



FAMILY AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT DETERMINE SOCIAL SKILLS AMONG INDIAN ADOLESCENTS

Jagpreet Kaur • **Dalvir Singh** **
Punjabi University, India

Abstract

The main objective of this study was to explore the relationship of social skills with family and school environment of adolescents in a sample of 500 adolescents from Patiala district of Punjab. Social skills considered in the present study were self awareness, empathy, effective communication and interpersonal relationship. The results of correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship of these social skills with cohesion, expressiveness, acceptance and caring, independence, active recreational orientation and organization dimensions of home environment among adolescents. However, a negative and significant relationship of these social skills with conflict dimension of home environment among adolescents was observed. Also, social skills among adolescents was found to be positively and significantly related to creative stimulation, cognitive encouragement, permissiveness and acceptance dimensions of school environment. However, social skills among adolescents were found to be negatively and significantly related to rejection dimension of school environment. A stepwise multiple regression analysis was run to examine the extent to which the various dimensions of home and school environment contributed to the variability in social skills among adolescents. The results indicated that cohesion, expressiveness, acceptance and caring and dimensions of home environment and creative stimulation and control dimensions of school environment were the significant predictors of self awareness among adolescents. In case of empathy, conflict component of home environment and creative stimulation and cognitive encouragement and control components of school environment were found to be the significant predictors. However, effective communication was found to be significantly predicted by control, rejection and permissiveness components of school

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to:

• Ph.D., Department of Education, Punjabi University. Address: Arts Block, No. 5, 147002, Patiala (PB), India. E-mail: mahal.jagpreet@gmail.com

** Research Scholar, Department of Education, Punjabi University, Patiala (PB), India.

environment and acceptance and caring component of home environment. For interpersonal relationship skills, acceptance and caring and independence dimension of home environment and control and creative stimulation components of school environment came out to be the significant predictors. These results of the study have implications for counsellors, teachers and parents.

Keywords: social skills; home environment; school environment; adolescents

Introduction

Social skills are crucial tools to functioning in the social world. Good social skills are critical to successful functioning in life. With the increase of technology, human contact has become a trivial thing to the children of this generation. Children are no longer learning their social skills from observing social interactions, learning from the adults the rights and wrongs, and practicing interacting with their social environment. They have become shyer and more awkward in social situations. Therefore, it is imperative for children to cut back on technological communication and improve their social skills now, while they are still young and impressionable. Social skills can be defined as the set of skills people use to interact and communicate with one another. They are based on the social norms of our society and they tell us what attitudes and behaviors are considered to be normal, acceptable and expected in a particular social situation. Walker et al. (1983) defined social skills as “a set of competencies that a) allow an individual to initiate and maintain positive social relationships, b) contribute to peer acceptance and to a satisfactory school adjustment, and c) allow an individual to cope effectively with the larger social environment”.

Positive social skills are recognized as critical for healthy social development. Children with positive social skills are more likely to have high self-esteem, have positive relationships with peers (Mize, 2005) and achieve in school (Caprara et al., 2000). Heckman (2006) too emphasises the importance of such non-cognitive skills in establishing the groundwork for children’s later achievements. Moreover, research finds that positive social skills are associated with positive later life outcomes, such as successful marriages and careers (Bay-Hinitz et al., 1994). On the other hand, deficits in social skills are related

to aggressive behaviors, such as bullying, fighting and delinquency (Bloom et al., 2007). Social skills can also be defined within the context of social and emotional learning - recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically (Zins et al., 2004). Children's social skills predict important outcomes, such as peer acceptance, friendships, and positive opinion by significant others (Nassau & Drotar, 1995). The early development of social skills promotes psychological well-being, resilience, and mental health (Kolb & Hanley-Maxwell, 2003).

As children approach and enter adolescence, school and community influences begin to compete with the home environment as key factors in their lives. Broader community influences, such as the mass media, become increasingly important influences on their attitudes and behaviours. Each setting - where young people live, learn, work, play and worship - provides opportunities for youth to strengthen both their identities and their social, emotional and intellectual competencies. Children glean many social interacting skills from observing their social environment. They watch the children in their school, their teachers in the classroom, and their siblings and parents at home and can pick up on how nonverbal cues and body language shape a conversation. With this understanding, researchers and educators seek to evaluate and build students' social skills within a variety of social contexts. The role of the family and the specific interactions between a child and parent have been determined to be powerful indicators of development (Baharudin, 1998; Gerris & Dekovic, 1997; Harris & Liebert, 1987; Hines, 1997; Bennett & Hay, 2007). Family has been found to have a positive effect on social skills among children (Lamb & Baumrind, 1978; Craig & Kermis, 1995; Darwish, Esquivel, Hautz, & Alfonzo, 2000; Steelman et al., 2002; Connell & Prinz, 2002; Pushpalata et al., 2009). Some specific interactions include regular family discussions, encouragement, limit setting, warmth, daily routine, praise, and intellectual stimulation. During this transition to adolescence, many of the conditions that affect this transition come into play in the earlier school years. The classroom is one such environment children must learn to navigate. Successful learning requires students to interact closely with teachers and peers. In addition to their general importance for daily interaction, social skills can have a big impact on a child's ability to succeed in an academic setting. The

classroom becomes both a training ground for development of social skills and an arena in which those skills are put to use.

Inculcating social skills in the classroom has been found to enhance academic performance (Sugai & Lewis, 1996; Warger & Rutherford, 1996), lessen the occurrence of behavior problems (Anderson et al., 1988; Kamps & Kay, 2002; Sugai & Lewis, 1996) and improve the student's interpersonal relationships with peers and adults (Kamps & Kay, 2002; Rutherford et al., 1996; Sabornie & Beard, 1990; Sugai & Lewis, 1996; Warger & Rutherford, 1996). Social skills are also linked to the quality of the school environment and school safety. Positive social skills are recognized as critical for healthy social development. Children with positive social skills are more likely to have high self-esteem, have positive relationships with peers, and achieve in school. Moreover, research finds that positive social skills are associated with positive later life outcomes, such as successful marriages and careers. On the other hand, deficits in social skills are related to aggressive behaviours, such as bullying, fighting and delinquency. Hence, it was thought worthwhile to explore the contribution of family and school environment into the social skills among Indian adolescents.

Objectives

To study family and school environment as predictors of social skills among adolescents.

Hypotheses

Family and school environment are the significant predictors of social skills among adolescents.

Delimitations of the study

The study was confined only to the adolescents studying in different government and private schools located in Sangrur district of Punjab.

Operational definitions of the terms used

Social Skills: These are the skills required for young people facilitating interaction and communication with other people and with the wider community. These include self awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationship

skills and effective communication to be measured with the help of Social Skills Scale developed by the investigators.

Family Environment: It is the quality and quantity of the cognitive, emotional and social support that has been available to the child within the home and connotes the psychological environment of home in terms of cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, acceptance and caring, independence, active recreational orientation, organization and control to be measured with family environment scale developed by Bhatia and Chadha (2004).

School Environment: It is defined as an aggregate of all the psycho-physical, social conditions of the school in terms of creative stimulation, cognitive encouragement, permissiveness, acceptance, rejection and control to be measured with school environment inventory developed by Misra (2002).

Method

The study was conducted through descriptive method of research.

Participants

The population of the present study was adolescents studying in ninth class in various government and private schools located in Patiala district of Punjab. A stratified random sample of 500 adolescents (M=15.67; Male=267; and Female=233) was taken for the conduct of the present study giving due representation to gender and locale.

Research Tools

Social Skills Scale developed by the investigators themselves was used to measure social skills among adolescents. It is a 40-item scale that contains 10 items each for the four social skills namely self awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationship skills and communication.

Family Environment Scale by Bhatia and Chadha (2004) was used to assess the psychological environment of the home of adolescents. This scale is of 69 items contain eight sub scales - cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, acceptance and caring, independence, active recreational orientation, organization and control.

School Environment Inventory by Misra (2002) is a scale that measures psychosocial climate of school as perceived by the pupils. It is a 70 item

inventory covers six dimensions of school environment i.e. creative stimulation, cognitive encouragement, acceptance, permissiveness, rejection and control.

Results and Discussion

To achieve the objective of the study, correlation and regression was used to study family and school environment as the predictors of social skills among adolescents.

Social Skills in relation to Family Environment

Pearson's product-moment correlation was computed to determine the linear relationship of social skills with family environment in terms of its components viz. cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, acceptance and caring, independence, active recreational orientation, organization and control. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in the table 1.

Table 1. Social Skills among Adolescents in relation to Family Environment

Social Skills	Self awareness	Empathy	Effective Communication	Interpersonal relationship skills
	<u>Family Environment Components</u>			
Cohesion	.22**	.14**	.14**	.06
Expressiveness	.19**	.11*	.11*	.15**
Conflict	-.17**	-.18**	-.09*	-.13**
Acceptance and Caring	.18**	.09*	.14**	.17**
Independence	.05	-.02	.10*	.12**
Active Recreational Orientation	.19**	.14**	.04	.16**
Organization	.12**	.10*	.12**	.06
Control	.03	.08	.05	.09

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01

It may be observed from the table 1 that there is a positive and significant correlation of self awareness among adolescents with the family

environment components of cohesion ($r=.22$, $p<.01$), expressiveness ($r=.19$, $p<.01$), acceptance and caring ($r=.18$, $p<.01$), active recreational orientation ($r=.19$, $p<.01$) and organization ($r=.12$, $p<.01$). However, the family environment component namely conflict ($r=-.17$, $p<.01$) is negatively correlated with self awareness among adolescents. Also, a non-significant relationship of self awareness was observed with independence ($r=.05$, $p>.05$) and control dimension of family environment ($r=.03$, $p>.05$). Further, a positive and significant correlation of empathy and family environment components of cohesion ($r=.14$, $p<.01$), expressiveness ($r=.11$, $p<.05$), acceptance and caring ($r=.10$, $p<.05$), active recreational orientation ($r=.14$, $p<.01$) and organization ($r=.10$, $p<.05$). Also, a negative correlation was found between empathy and family environment component of conflict ($r=-.18$, $p<.01$). A non-significant correlation of empathy with family environment components of independence and control was also observed.

The table 1 further reveals that effective communication among adolescents was found to be positively and significantly correlated with the family environment components of cohesion ($r=.14$, $p<.01$), expressiveness ($r=.11$, $p<.05$), acceptance and caring ($r=.14$, $p<.01$), independence ($r=.10$, $p<.05$) and organization ($r=.12$, $p<.01$). Also, effective communication among adolescents was found to be significantly and negatively related to conflict component of family environment ($r=-.10$, $p<.05$) and no significant correlation was observed between effective communication among adolescents with active recreational orientation and control components of family environment. It may be further seen from the table 1 that interpersonal skills among adolescents are significantly and positively related to expressiveness ($r=.15$, $p<.01$), acceptance and caring ($r=.17$, $p<.01$), independence ($r=.12$, $p<.01$) and active recreational orientation ($r=.16$, $p<.01$). However, interpersonal skills among adolescents were found to be negatively related to conflict component of family environment ($r=-.13$, $p<.01$) and no significant correlation of interpersonal relationship skills with family environment components of cohesion ($r=.06$, $p>.05$), organization ($r=.06$, $p>.05$) and control ($r=.09$, $p>.05$) was observed. The finding clearly points to the fact that adolescents high on cohesion, expressiveness, acceptance and caring, independence, active recreational organization and organization in their family environment tend to possess higher level of social skills namely self awareness, empathy, effective communication and interpersonal relationship skills.

Social Skills in relation to School Environment

Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to study the relationship of social skills with school environment in terms of its components namely creative stimulation, cognitive encouragement, acceptance, permissiveness, rejection and control. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in the table 2.

Table 2. Social Skills among Adolescents in relation to School Environment

Social Skills	Self awareness	Empathy	Effective Communication	Interpersonal relationship skills
	<u>School Environment Components</u>			
Creative Stimulation	.21**	.23**	.14**	.20**
Cognitive Encouragement	.13**	.09*	.16**	.18**
Acceptance	.15**	.18**	.18**	.19**
Permissiveness	.18**	.16**	.15**	.10*
Rejection	-.01	-.03	-.16**	-.10*
Control	.21**	.23**	.23**	.22**

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01

The table 2 shows that self awareness among adolescents was significantly and positively related to school environment components of creative stimulation (r=.21, p<.01), cognitive encouragement (r=.13, p<.01), acceptance (r=.15, p<.01), permissiveness (r=.18, p<.01) and control (r=.21, p<.01). However, a negative correlation was observed between self awareness and rejection component of school environment, though not significantly so. Further, empathy among adolescents was found to be significantly and positively related to school environment components of creative stimulation (r=.23, p<.01), cognitive encouragement (r=.09, p<.05), acceptance (r=.18, p<.01), permissiveness (r=.16, p<.01) and control (r=.23, p<.01). However, a negative correlation was observed between self awareness and rejection component of school environment, though not significantly so.

The table 2 further shows that effective communication among adolescents was significantly and positively related to school environment components of creative stimulation (r=.14, p<.01), cognitive encouragement

($r=.16$, $p<.01$), acceptance ($r=.18$, $p<.01$), permissiveness ($r=.15$, $p<.01$) and control ($r=.23$, $p<.01$). However, a significantly negative correlation was observed between effective communication and rejection component of school environment ($r=-.16$, $p<.01$). It may also be seen from the table 2 that interpersonal relationship skills among adolescents were significantly and positively related to school environment components of creative stimulation ($r=.20$, $p<.01$), cognitive encouragement ($r=.18$, $p<.01$), acceptance ($r=.19$, $p<.01$), permissiveness ($r=.10$, $p<.05$) and control ($r=.22$, $p<.01$). However, a significantly negative correlation was observed between interpersonal relationship skills and rejection component of school environment ($r=-.10$, $p<.05$).

Home and school environment as predictors of social skills among adolescents

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the extent to which different home and school environment components contributed to the variability in social skills viz. self awareness, empathy, effective communication and interpersonal skills among adolescents. The stepwise analysis was preferred over standard one to find a subset of those independent variables which are useful in predicting the dependent variable, by eliminating those which do not contribute additional to that already predicted by the variables in the equation. The table 3 shows the results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis for the dependable variable self awareness.

Table 3. Summary of Stepwise Regression for Prediction of self awareness among adolescents

Predictor Variable	R	R ²	F	Direction of relationship with self awareness
Cohesion	.218 ^a	.048	24.94**	Positive
Creative Stimulation	.290 ^b	.084	22.85**	Positive
Expressiveness	.316 ^c	.100	18.29**	Positive
SE Control	.328 ^d	.108	14.94**	Positive
Acceptance and Caring	.340 ^e	.115	12.89**	Positive

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; a. Predictors: (Constant), Cohesion; b. Predictors: (Constant), Cohesion, Creative Stimulation; c. Predictors: (Constant), Cohesion, Creative Stimulation, Expressiveness; d. Predictors: (Constant), Cohesion, Creative Stimulation, Expressiveness, SE Control; e. Predictors: (Constant), Cohesion, Creative Stimulation, Expressiveness, SE Control, Acceptance and caring

The results of the stepwise multiple regression indicated that cohesion, expressiveness and acceptance and caring components of home environment and creative stimulation and control dimensions of school environment emerged as the significant predictors of self awareness among adolescents. Together they explain 11.5% of the variance in self awareness among adolescents. The table 4 shows the results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis for the dependable variable empathy. The results of the stepwise multiple regression indicated that conflict component of home environment and creative stimulation, control and cognitive encouragement dimensions of school environment emerged as the significant predictors of empathy among adolescents. Together they explain 11.5% of the variance in empathy among adolescents.

Table 4. Summary of Stepwise Regression for Prediction of empathy among adolescents

Predictor Variable	R	R ²	F	Direction of relationship with empathy
Creative Stimulation	.231 ^a	.053	28.08**	Positive
Conflict	.284 ^b	.081	21.85**	Negative
SE Control	.315 ^c	.100	18.27**	Positive
Cognitive Encouragement	.339 ^d	.115	16.03**	Positive

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; a. Predictors: (Constant), Creative Stimulation; b. Predictors: (Constant), Creative Stimulation, Conflict; c. Predictors: (Constant), Creative Stimulation, Conflict, SE Control; d. Predictors: (Constant), Creative Stimulation, Conflict, SE Control, Cognitive encouragement

The table 5 presents the results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis for the dependable variable effective communication. The results of the stepwise multiple regression indicated that acceptance and caring components of home environment and control, rejection and permissiveness dimensions of school environment emerged as the significant predictors of effective communication among adolescents. Together they explain 10.3% of the variance in effective communication among adolescents.

Table 5. Summary of Stepwise Regression for Prediction of effective communication among adolescents

Predictor Variable	R	R ²	F	Direction of relationship with effective communication
SE Control	.229 ^a	.052	27.49**	Positive
Rejection	.274 ^b	.075	20.13**	Negative
Acceptance and Caring	.299 ^c	.089	16.25**	Positive
Permissiveness	.321 ^d	.103	14.17**	Positive

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; a. Predictors: (Constant), SE control; b. Predictors: (Constant), SE control, Rejection; c. Predictors: (Constant), SE control, Rejection, Acceptance and Caring; d. Predictors: (Constant), SE control, Rejection, Acceptance and Caring, Permissiveness

The table 6 presents the results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis for the dependable variable interpersonal relationship skills among adolescents. The results of the stepwise multiple regression indicated that acceptance and caring and independence component of home environment and control and creative stimulation dimensions of school environment emerged as the significant predictors of interpersonal relationship skills among adolescents. Together they explain 10.00% of the variance in interpersonal relationship skills among adolescents.

Table 6. Summary of Stepwise Regression for Prediction of interpersonal relationship skills among adolescents

Predictor Variable	R	R ²	F	Direction of relationship with interpersonal relationship skills
SE Control	.22 ^a	.05	24.54**	Positive
Acceptance and Caring	.27 ^b	.07	19.52**	Positive
Creative Stimulation	.30 ^c	.09	15.89**	Positive
Independence	.31 ^d	.10	13.37**	Positive

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; a. Predictors: (Constant), SE control; b. Predictors: (Constant), SE control, Acceptance and Caring; c. Predictors: (Constant), SE control, Acceptance and Caring, Creative Stimulation; d. Predictors: (Constant), SE control, Acceptance and Caring, Creative Stimulation, Independence

From the above results of stepwise multiple regression, it may be concluded that family cohesiveness is the most significant contributor to self awareness among adolescents explaining 4.8 of the variance in self awareness among adolescents. However in case of empathy, creative stimulation dimension of school environment was found to be the most significant predictor explaining 5.30% of the variance in empathy among adolescents. Interestingly, the control dimension of school environment emerged as the most significant predictor of effective communication and interpersonal relationship skills explaining 5.20% and 5.00% of the variance in effective communication and interpersonal relationship skills among adolescents respectively. The results of the present study may be seen in the light of some related research evidence. The results of the present study indicate that home and school environment was found to be significant predictor of social skills among adolescents. Similar results have been obtained in a number of researches (Lamb & Baumrind, 1978; Craig & Kermis, 1995; Darwish, Esquivel, Hautz, & Alfonzo, 2000; Steelman et al., 2002; Connell & Prinz, 2002; Sharma, 2003; de Guzmanet & Carlo, 2004; Jones & Lavalley, 2008; Gooding, 2009; Pushpalata et al., 2009). It has also been observed that when children are well supported in the early years they are more likely to succeed in school and become positively contributing adults (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003). Unfortunately the reverse is also true, and children's development can be impeded by factors such as insufficient cognitive stimulation, poor nutrition, and maladaptive social interaction (Karoly et al., 1998).

The results of the present study highlight the importance and contribution of family and school environment in development of social skills among adolescents. The results emphasize that the contribution of family cohesiveness, acceptance and caring and independence. However, family conflict and rejection emerged as the negative contributors to social skills among adolescents. Out of the various school environment dimensions, control and creative stimulation in the school emerged as the significant predictors of social skills among adolescents. The results of the present study have far reaching implications. Designing effective family and school environments, taking advantage of teachable moments, implementing proactive approaches when teaching social behaviors, and giving direct social skill instructions will definitely improve social skills among adolescents. When teachers assist children to learn the social skills that are needed for success in their homes,

schools, and communities, they are building a strong foundation for everyone for many years to come (Lynch & Simpson, 2010).

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