotional adjustment (Saxena, 1972; Singh, 1965).

A second analysis was carried out to see if any significant relationship exists between harmonious relations of parents and marital adjustment of their daughters. A satisfying marital relationship is often regarded as the cornerstone of good family functioning, which directly or indirectly facilitates development of competent, adaptive children. Several studies demonstrate increased parent-child involvement and sensitive, competent, affectionate parent-child relationship, when spouses are mutually supportive (Cowan, Cowan, Hemig, & Miller, 1991; Cox, Owen, Lewis, & Henderson, 1989). High conflict between parents is associated with disruption in social and cognitive competence in children (Cowan et al., 1991; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

Parents are not only sources of mutual emotional and physical support and comfort, they serve as models in their caretaker roles. The data in the present study as shown in Table 5 support our hypothesis that warm and harmonious intrafamily relations facilitate development of competence and academic excellence in children.

Our second hypothesis was that marital harmony of parents would be positively related with the marital adjustment of their daughters. Marital adjustment or harmony is a multidimensional construct. It is a process of modifying, adapting, or altering individual and couple patterns of behaviour and interaction to achieve maximum satisfaction in the relationship. The results of the present study reveal that a higher percentage of women in the Excellent group ($n=20$ or 80%) have assessed their relations with the spouse as most satisfactory/satisfactory whereas, 14 women (56%) in the High group have reported satisfactory marital relationship. In the Average group 9 women (36%) have described their marital life satisfactory. These data provide evidence to support our hypothesis.

To conclude, warm and affectionate intrafamily relationships enjoyed during childhood years contribute significantly to academic excellence and marital adjustment of women.

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