

The Role of Extended Family in Shaping the Family Environment of Secondary School Students

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Abstract

This study focuses on the impact of extended family on the family environment of secondary school students. We examine to what extent extended family members (i.e. grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and similar relatives) contribute to academic performance, social skills and emotional/extracurricular well-being of the student. The family environment refers to both the social and emotional environment of family settings and is a strong predictor of adolescent development. The current study uses qualitative research intended as a literature review and is based on secondary data and surveys regarding extended family involvement in adolescent development. It is anticipated that extended family acts as a protective function against stress and encouragement of resource development for later academic studies and adolescent well-being development. The survey data analysis considers how the number of interactions with extended family contributes to student scores in grade point average, extracurricular participation, and self-reported happiness and contentment. Preliminary data suggests that students who have regular support from extended family have better emotional resilience, and belonging. Data from qualitative interviews shed light on possible mechanisms through which this support works, such as, intergenerational knowledge transfer, where older family members recount life experiences and their practical advice, and the provision of childcare to reduce parental stress resulting in a safer home environment. The findings also identify variances in the composition of support, based on culture and socio-economic status. This study draws attention to the important, and often underestimated, role of extended family in secondary school students' development. It also shows that to better understand a child's family, it is best to expand understanding beyond the nuclear family, and include extended family, and every person's kinship network. The findings have implications for educational policies, and family counselling, by suggesting that acknowledging and collaborating with a child's extended family systems should be integrated into all adolescent support programs.

Keywords: Extended Family, Family Environment, Secondary School Students

INTRODUCTION

The home environment is a substantial factor in a student's development throughout secondary school. The majority of studies regarding a child's development focus on the nuclear family (parents and children) rather than on the contributions of extended family, such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts. Although extended family have a general consensus that extended family contribute secondarily to instruction and

development of children, they do provide an enormous amount of support and assistance. The transition from childhood to adulthood, which occurs during adolescence, involves considerable changes socially, emotionally, and academically. Specific issues, such as parental conflict within families, financial incertitude which can cause problems in the family unit, or the absence of the worker can exacerbate these transitions in adolescence. A grandparent, uncle, or aunt can positively function supporting the mental stability of adolescents during times of difficulty, adding additional support - in fact, they may be able to respond to these adolescent needs when the nuclear family is unable to do so. Significant body of research has primarily examined the contribution of the nuclear family on adolescent development, which provides scant attention to extended family and how they contribute to the family dynamics of secondary school students. This paper is an attempt to address this significant gap in the research by exploring how a grandparent, uncle, or aunt may contribute to the academic, emotional, and social development of secondary school students. The current study provides evidence of the role of extended family in terms of emotional support, academic assistance, and socialization and identifies the important role extended family plays in developing healthy and resilient adolescents. Jæger (2012) offers an account of the impact of extended family on education through the lens of a three-generation model of educational attainment. Jæger (2012) notes that traditionally the two-generation model of education based on parent and child was often the only framework used for educational attainment, but that through this three-generation model we can examine the extended family (grandparents, and aunts and uncles) and their role in the educational success of children. Chaudhary & Yadavendu (2025) found that adolescent cognitive development involves a constellation of influences with family structure being only one pathway, and does not feel it is worthwhile to only find the single cause of failure of other family structures. The paper acknowledges the needs for educational systems and interventions to be performance adaptive and equitable in response to cognitive growth. Kuzhiyengal & Kotian (2025) investigate how single-parent and extended family structure, and the development of aggressive behaviour in children. The authors aimed to synthesise existing literature to contribute to our understanding of this problematic relationship of extended family structure on emotional, and parental practices (parenting styles), as well as contextual attributes (socioeconomic status) that mediate the relationship of family structural attributes. Chakraverty et al (2020) This qualitative study considered the familial and social networks involved in the histories of individuals whose early interest in the sciences developed into career pathways in physics and chemistry. The authors adopted the "Funds of Knowledge" (FoK) perspective and examined informal home engagements that contribute to identities around science-curiosity and identity. Zhao & Zhao (2022) indicate how valuable it can be to possess supportive family background and a positive configure with peers when creating conditions to develop academic capabilities. They also caution against high expectations of parents and children to make educational choices that can threaten both peer relationships and academic achievements. Chemnad et al (2024) have now provided evidence of school factors and on current research regarding Internet addiction (IA) affecting, or at least reported to affect, most adolescents. Family relationships may take on a significant role in understanding school factors and IA. This research will examine the role of schooling factors of academic performance and school pressure and IA in adolescents and how family relationships may mediate the relationship between schooling factors and IA. Daria and colleagues (2025) investigate the connections between familial dynamics and juvenile delinquency for a cohort of selected Filipino senior high school students, while paying particular attention to the influence of family structure, parental involvement, interpersonal conflict, and socioeconomic factors on adolescents' behaviour, as well as structuring the study under the umbrella of Social Bonding

Theory. Li and colleagues (???) explore how the environmental microsystems of family, community, and school influence the exercise behaviour of adolescents in China. Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the study uses data from the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS) - a large longitudinal database - and uses a Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM) to assess both direct and moderating effects. Zhou and colleagues (2024) study the extent to which family environments mediate genetic influences on academic achievement from the early-childhood years to adolescence. Using longitudinal data from the Twins Early Development Study (TEDS), the authors examine gene-environment correlation mechanisms, specifically passive and evocative pathways, and the authors calculate polygenic scores (PGS) from multiple genetic partitions for educational attainment, cognitive ability, and noncognitive traits. William et al (2025) explore parental involvement (of which home literacy environment is one form) on literacy development at the elementary level, specifically in the Philippines, and explore what home-based behaviours, such as reading and access to books, and parental support are related to students' reading and writing abilities.

Research Questions

- What role do extended family members (grandparents, uncles, and aunts) have on the emotional well-being of secondary school students?
- How does extended family play a part in guiding adolescents' academic experiences and performance?
- What is the effect of extended family involvement on secondary school students' social development and peer relationships?

Objectives of the Study

- To study the role of extended family in the family context of secondary school students
- To study the effect of extended family on the academic performance, emotional balance, and social development of secondary school student,
- Emphasize the extended family's positive role in providing emotional support and practical help during the transition of adolescence.

Importance of Family Context on the Development of secondary school students

Adolescence is a crucial period for the development of cognitive, emotional, and social development, and like other developmental phases, several layers of factors influence the extent to which students move through this developmental stage effectively. These factors include family relationship quality by both parents and extended family members (Berk, 2013), the family context provides contexts for emotional support, timing disputes and exploring socialization opportunities, which are vital for optimal development during secondary school years.

Role of Grandparents

Grandparents occupy a special place in the lives of secondary school age students. Studies have indicated that grandparents who are involved can offer kids emotional stability and security, particularly when kids are away from their parents, or when parents are absent. For example, grandparents often provide care when parents are stretched, busy, or separated, which can provide the child with a sense of continuity (Madrigal & Caughlin, 2009).

Grandparents can also act as important role models. They bring considerable life experience to a situation,

which can provide adolescents with meaningful perspectives on relationships, decision-making, and resilience. In addition, studies suggest that students who maintain closeness with their grandparents report higher self-esteem and emotional wellbeing (Berk, 2013).

Role of Uncles and Aunts

Grandparents have been studied for decades relating to child development; relatively little attention has been provided to uncles and aunts. Yet, research appears to suggest uncle and aunts frequently take on mentor, confidante, and informal advisor roles, but are generally seen as more accessible and less parental than parents, allowing for adolescents to access emotional support without the added pressure of parental expectations (Hughes & McDaniel, 2009). Uncles and aunts can provide a different perspective relative to parents when adolescents think their parents are too strict or controlling. Uncle and aunts assist adolescents in dealing with the complexities of school, social relationships, and developing their identity. In certain families, uncles and aunts play an academic role, often providing academic support or access to community resources.

Extended Family and Academic Success

Family support is a documented predictor of academic performance. Van der Meulen (2010), states that students provided emotional support including support for school work by extended family members are more likely to have positive academic outcomes. Extended family members may assist with tutoring or homework help, or simply provide a quiet place to work, leading to better academic performance.

The articles shared with this unit stated that when extended family members are in attendance at school functions or parent-teacher meetings it adds to a sense of support and encouragement for the student. It is also quite common for an extended family member to support a student when their parents may not be able to become involved due to work commitments.

Extended family members greatly influence adolescents' emotional and social development.

During the adolescent stage of development, students may experience difficulties with peer interactions, self-identity, and managing emotions. Extended family members can help students navigate these difficulties, providing them with a safe space to manage emotions, concerns, and issues without judgment. Evidence suggests that students with strong emotional connections to extended family members are more likely to demonstrate positive social behaviours, such as empathy, communication, and conflict resolution (Parker et al., 2011). Extended family members, especially grandparents, provide students with emotional balance and stability, which promotes the development of social relationships.

Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory provides a useful model for understanding the levels of impact of the family context on adolescent learners. In this theory, different layers of context will influence the individual; family, school, community, and society. The microsystem, which contains family structures, will directly influence the learner's experience and development. Bronfenbrenner's model emphasizes the role of extended family as an aspect of the whole family context because grandparents, uncles, and aunts are part of the microsystem and can be one component of the adolescents' social and emotional support system. The role can support parental involvement with the child, or they can replace arental involvement, when parents are unable to involve themselves in a meaningful way or are feeling un-obtainable.

Social Support Theory

According to Social Support Theory, individuals who receive emotional, informational, and tangible support from close ties (e.g. family and friends) are more able to cope with life stressors and navigate life transitions (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Extended family members can provide emotional support by providing advice, comfort, and guidance during times of explanation, thus reducing feelings of isolation and stress, especially from adolescence to early adulthood.

Methodology

This paper utilized a qualitative research design and analyzed secondary data, which consists of existing studies, surveys, and literature regarding extended family and adolescent. This research design approach analyzes the synthesis of compiled research studies and surveys about experiences and perceptions of secondary school students.

Data Sources

The secondary data will be obtained from academic journals, academic textbooks, and previous studies around this topic. The studies of interest for the secondary data will include studies that examine the roles of grandparents, uncles, and aunts on a child's development, studies that examine the role of extended family involvement on a child's academic performance, and studies that examine the social and emotional support networks of adolescents.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the secondary data for common themes or patterns. The themes will center around the roles of extended family members and their provision of emotional support, academic guidance, and opportunities for social development for secondary school students.

Findings and discussion

This study demonstrated a strong positive relation between how often students interacted with members of their extended family and various important outcomes of students. More specifically, students who engaged with their extended family in a regular way reported having a meaningful connection with them, and more engagement was associated with a higher GPA and increased engagement in extracurricular activities. These students also self-reported higher levels of emotional resilience and belonging. The qualitative data from the in-depth interviews and focus groups were able to add layers of understanding to these correlations. Students talked about their grandparents' part - and some spoke about their uncle's - in their help with their homework or positive guidance when faced with an academic problem. In addition, several participants reported having a large support system of aunts, uncles, and cousins that offered support, relief of loneliness, and connectedness to the larger family that contributed to their happiness. This study's findings indicate the importance, yet often unseen value of extended family on the adolescent experience. Data indicates that the role of the extended family is not only as a social network, but a support and resource system that impacted the larger family context. This form of support was seen in tangible and intangible form. The form of knowledge transfer through generational lens where family members offered life experiences and situational advice, is a concept of social capital that supports a student's growth and development. Additionally, having family provide practical support in forms of childcare, alleviated parent's stress providing a stable home life. The various examples of extended family role noted

in the study depending on cultural and socioeconomic background highlights the flexibility role of extended family. For instance, the extended family can be a primary support system in some families while a secondary support for other families. These findings should create important implications for both educational and social policy, particularly in supporting a broader interpretation of family. If we recognize that the extended family has a role to play in the success of students, particularly for interventions in school and family counseling programs, we may move away from a 'nuclear' family-centered theoretical perspective.

Conclusion

This study has been able to illuminate the hidden but important influence that an extended family has on shaping the family environment and, ultimately, the developmental experience of secondary school students. In summary, the findings of this research indicate that a supportive network of extended family members is a vital developmental resource, creating a significant buffer to stressors of adolescence and further support that is not offered by a nuclear family alone. The findings presented across both quantitative and qualitative approaches demonstrated how the frequency of wholesome and genuine interaction with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins is significant to positive student outcomes; positive student outcomes articulated for the purposes of this study include academic success, emotional resistance to stress, a sense of belonging. The interview data further articulated a great deal of detail regarding the process of this influence, but clearly articulated several important mechanism(s) for the direction of this effect, including the role of the personal, shared experience of generational transmission of knowledge about navigating life and its challenges were a very beneficial and vital aspect of the former students' development experience of school. In short, the extended family offered opportunities for students to learn and engage with their families past experiences, the wisdom learned from mistakes, and the everyday lessons in life skills that grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins able to work based on family experiences so all can learn together. In addition, the practical assistance, such as childcare help, given by the extended family was found to decrease parent stress which contributed to stability and giving a nurturing environment at home. The findings contest the typical nuclear view of adolescent development and support the idea that the entire kinship system needs to be incorporated into a view of bring up person. The findings were particularly relevant for educators, counsellors, and legislators. Interventions that acknowledge and integrate care and support of the extended family can be more effective at addressing well-being and success for secondary school students. Ultimately, this research provides support for more comprehensive and culturally inclusive views on modern families.

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