



Mental Health among Adolescents in Context of Family Climate, Socio-economic Status, Sex-difference and Inhabitation

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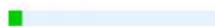
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ABSTRACT

An attempt was made to compare adolescents on various dimensions of mental health including overall mental health in context of favourable & unfavourable family climate score. For the purpose 100 adolescents were selected in such a way they were equally divided into favourable & unfavourable family climate group based on median cut on family climate scale (Bina Sah) score. The sample were collected from +2 schools of Hazipur Vaishali using purposive sampling. Mental health was measured using Mithila Mental Health Status Inventory by Kumar & Thakur along with a personal Data Sheet. The scores obtained on various dimensions of mental health (Ego-centrism, Alienation, Expression, Emotional instability, social non-conformity) including overall mental health by the two groups were compared using t-value which were found significant. It was found that adolescents of favourable family climate group showed their dominance over their counterpart adolescents groups on unfavourable family climate group. On each & every dimension of mental health including overall mental health. The findings were interpreted aptly.

KEY WORDS

Adolescents, Climate, Studentsm Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

Family climate refers to the overall emotional and relational atmosphere within a family unit. It encompasses the quality of interactions, communication patterns, the emotional tone of relationships, and the general environment in which

family members live and interact with each other. This climate can be supportive, nurturing, and positive, or it can be negative, stressful, and conflict-ridden. The family climate can significantly influence the mental health of its members, particularly children and adolescents, but its impact extends to adults as well. The family, as a primary source of socialization, plays a fundamental role in shaping an individual's emotional well-being, coping mechanisms, and psychological resilience.

The concept of family climate is rooted in family systems theory, which emphasizes that the family operates as an interconnected system where changes in one member's behavior can influence the whole system. For instance, a conflict between parents may create an atmosphere of tension, affecting the emotional stability of children. On the other hand, a positive family climate, characterized by warmth, communication, and emotional support, can foster secure attachment and emotional resilience, buffering individuals from mental health challenges.

Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affecting how individuals think, feel, and behave. It also influences how individuals handle stress, relate to others, and make decisions. Mental health is not merely the absence of mental disorders; it is a dynamic state of well-being in which individuals can cope with the normal stresses of life, realize their potential, work productively, and contribute to their community. Family climate is a crucial factor in this context, as it can either promote or hinder an individual's mental health.

The relationship between family climate and mental health is particularly evident in childhood and adolescence, a period when family dynamics are central to emotional development. During these years, individuals are learning key coping skills, emotional regulation, and interpersonal behavior. Positive family environments that nurture secure attachment, foster open communication, and provide emotional support are associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems in children and adolescents. Conversely, a toxic or stressful family climate, characterized by high levels of conflict, neglect, or inconsistent parenting, can significantly increase the risk of mental health issues.

For example, research has shown that children who grow up in families with high levels of conflict or dysfunction are more likely to experience mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and conduct disorders. In households where parents engage in frequent arguments or where there is neglect or abuse, children often develop maladaptive coping strategies and may struggle with emotional regulation later in life. Furthermore, children exposed to family stress may have difficulties forming healthy relationships outside of the home, which can lead to further psychological challenges.

Additionally, the family climate's influence extends beyond childhood into adulthood. As individuals grow older, they continue to rely on their families for emotional support, guidance, and a sense of belonging. Family climate can impact adult mental health through ongoing relationships with parents, siblings, or other family members. A supportive family environment can promote psychological resilience, while a toxic family climate can exacerbate mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.

It is also important to note that family climate affects mental health differently based on individual experiences and resilience factors. While some individuals may be more vulnerable to negative family dynamics due to genetic predispositions or early life experiences, others may develop strong coping mechanisms and support networks outside the family that help buffer the effects of a dysfunctional home environment. Thus, the impact of family climate on mental health is not one-size-fits-all but can vary based on individual factors and the broader social context.

In summary, the family climate is a critical determinant of mental health, with profound effects throughout the lifespan. A positive family climate, marked by emotional support, effective communication, and warmth, can serve as a protective factor, promoting psychological well-being. In contrast, a negative family climate, characterized by conflict, neglect, or instability, can increase the risk of mental health problems. Understanding

the intricate relationship between family climate and mental health is crucial for developing effective interventions that foster healthier family dynamics and promote mental well-being across generations.

Review of Literature

Belsky's² (1984) developed model of parenting and child development which highlighted the importance of family dynamics in shaping children's psychological outcomes. The study suggests that the family climate, particularly parenting styles, is pivotal in influencing children's emotional regulation and behavior. Authoritarian, neglectful, or overly permissive parenting can contribute to negative mental health outcomes in children, while supportive and involved parenting fosters emotional well-being and resilience. Belsky's framework offers insight into how family dynamics impact both short- and long-term mental health outcomes. Amato's¹ (2000) investigated the effects of parental divorce on children's mental health, emphasizing the role of family climate in this process. The study concludes that a negative family climate, often associated with parental conflict or divorce, increases the risk of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues. However, children from divorced families with supportive co-parenting relationships and minimal conflict were found to have better mental health outcomes. Laursen and Collins⁹ (2009) explored the significance of family relationships during adolescence, focusing on the role of family climate in shaping emotional and behavioral outcomes. The study found that a positive family climate, characterized by open communication, warmth, and support, was associated with higher levels of psychological well-being in adolescents. In contrast, negative family climates—marked by conflict, inconsistency, and neglect were linked to increased levels of depression, anxiety, and antisocial behavior. Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch⁸ (1991) analyzed the relationship between parenting styles and adolescent mental health outcomes. The authors found that adolescents raised in a family climate of authoritative parenting characterized by warmth, support, and clear boundaries—had the most positive mental health outcomes. Adolescents in authoritarian, permissive, or neglectful households exhibited higher rates of psychological distress, including depression and anxiety. Kendler et al.⁶ (2003) explored how family climate interacts with genetic predispositions to influence mental health. The study shows that negative family environments, such as those marked by high levels of conflict or neglect, exacerbate genetic vulnerability to mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. In contrast, supportive family climates help buffer the genetic predisposition to these conditions. Garbarino & Kostelny⁵ (1992) emphasized the impact of family stress, including economic hardship and parental conflict, on children's mental health. Garbarino and Kostelny suggest that children exposed to family stress are at greater risk for psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and aggression. The family climate, in this context, is critical as children in more supportive, less stressed family environments were found to cope better and show fewer signs of psychological distress. Conger et al.⁴ (1992) conducted a study exploring the relationship between economic stress in the family and adolescent mental health. The study showed that economic strain negatively affects family climate, increasing parental conflict and reducing the availability of emotional support. Adolescents in such environments were found to be more vulnerable to depression and behavioral issues. In contrast, families that provided emotional support despite financial strain were less likely to see negative mental health outcomes in their children. Cohen & Wills³ (1985) conducted research examining the role of social support in mental health, with a focus on family relationships. The study suggests that a supportive family climate acts as a buffer against mental health challenges, especially in times of stress. Family members who offer emotional and practical support can reduce the risk of developing mental health issues like anxiety and depression by providing coping resources, promoting a sense of belonging, and enhancing self-esteem. Kerr & Stattin⁷ (2000) focused on how family climate influences adolescent mental health. The study found that parental involvement in adolescents' lives, through monitoring and open communication, significantly affects emotional well-being. Adolescents in families with high levels of monitoring and emotional support showed fewer signs of depression, anxiety, and behavioral problems compared to those in families with low levels of involvement. Masten & Coatsworth¹⁰ (1998) explored how family climate contributes to a child's ability to overcome adversity. Their research demonstrates that a positive family climate, characterized by emotional warmth, stability, and

consistency, is a key factor in fostering resilience in children. These children were more likely to exhibit strong mental health and positive outcomes even in the face of external challenges, such as poverty or parental conflict. Smith et al.¹¹ (2009) explored the influence of family socialization practices on psychological adjustment in children. Smith and colleagues found that family climate plays a critical role in shaping children's ability to adjust to stress and develop healthy emotional regulation skills. Children raised in a positive family climate—characterized by warmth, consistency, and supportive parenting—were more likely to develop positive coping strategies and show better mental health outcomes. Conversely, children from families with poor communication or inconsistent parenting were more prone to mental health issues.

The literature on family climate and mental health consistently highlights the significant impact of family dynamics on psychological outcomes. A positive family climate, characterized by warmth, support, and consistent communication, is associated with better mental health and emotional well-being across the lifespan. Conversely, negative family climates, including high levels of conflict, neglect, or stress, are linked to a higher risk of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. Research continues to emphasize the importance of understanding family dynamics to prevent and address mental health challenges and to foster environments that promote resilience and psychological well-being.

Purpose

It was intended to compare groups of adolescents belonging to favourable & unfavourable family climate group in terms of various dimensions of mental health egocentrism, alienation, expression, emotional instability and social non-conformity including overall mental health.

Hypothesis

- H₁** Adolescents belonging to favourable & unfavourable family climate groups will differ significantly from one another on ego-centrism dimension of mental health.
- H₂** Adolescents belonging to favourable & unfavourable family climate groups will differ significantly from one another on alienation dimension of mental health.
- H₃** Adolescents belonging to favourable & unfavourable family climate groups will differ significantly from one another on expression dimension of mental health.
- H₄** Adolescents belonging to favourable & unfavourable family climate groups will differ significantly from one another on emotional stability dimension of mental health.
- H₅** Adolescents belonging to favourable & unfavourable family climate groups will differ significantly from one another on socio non-conformity dimension of mental health.
- H₆** Adolescents belonging to favourable & unfavourable family climate groups will differ significantly from one another on mental health dimension of mental health.

Method of Study

Sample Used

The sample comprised of 100 adolescents equally divided into favourable & unfavourable family groups based on median as cut on family climate score. They were selected from among 200 adolescents of +2 high schools of Hazipur, Vaishali : other than the condition of research they were matched so far as practicable.

Research Tools

- (i) A Personal Data Sheet was used for collecting necessary information about the respondents.
- (ii) Family Climate Scale by Dr. Veena Shah was used to identify the favourable and unfavourable family climate of the respondents.
- (iii) Mithila Mental Health Status Inventory (MMHSI) by Kumar & Thakur was employed to measure the various dimensions of mental health of the respondents.

Procedure for Formation of Groups

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase family climate scale and PDS were employed on the 200 respondents. The data were obtained and median value on family climate scale was calculated. The respondents at and above median value were treated as having favourable family climate and respondents below median value were treated as having unfavourable family climate. From among 100 respondents, 50 from among respondents having favourable family climate and 50 from among having unfavourable family climate, were selected. The selected respondents were subjected to mental health inventory in the second phase. The scoring was made according to its manual. The obtained data were analysed using t-test.

Results

Table 01: Mean, SD, t-value between adolescents belonging to favourable and unfavourable family climate group on egocentrism dimension of mental health

Dimension of Mental Health	Favourable Family Climate (N=50)		Un-favourable Family Climate (N=50)		t-value	df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Egocentrism	7.46	1.23	10.12	1.65	9.50	98	<.01

It is clear from the results table-1 that adolescents of favourable family climate differ significantly (Mean = 7.46) from adolescents of unfavourable family climate (Mean = 10.12) on egocentrism dimension of mental health t-value between the mean was found significant ($t = 9.50$; $df = 98$; $p < .01$).

Interpretation: Adolescents belonging to a favourable family climate differ from those in an unfavourable family climate on the egocentrism dimension of mental health because family environment directly shapes social orientation and interpersonal sensitivity. A favourable family climate marked by warmth, open communication, emotional support, and balanced discipline encourages empathy, perspective-taking, and cooperative behavior. Such adolescents become less self-centered and more socially responsible. In contrast, an unfavourable family climate characterized by conflict, neglect, or overcontrol fosters insecurity and self-preoccupation, making adolescents more egocentric as a defensive coping style. Hence, differences in family climate significantly determine whether adolescents develop balanced social awareness or heightened egocentrism.

Table 02: Mean, SD, t-value between adolescents belonging to favourable and unfavourable family climate group on alienation dimension of mental health

Dimension of Mental Health	Favourable Family Climate (N=50)		Un-favourable Family Climate (N=50)		t-value	df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Alienation	9.47	1.37	12.52	1.88	9.24	98	<.01

It is clear from the results table-2 that adolescents of favourable family climate differ significantly (Mean = 9.47) from adolescents of unfavourable family climate (Mean = 12.52) on alienation dimension of mental health t-value between the mean was found significant ($t = 9.24$; $df = 98$; $p < .01$).

Interpretation: Adolescents belonging to a favourable family climate are less likely to be alienated because such families provide emotional warmth, acceptance, and open communication, which foster a strong sense of belonging and security. Supportive family interactions promote trust, self-esteem, and connectedness, reducing feelings of isolation. In contrast, adolescents from an unfavourable family climate, marked by conflict, neglect, rejection, or lack of communication, often feel misunderstood and unsupported. This weakens their social bonds, leading to loneliness, mistrust, and alienation. Thus, the quality of the family climate plays a decisive role in shaping adolescents' integration with family and society versus feelings of estrangement.

Table 03: Mean, SD, t-value between adolescents belonging to favourable and unfavourable family climate group on expression dimension of mental health

Dimension of Mental Health	Favourable Family Climate (N=50)		Un-favourable Family Climate (N=50)		t-value	df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Expression	7.58	2.89	11.07	2.16	6.84	98	<.01

It is clear from the results table-3 that adolescents of favourable family climate differ significantly (Mean = 7.58) from adolescents of unfavourable family climate (Mean = 11.07) on expression dimension of mental health t-value between the mean was found significant (t = 6.84; df = 98; p<.01).

Interpretation: Adolescents belonging to a favourable family climate manifest better outcome on the expression dimension of mental health because supportive, affectionate, and communicative families provide a safe environment for emotional sharing. In such families, adolescents feel valued, heard, and encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings openly, which nurtures confidence, emotional regulation, and psychological stability. In contrast, adolescents from an unfavourable family climate—characterized by conflict, neglect, or authoritarian control—often suppress emotions due to fear of criticism or rejection. This restriction hampers healthy self-expression, increases frustration, and elevates the risk of anxiety or withdrawal, thereby weakening their overall mental health expression dimension.

Table 04: Mean, SD, t-value between adolescents belonging to favourable and unfavourable family climate group on emotional stability dimension of mental health

Dimension of Mental Health	Favourable Family Climate (N=50)		Un-favourable Family Climate (N=50)		t-value	df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Emotional Stability	21.44	2.40	28.46	2.67	13.76	98	<.01

It is clear from the results table-4 that adolescents of favourable family climate differ significantly (Mean = 21.44) from adolescents of unfavourable family climate (Mean = 28.46) on emotional stability dimension of mental health t-value between the mean was found significant (t = 13.76; df = 98; p<.01).

Interpretation: Adolescents belonging to a favourable family climate differ significantly from those in an unfavourable family climate on the emotional instability dimension of mental health because family environment plays a central role in shaping emotional regulation. Supportive families marked by warmth, trust, and open communication foster security, resilience, and stable emotions, enabling adolescents to cope effectively with stress. In contrast, unfavourable family climates characterized by conflict, rejection, neglect, or inconsistent parenting create insecurity and heightened sensitivity to stressors. Such conditions increase anxiety, mood swings, and impulsivity, leading to greater emotional instability. Hence, differences in family climate directly account for variations in adolescents' emotional stability.

Table 05: Mean, SD, t-value between adolescents belonging to favourable and unfavourable family climate group on social non-conformity dimension of mental health

Dimension of Mental Health	Favourable Family Climate (N=50)		Un-favourable Family Climate (N=50)		t-value	df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Social Non-conformity	17.78	2.41	22.83	2.66	9.90	98	<.01

It is clear from the results table-5 that adolescents of favourable family climate differ significantly (Mean = 17.78) from adolescents of unfavourable family climate (Mean = 22.83) on social non-conformity dimension

of mental health t-value between the mean was found significant ($t = 9.90$; $df = 98$; $p < .01$).

Interpretation: Adolescents belonging to a favourable family climate differ significantly from those in an unfavourable family climate on the social non-conformity dimension of mental health because family environment strongly shapes value systems, discipline, and social responsibility. In favourable climates—marked by warmth, guidance, and consistent norms—adolescents internalize positive values, respect for rules, and cooperative behaviors, which reduce tendencies toward deviance or non-conformity. Conversely, unfavourable family climates—characterized by conflict, neglect, inconsistency, or lack of supervision—foster feelings of alienation, resentment, and insecurity. Such conditions increase the likelihood of defiant attitudes, rule-breaking, and antisocial tendencies. Thus, supportive families nurture conformity, while negative climates heighten risks of social non-conformity.

Table 06: Mean, SD, t-value between adolescents belonging to favourable and unfavourable family climate group on total mental health dimension of mental health

Dimension of Mental Health	Favourable Family Climate (N=50)		Un-favourable Family Climate (N=50)		t-value	df	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Total Mental Health	58.73	10.60	85.00	12.72	11.23	98	<.01

It is clear from the results table-6 that adolescents of favourable family climate differ significantly (Mean = 58.73) from adolescents of unfavourable family climate (Mean = 10.60) on total mental health dimension of mental health t-value between the mean was found significant ($t = 11.23$; $df = 98$; $p < .01$).

Interpretation: Adolescents belonging to a favourable family climate show dominance over those from an unfavourable family climate in terms of overall mental health because a supportive home environment provides the foundation for emotional security, self-esteem, and resilience. In favourable families—where warmth, open communication, encouragement, and consistent discipline prevail—adolescents feel valued and confident, enabling them to cope effectively with stress and challenges. Such nurturing climates also promote positive socialization, emotional regulation, and healthy interpersonal relationships. In contrast, unfavourable family climates marked by neglect, conflict, or authoritarian control create insecurity, frustration, and poor coping, which weaken overall mental health. Hence, family climate becomes a decisive factor in shaping adolescents' psychological well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

- (i) Ego-centrism dimension of mental health is a function of family climate.
- (ii) Family climate is a significant contributor to alienation dimension of mental health.
- (iii) Family climate is significant contributor to expression dimension of mental health.
- (iv) Family climate is the significant contribution of emotional stability dimension of mental health.
- (v) Family climate is the significant contributor to social non-conformity dimension of mental health.
- (vi) Family climate is a significant contributor to sound mental health.

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