Family psychological markers in a systemic and anthropological approach

Cornelia Rada[1], Suzana Turcu[1]*

[1]Institute of Anthropology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania,
cornelirada@yahoo.com; suzana78m@yahoo.com*

* *Corresponding Author*

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Interpersonal relationships with parents have a vital role in individual development and influence the type of relationships that will be establish later throughout life with other people. Dysfunctional family dynamics generated by inappropriate rules and ties, results in poor and unfulfilling relationships of the future adult.

Objective: Documenting the psycho-affective climate from the natural familial environment and its influence on subjects' relating patterns.

Method: On 385 urban subjects, between 18-69 years, homogeneously distributed by age and sex, was applied a questionnaire with 78 items, of which 10 focused family environment perception. Standardized interviews were organized to measure cohesion, flexibility and communication. A standardized questionnaire scaling emotional intelligence was also used.

Results: Regardless age and sex, over ¾ of our subjects claim that they manage to have harmonious relationships with people of the same age and similar concerns, with school and/or work colleagues. Disagreements with school/work colleagues, regardless sex, were reported mostly by younger people, especially women. Relationships with parents of superior quality generated best relating patterns ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: A balanced conjugal family environment is a good predictor of the extra-familial relating skills.

Keywords: familial environment, relating patterns, educational model, parental support, Circumplex Model.

Introduction

Family is a natural environment with a strong impact on personal bio-psycho-educational development. Children's home life influences their daily thoughts and activities. Relationship with parents influence the way people communicate as well as cultural traditions influence the communication style. Family traditions state what people can or cannot talk about, who they can/cannot relate to. Family upbringing has a strong impact on the future adult's thinking, acting and relating manner.

Aspects of parenting behavior often studied are parental support and parental control. S*upport* is defined as the amount of caring, closeness and affection that a parent exhibits. It is very similar to cohesion as defined in the Circumplex Model, the difference being that parental support is supposed to be linear. Also *control* (flexibility degree a parent uses in enforcing rules and disciplining a child) is very similar to the flexibility in the Circumplex Model, but it is assumed to have a linear relationship with positive child outcomes. Amato and Booth (1997) found that there is a curvilinear relationship between parental control and positive outcomes in children. They reported that if parents were either too lenient (leading to a chaotic system) or too strict (leading to a rigid system), the child had more psychological problems. This supports the curvilinearity hypotheses from the Circumplex Model that more children with problems come more from unbalanced systems [1].

People often develop relating patterns as adults that are not so different from how they learned to relate as children [1].

Interpersonal relationships with parents have a vital role in individual development and influence the type of relationships that will be establish later throughout life with other people. Based on the relationship with parents and parent relationship models, future adult's relationships will be built. In general, the more important, more emotionally significant an individual is for us, the more our relationship with him tends to be similar to the relationship with our parents.

The relationship to father as well as to mother appears to affect friendly responsiveness to the future adult [2].

Dysfunctional family dynamics generated by inappropriate rules and ties, results in poor and unfulfilling relationships of the future adult [3].

Diagnosis of family functions facilitates the determination of risk factors of family environment in order to adapt its resources as educational agent.

Aim & Objectives

Documenting the psycho-affective climate from the natural familial environment and its influence on subjects' relating patterns

Material and Method

On 385 urban subjects, between 18-69 years, homogeneously distributed by age and sex, was applied a questionnaire with 78 items, of which 10 focused family environment perception. Standardized interviews were organized to measure cohesion, flexibility and communication. A standardized questionnaire scaling emotional intelligence was also used. Age groups defined

were: up to 24 years, 25-34, 35-49, over 50 years old.
Data was processed with SPSS 13.
Subjects covered the sex and age groups defined, as follows (Table 1, 2):

Results

The variable that induced statistically significant differences was the age group.

Perceived familial environment

Regardless age and sex, most our subjects stated the relationships with their parents as friendly (Figure 1).

Same harmony was used in describing the relations between their parents (Table 3).

Almost a quarter of our subjects saw their parents hitting each other (Table 4), half were beaten by their parents or family members "from time to time"(44.4%) or "often" (5.2%) – Figure 2.

Statistically significant differences were found on age groups (p <0.05).
At yes / no questions on family of origin's perception, almost ¾ of the respondents stated their origin family, as a welcoming, affective environment (Table 5). Family perception as a friendly environment increases with age from 42.3 to 83.3%,

Half of them felt that family lets you on your own, acting only when problems occur, family closeness and support being more obvious for older subjects (up to 33. 3%) - Pearson test χ^2, p<0.05 (Table 6).

Family was described as a prison where parents dispose of their children as they wish, shaping and moulding them, mostly by young people (Table 7). Family perception as a prison decreases once the subjects grow older, from 26.9 to 11.1%.

More than half of the respondents felt that both parents have given them enough independence. Too much control from both parents was reported only by 28 subjects – 7.3% (Table 8).

Almost half of them have been affected by this control (Figure 3).

From the ones that had felt inappropriate parental pressure almost a third declared that one or both parents stressed them (Figure 4).

Relational Pattern

Regardless age and sex, over ¾ of our subjects claim that they manage to have harmonious relationships with people of the same age and similar concerns, with school and/or work colleagues (Table 9, Figure 5).

Psycho emotional effect of subject's relational pattern is more obvious in younger subjects, but without any statistically significant differences involved (Table 10).

Disagreements with school/work colleagues, regardless sex, were reported mostly by younger people (twice as many), and especially by female subjects (Table 11).

Disputes with the opposite sex were more often reported by younger subjects, almost 5 times more frequently than those reported by subjects over 50 (Figure 6).

Somehow similar ratio is found concerning debate with people of same sex (23% as opposed to 8.4% reported by older subjects), with no age-related differences (Table 12).

On the other hand, psycho emotional effect of subject's relational pattern is obviously influenced by subject's sex. Female individuals reporting negative effects were twice more numerous than men, with statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$)(Table 13).

Emotional intelligence, cohesion, flexibility and communication

Faces IV and the Circumplex Model (2006) were used in order to determine cohesion, flexibility and communication.
The main hypothesis of the Circumplex Model is that balanced levels of cohesion and flexibility (low to high levels) are most conducive to healthy family functioning, while unbalanced levels of cohesion and flexibility (very low or very high levels) are associated with problematic family functioning [5].
This method divides families into six types, from the most healthy and happy to the least healthy and most problematic: Balanced, Rigidly Cohesive, Midrange, Flexibly Unbalanced, Chaotically Disengaged and Unbalanced [1].
Extreme unprofitable cohesion (Cz) scores (very low and very high), corresponding to the disengaged and enmeshed model, were recorded respectively at 3.9% and 49% of subjects. Unprofitable extreme flexibility (F) scores, corresponding to the *chaotic* and *rigid* models, were registered respectively at 1.8% and 44.2% of our subjects.
Unprofitable communication (Cm) scores, very low and very low to medium high, corresponding to the *uncommunicative* model were recorded in 14.6% of the respondents.
Emotional intelligence (EI) was measured according to Daniel Goleman's model [6]. Goleman's model outlines four main EI constructs: self-awareness (ability to read one's emotions and recognize their impact), self-management (involves controlling one's emotions and impulses and adapting to changing circumstances), social awareness (ability to sense, understand, and react to others' emotions while comprehending social networks) and relationship management – the ability to inspire, influence, and develop others while managing conflict.
Responses to the standardized questionnaire scaling emotional intelligence clustered most of our subjects in the under-average score category (63.9%).

Discussion and Conclusion

The conduct of both parents is the primary source of imitation, as children begin to develop behavior. If parents' behavior is appropriate and stimulates the child, he/she will come to socialize normally. If positive conduct parents' patterns are absent, the child will have difficulties in the socialization process.

Using Pearson Chi-Square test, we compared subjects' relations with their parents (both mother and father) with their perceived relating pattern with other people. A superior quality of relationships with parents generated best relating patterns ($p<0.05$).

Regardless age or gender, more than ¾ of respondents appreciated that they manage to have harmonious relationships with individuals of similar age and concerns, with school and work colleagues and they were not considered noisy or troublemakers in their families, at school or at their working place . Of those with relational difficulties 25% appreciated that they were affected by these disagreements.

Factorial analysis indicates a correlation between relating difficulties outside the family and low scores on IE scores on one hand and unprofitable scores to Cz, F, Cm recorded in the family on the other hand.

Circumplex model of family relationships was successfully used as a predictor of behavior in the extra-familial environment.

Romanian educational familial pattern follows toward a healthy trend that combines parental surveillance with child autonomy. However education-by-beating, experiencing *difficult* or *tensioned* relationships, requires counseling for personal development for both parts (children and parents) in order to facilitate the transition from a rigid (44.2%) or chaotic (1.6%) educational model to a structured and flexible one.

A balanced conjugal family environment is a good predictor of the extra-familial relating skills.

Conflict of Interest: None declared.

References

1.   Olson DH, FACES IV and the Circumplex Model: validation study. *J Marital Fam Ther*. 2011 Jan;37(1):64-80.

2.   Main M, Weston RD: The quality of the toddler's relationship to mother and to father: Related to conflict behavior and the readiness to establish new relationships, 1981. *Child Development* 1981, 52(3):932-940

3.   Boyd, GA: When You Grow Up In a Dysfunctional Family, 1992. http://www.mudrashram.com/dysfunctionalfamily2.html .

4.   White, L. : Sibling Relationships over the Life Course: A Panel Analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 2001 63:555–568.

5.   Olson DH, Sprenkle DH, Russell CS: Circumplex model of marital and family system: I. Cohesion and adaptability dimensions, family types, and clinical applications. *Fam Process*. 1979 Mar;18(1):3-28. PubMed PMID: 437067.

6.   Goleman, D. (1998). Working with emotional intelligence. New York: Bantam Books

Table 1. Age groups

		Percent
Valid	18-24 years	20.3
	25-34	25.7
	35-49	26.0
	50 and over	28.1
	Total	100.0

Table 2. Sex distribution

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Masculine	168	43.6
	Feminine	217	56.4
	Total	385	100.0

Table 3. Parental relations

	Percent
Tensioned	9.6
Difficult	18.4
Friendly	**62.6**
Other	9.4
Total	100.0

Table 4. Have you seen or heard your parents hitting each other

	Percent
Never	74.5
Seldom	22.6
Frequently	2.6
N/A	.3

Table 5 Origin family is a refuge. a welcoming. affective environment

		Age groups				Total
		18-24 years	25-34	35-49	50 and over	
	No	57.7%	21.2%	19.0%	16.7%	26.8%
	Yes	42.3%	78.8%	81.0%	83.3%	73.2%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6 Family lets you on your own and intervenes only when problems occur* Age

groups

		Age groups				Total
		18-24 years	25-34	35-49	50 and over	
	No	26.9%	48.5%	55.0%	66.7%	50.9%
	Yes	73.1%	51.5%	45.0%	33.3%	49.1%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 7 Family perceived as a prison

		Age groups				Total
		18-24 years	25-34	35-49	50 and over	
Family is a prison	No	73.1%	87.9%	93.0%	88.9%	86.5%
	Yes	26.9%	12.1%	7.0%	11.1%	13.5%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 8 Parental control

	%
Independence from both parents	56.4
Both parents controlled me too much	7.3
Father controlled me too much	12.7
Mother controlled me too much	23.4
N/A	0.3
Total	100.0

Table 9. How would you describe your relations with other people * Age groups

	Age groups				Total
	18-24 years	25-34	35-49	50 and over	
I relate easily	84.6%	93.9%	91.0%	97.2%	92.2%
Difficult relationships with both sexes	7.7%	6.1%	4.0%	2.8%	4.9%
Difficult relationships with same sex	3.8%		2.0%		1.3%
Difficult relationships with opposite sex	3.8%		3.0%		1.6%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 10. Psycho emotional effect of relational pattern *Age groups

	Age groups			
	18-24 years	25-34	35-49	50 and over
Hardly	23.1%	18.2%	24.0%	33.3%
Partially	**11.5%**	9.1%	5.9%	2.8%
A lot	**3.8%**	-	2.1%	-
I relate easily	61.5%	72.7%	68.0%	63.9%

Table 11. Disagreements with colleagues* Age*Sex

% within Age groups					% within sex	
	Age groups				Sex	
	18-24 years	25-34	35-49	50 and over	Masculine	Feminine
Seldom	69.2%	75.8%	85.0%	86.1%	85.1%	75.6%
Occasionally	26.9%	24.2%	15.0%	11.1%	14.9%	21.7%
Frequently	3.8%			2.8%		2.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 12. Disputes with same sex fellows* Age groups

	Age groups				Total
	18-24 years	25-34	35-49	50 and over	
Seldom	76.9%	69.7%	82.0%	91.7%	80.5%
Occasionally	19.2%	27.3%	18.0%	5.6%	17.1%
Frequently	3.8%	3.0%		2.8%	2.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 13. Psycho emotional effect of subject's relational pattern * Sex Crosstab

	Sexul		Total
	Masculin	Feminin	
Not at all	29.2%	15.7%	21.6%
Partially	14.3%	**29.0%**	22.6%
A lot	2.4%	**5.1%**	3.9%
I relate well	54.2%	50.2%	51.9%

Figure 1. Subjects' relationship with their parents
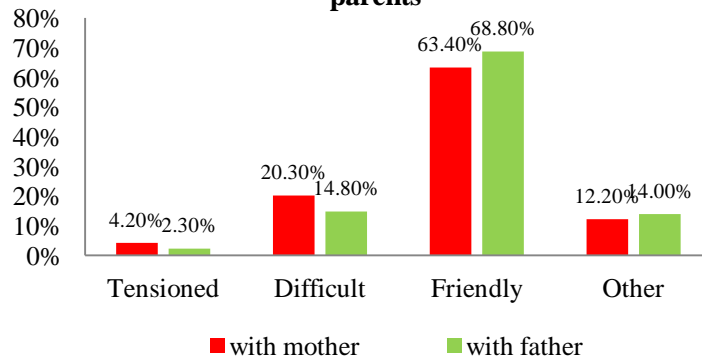

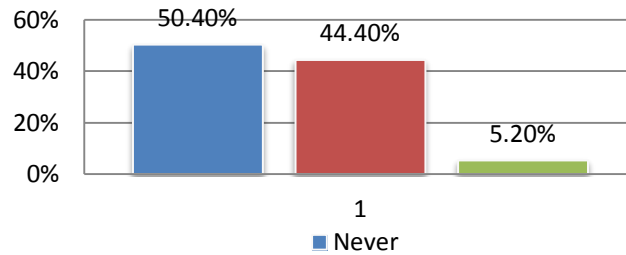**Figure 2. Have you been beaten by your parents or other family members ?**

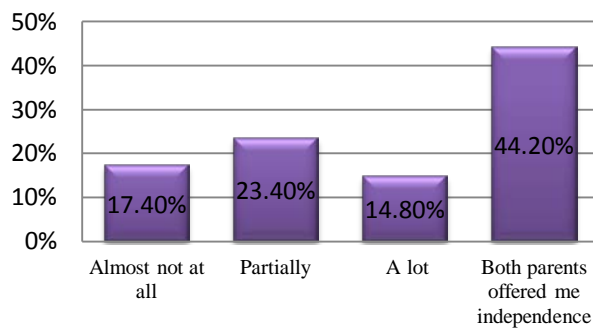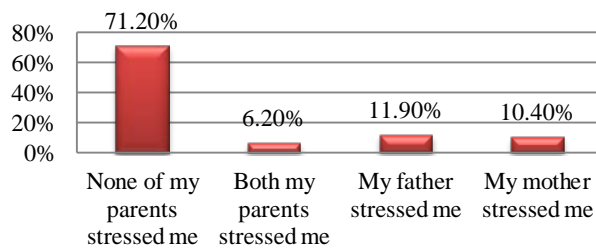**Figure 3. Have you been affected by the parental control?**

Figure 4. Have you been stressed by the parental control?

Figure 5. Subjects' relations with other people*Sex

Feminine	89.90%	6.50%	1.80%	1.80%
Masculine	95.20%	3.00%	0.60%	1.20%

- ■ I relate easily
- ■ Difficult relationships with both sexes
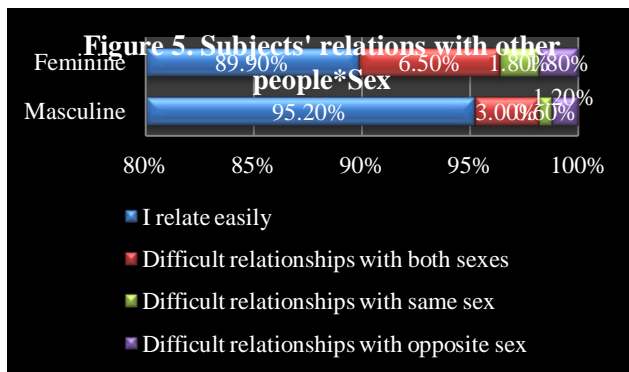- ■ Difficult relationships with same sex
- ■ Difficult relationships with opposite sex

Figure 6. Subjects' relations with opposite sex

	Seldom	Occassionaly	Frequently
50 and over	94.40%	2.80%	2.80%
35-49	85.00%	15.00%	
25-34	90.90%	9.10%	
18-24 years	76.90%	19.20%	3.80%